

Religious Courtship

*Being Historical Discourses on the Necessity of
Marrying Religious Husbands and Wives Only*

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Religious Courtship; or, Being Historical Discourses on the Necessity of Marrying Religious Husbands and Wives Only

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The Author's Preface

As this way of writing in cases not much unlike this, has been approved of, and has met with great success in other hands; it has been an encouragement to this undertaking.

Historical dialogues, it must be confessed, have a very taking elegance in them, and the story being handed forward in short periods, and quick returns, makes the retaining it in the mind the easier, and the impression the more lasting as well as delightful.

The story represented here is capable of such and so many applications to the cases of young people, whose settlement is always in view, that there will never be a time when the instruction will be useless.

If anybody should object, that too much is put here upon the woman's part, and that a lady cannot be supposed in the midst of her lover's addresses, to take upon her, to demand such an account of himself as is here suggested; that few men will stoop to such an examination; and few women venture the loss of their lovers upon such a subject: Let such consider, how small the satisfaction here proposed on the lady's part is, and that no gentleman can think hard a woman should be satisfy'd, whether he is a christian or a heathen; a man of religion or an atheist; and indeed, no man of any tolerable share of sense, will address himself to a lady for marriage, but he will take care to anticipate her inquiries of that kind, by showing some concern, for knowing what she is herself.

The universal neglect of this trifle, both in men and women, is what this book is designed to correct, and there needs no greater satire upon that part, than the success of the several cases here related: (viz.) The happy life of the youngest sister who came into the measures proposed; and the miserable condition of the second sister, who rashly threw herself into the arms of a man of differing

principles from her own, though blessed with all the good-humour in the world.

In these accounts, the very great consequence of being equally yoked, is illustrated; and it appears here how essential a share of religion, and a harmony of principles with religion, are to the felicity of the conjugal life.

To those who do not cast off all concern for themselves; who do not make marrying a mere leap in the dark, and as the first lady expresses it, a rushing like a horse into the battle, these things will be of some moment. As to those that are void of care of these matters, they must go on, and pay for their experience, let them take heed, and buy it as cheap as they can.

If the women seem to be favored in this story, and have the better part of the staff put into their hands, it is because really the hazard is chiefly on their side, and they are generally the greatest sufferers in the success:¹

But if it were otherwise, yet, if they are treated with more than ordinary regard, the author hopes they will not lay that sin to his charge.

The appendix to this work, speaks for itself: Irreligious servants in some respects, are the plague of families, and keep our houses always in disorder. 'Tis a wonderful thing to reflect on, that so scandalous an evil, so easy to be rectified, should have gone on to such a degree as it has in the world; and that masters and mistresses of families, have not long ago for their own ease, and for the satisfaction of one another, come to a general law, for the managing, the punishing, and above all, for the recommending of servants; which if they would do, they would easily, I say, bring them to know themselves, and do their duty; neither of which is the case among servants at this time.

But 'tis all our own faults; we recommend sluts, and thieves, and drones, and saucy, insolent fellows, and wenches: I say, we recommend them one to another, without any concern for our

¹or, what follows the marriage

neighbour's safety or peace; in a word, to pay the debt of charity for those creatures, which have abused us, we forget the debt of justice to one another, and betray the confidence which one house-keeper and neighbour owes to another, in one of the most essential articles of their families' quiet.

This is all exposed here; and though this part is very short, being but an accident to the other discourses; yet, I presume to say, it will be as acceptable, and, in its kind, as useful as any of the rest.

This fifth edition of this work, recommends itself upon this express condition, viz. That the author has not found occasion to alter any thing in the fourth (errors of the press excepted) nor have I found room for any additions, that usual pretence to set off new impressions, and impose upon those who have bought the first; being still fully satisfy'd, the goodness of the design, and the usefulness of the subject, will make the work acceptable wherever it comes.

Religious Courtship

Part I

There lived in a village near London, an ancient grave gentleman of a good estate, which he had gained by trade, having been bred a merchant, though of a very good family too; he had been a man in great business, but his circumstances being easy, and his love of a retired life encreasing with his years, he had left off his business, and taken a house a mile or two out of town; he was a widower at the time of this affair, his wife having been dead some years before.

He had five or six children, and all grown up, but none settled in the world, though he had an estate sufficient to give them very plentiful fortunes. His three daughters were very agreeable women, and, which was still better, were very sober, modest, sensible and religious young ladies, two of them especially: and as the character of their father, and the fortune he was able to give them, recommended them very well to the world; so they had several gentlemen that made honorable and handsome proposals to their father for their marriage.

I shall most carefully avoid giving any room here so much as to guess what opinion in religion they were bred up in, or whether the old gentleman was a churchman or a dissenter; and the same caution I shall use with all the rest of the persons whom I shall bring upon the stage in the course of this story: My reason for which every body will understand by the nature of the relation, and of the times we live in.

The father of these ladies had been a man always, till now, hurried in the world; being crowded with a vast business, taken up with getting money, and with growing rich; so that he neither had much concern for, or indeed took any care of, the education or

instruction of his children, but left them wholly to the conduct of their mother. Nor was it any great loss to the children, especially to the daughters, their mother being a most pious, religious, and virtuous lady, who was not only extraordinarily qualified to instruct her children, but gave up her whole time to it from their childhood.

