

Marriage Is Different Today

panionship which heretofore men have usually expected only from other men. He wants it now from his wife. Does this mean he cares less about the other needs? Knowing many young men among family and friends, I should say no; he does not care less about other needs. He believes they will follow the companionship.

He may be right. What then does a man marry for nowadays? Not necessarily for the comforts of a home. I know an astonishingly large number of cheerful young bachelors living in pleasant apartments of their own, either individually or in groups. Nor do they lack the woman's touch. They are surrounded by adoring and wistfully hopeful young women, always ready to play hostess.

If young men want children, they keep the wish to themselves. I hear no hint of longings for fatherhood. They are too busy with their jobs and careers. They are wary of marriage, although they say they want to marry eventually, if and when they find the impossible "perfect woman."

In contrast, there are also the very young marriages, boys and girls who marry and begin life together soon after high school. We do not yet know what will happen to these marriages. I shall only quote a few figures from a study made in recent years by one of our great universities. The subject for study was modern American woman. It was disclosed that the average American woman of today gets engaged at the age of 19. She marries at 21, and by the time she is 26 she has all her children—three. By the time she is 31, her children are in school at least part of the day; she lives in a small but well-equipped house, and she has 44 more years to live. Forty-four years, with the mental equipment of a girl of 19! Her husband will continue to grow, but unless she is helped she probably will not.

Companionship is impossible unless she realizes her plight and does something about it.

SO IS THERE something new about marriage today? Yes, there is. What's new is the demand of modern man for a different kind of woman. The modern young man, as I know him, no longer wants a girl like Mother. Mother was all very well in her place, but her son wants as a wife a woman whose mind matches his own in intelligence, curiosity, capacity for growth, interest in life at home and in the world at large.

He wants companionship on a scale and to a degree and of a quality which wives of old cannot provide. He is not attracted to the beauty-parlor product. He is contemptuous of the "tired business-man." He will never be one of those. And he is profoundly impatient of women and often deeply angry with them. "Why don't women grow up?" he growls, not realizing that his demand is a sign of his own recent and still incomplete maturity.

This impatience and secret anger color all his relationships with women, at home and elsewhere, but he keeps his feelings to himself because he is kind, because he likes women, because he yearns for a woman with whom he can really communicate. He searches for her, of course, and is often disappointed. Then he is unjust and may conclude that women are hopeless. He is extremely wary of the woman who angles for him with the lures of mere physical beauty.

That she can think he is so naïve in this day and age deepens his secret contempt for women.

And what about the woman? Will she accept

the challenge, will she seize the opportunity? That is the question! The long centuries of shelter in the house, the local tasks of cooking and cleaning and caring for children, the easily fulfilled demands of physical sex are no longer enough for man. This man, this modern man, wants her whole self; he demands that she be herself at full growth, his mate in every sense and perception.

It is far more than has ever been asked of her before. What will she do? She has exhausted all her little feminine tricks. There are too many pretty girls everywhere, younger and younger, so that the years of a girl's prettiness are few indeed.

By the time she is 25 she is already too old to be



■ In 1938, Pearl S. Buck became the first American woman to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature. The citation for the award read, "For the rich and genuine epic portrayals of Chinese peasant life, and for masterpieces of biography."

Born in West Virginia of missionary parents, Miss Buck grew up in China and has spent a good deal of her adult life there. Her most famous book, "The Good Earth," won her the Pulitzer Prize in 1931. She has tried her talented hand at every kind of writing, including playwrighting. Among her most recent novels are "Imperial Woman," "Letter from Peking," and "Command the Morning."

merely a "pretty girl." There must be more to her than that. In her panic, she tries to marry before she is out of her own childhood and long before she is a woman. She burdens herself with household cares and children before she is old enough to manage them, and she robs herself and her man of what she could have been had she given herself time to grow, had she been willing to complete herself, enrich her mind with knowledge and her emotions with the depth of maturity.

In her panic, too often she bestows her physical charms upon some boy or man without the assurance of marriage and thereby makes it harder for herself or any woman to marry.

Woman is in a predicament in our modern world. Man is no longer holding her back. He is urging her on. The day of our grandmothers, and even our

mothers, is over. There is nothing for women to rebel against, and many of them are frightened and trying to find shelter and excuse in being "just a housewife."

The responsibility is terrifying now that they can be whatever they wish to be. Will they face the fact that men want women to be their fullest and best selves as human beings? If they are willing, then the rewards are rich indeed. But they must help themselves and one another.

That 19-year-old girl, who has 44 years to live after she is 31, must be given better equipment than a 19-year-old brain. She must have the opportunity for more schooling after 31 if not before. Who will take care of the children? Who will clean the house? These tasks are easy when the brain is equipped. Once the *what* is decided, the *how* always follows. We must not make the *how* an excuse for not facing and accepting the *what*.

WOMEN MUST help each other, first of all, by believing in themselves. Then they will believe in and help one another. Whenever I hear a woman say she trusts a doctor because he is a man rather than a woman, I know that here is a woman who has a low opinion of herself. Otherwise, she would choose the best doctor she can find, man or woman.

A woman, to put it bluntly, is against other women because she fears she herself is inferior. Yet if she stopped to reason, she would realize that nature knows no sex limitations, and does not bestow brains upon men alone. Daughters inherit gifts as often and as much as do sons.

Well, you may say, women do a great deal. Yes, the small jobs of a community are usually performed by women, and women are very busy with these small jobs. But where are women in the policy-making centers? If women were sitting there with men, many of these small community jobs, the result of poverty and bad administration, might not be necessary at all.

For centuries charitable groups have worked for the poor, the sick, the war-wounded; but those same groups do little to prevent the frictions which result in war, disease, and poverty. The world, now so closely knit into one community, needs whole thinking at top levels—that is, thinking of men and women. Yet women are not at top levels. It is self-deceptive to say that men do not want them there. Men do want them there if they are wise, informed human beings, ready to apply themselves to the tasks ahead.

So there is something new in marriage. Man is making new demands on woman. He wants a new kind of woman for a wife.

Perhaps, if she accepts the challenge and the opportunity, she may have a few demands of her own to make on him. He is not perfect, this man. But he is asking woman to be perfect. It is the first step toward mutual growth.

Women have always wanted to be what men want them to be, and although they are not so blatant about it, men want to be what women want them to be. If woman now takes the first step toward man, in faith, then marriage will be better than it has ever been, a closer companionship on every level, a happiness far beyond previous experience.

Nothing in life is as good as the marriage of true minds between man and woman.

As good? It is life itself.