One morning, a little before her death, calling her daughters to her, she told them, among other things, that as to marriage, she had but two injunctions to lay upon them, which, as she was not likely to live to see them settled, she would desire them to lay down as maxims in the choice of their husbands; and which she would, as upon her death-bed, if her words had any extraordinary influence upon them, oblige them to observe strictly, viz.

1. Never to marry any man, whatever his person or fortune might be, that did not, at least, profess to be a religious man.
2. Never to marry any man, how religious soever he may seem to be, if he was not of the same principles and opinion in religion as themselves.

And as this was but a little before her death, so the daughters were more than ordinarily touched with the sense of it, and resolved to pursue it exactly. How they did pursue it, and the consequences of it, will be seen in the following Dialogues.

It followed some time after, that a gentleman of a very good estate courted the youngest of these daughters; and making very handsome proposals to her father, (*for he offer'd to settle 600l. per annum on her*) the father was exceedingly pleased with the match; he being a gentleman thoroughly well bred; and an agreeable person, and, in a word, nothing appearing to give the least reason, why he should not be as acceptable to the lady as he was to the father.

As he came thus recommended to the Father, there appeared nothing disagreeable in it to the young lady; nor had she at his first appearance the least exception to make against the gentleman as to his person: Indeed, as to his estate, *though her fortune was very handsome*, yet his was so far beyond it, that there was no

comparison in the case; and besides all this, she had this engaging circumstance in the proposal, viz. That she being the youngest of the three daughters, the gentleman had passed over her two eldest sisters, and had singled her out by his more particular fancy; giving her that undeniable mark of his affection, viz. That she would be the wife of his choice, and consequently that she would have an uncommon security of the sincerity of his love to her.

The father opposed his proposal a little at first, as a slight offer'd to his eldest daughters; but the gentleman told him, That he hoped, if he accepted his design of coming into his family, he would give him leave to take the person his judgment had made choice of, and that he thought he might be happy with: That it would be a very hard circumstance to him, and what he could not think of with patience, to marry one of his daughters, and be in love with another: That he was very far from offering any slight to the eldest, letting him know, that happening to see the youngest first, he found such suitableness, and something so agreeable in her to him, that he resolved to look no farther: That perhaps, if he had seen the eldest or the second daughter first, it might have been the same thing; but that as he could not answer for the bias of his fancy, so neither could he answer it to his own conduct, not to choose her, that was from the first moment he saw her, the only woman in the world that he ever thought could make him happy.

Her father could make no return to an answer that had so much weight in it, and which appeared to be so sincere; and therefore not acquainting his eldest daughter with the design he had had to propose her to him, he took occasion to talk to them all together one morning, as they were drinking chocolate; and begins merrily with them thus:

Religious Courtship

Dialogue I

FATHER. Well, Girls, you little think now, which of you all is like to be first marry'd. What say you, child? (turning to the youngest) I hope you are content to let your eldest sisters go before you?

3RD DAUGHTER. Yes, yes, Sir; I desire both my sisters may go before me; for I see nothing in the world, to make me in haste.

FATHER. Why? What's the matter that you are so out of love with the world all on a sudden? Is it that you think yourself too good for every body, or every body too good for you?

3RD DAUGHTER. No, Sir; I am neither so vain to think the first, or so humble to think the last; but I desire to think of myself as I ought to think.

FATHER. How is that pray?

3RD DAUGHTER. Why, Sir, I think I live too well to change for the worse, and this is not an age to change for the better; and therefore I desire to be as I am.

FATHER. Why is this age so much worse than that went before, pray?

3RD DAUGHTER. Nay, Sir, I don't know; but I am very well satisfy'd, Sir, with your first proposal, that my sisters may try before me.

FATHER. Well, well; and if you go before your sisters, there will be no harm done, if it be to your liking, I hope; I dare say, none of your sisters will be angry: at which, the two eldest said, No, no; we shall be very glad to see it: and so they fell to jesting with their younger sister, till they almost angered her.

You are mightily difficult, *says the eldest sister*, that you fall upon the whole world, as if there was nothing good enough for you.

Says the second sister, She will be easily pleased as another, I warrant her, if she was talked to in earnest; upon which, notwithstanding their Father was present, they fell to rallying one another, between jest and earnest, a little too warmly, as follows:

3RD DAUGHTER. That may be; as my eldest sisters teach me, I hope they intend to set me a good example; for it's their turn first.

1ST DAUGHTER. We don't know that; if a good offer comes in your way, you'll hardly put it off, and say, Your betters must go before you.

3RD DAUGHTER. For all you are both my eldest sisters, I question whether you understand what a good offer means: and it may be, have considered it no more than I; there's a great deal in that word.

1ST DAUGHTER. O! I'll explain it in a few words; a good estate, and a man you like.

2ND DAUGHTER. Nay; you might have stopped at the first: it's not matter what the man is, if the estate be but good.

3RD DAUGHTER. Is that the example my eldest sisters intend to set me?

FATHER. Ay; and a good example too, child.

3RD DAUGHTER. You are disposed to jest, Sir; but I believe you would not be pleased with such a way of choosing a husband for any of your daughters.

2ND DAUGHTER. I hope my father would; I am sure I should.

3RD DAUGHTER. That's no token to me that you have considered much of the matter, as I said before.

2ND DAUGHTER. Why? What would you have besides a good estate? What matter is it what the man is? I would pass by a great many homely defects for a good settlement.

3RD DAUGHTER. As for the homely defects, perhaps I may be no nicer than you, if there was nothing else wanting.