

A Well-Argued Defense of Dowries.

To the Editor of the New-York Times :

We have read with great interest the correspondence that has appeared in your Sunday edition relating to marriage. Regarding the discussion as second in importance to none other that has been held in your columns, we regret that you propose its early conclusion. It seems to us that the importance of this question entitled it to a longer consideration. We would not measure the value of the discussion, as thus far conducted, strictly by the clearness and logic of the letters you have printed, nor by the closeness with which the writers have adhered to the vexed theme of dowry. When reform is needed, anything is better than silence and indifference; nor does it matter much whether the first agitation of the subject is wise or ignorant, provided only that discussion be free, and that it last long enough to draw out the sincere thinkers from their shells. Carl Benson has done well in calling the attention of writers and readers to the precise question at issue—the desirableness of dowries. We have been hoping for weeks past that some one of your correspondents would save us the trouble of stating our view of the question; but, as no one has come forward with it, let us attempt it ourselves.

We are two bachelors, not yet very old, who believe that marriages should not be put off so long as they generally are, and must be, under the present no-dowry system, by the young men who have their fortunes in the world to make. Many considerations, physiological and moral, show the error of postponing marriage until the blithesome, warm-hearted period of young manhood has passed, and given place to the colder blood and harder visage of the gray-beard. We would offer no apology for the sins against purity to which young men are prone; yet by early marriages much of the temptation which leads to that evil would be avoided.

Under the system now in vogue in this country, the active, thrifty, prudent young man, who has enough to support himself, but not to support a wife, does not marry at twenty-five, when he should marry. Unable to count on any certain dowry even with the daughter of the richest parents, he waits ten or fifteen years, until he has means sufficient for the independent maintenance of a family. When, finally, he marries, his bride is not the lady of thirty or thirty-five, now *passé*, whom he loved as a girl, but a woman so much younger than himself that his prospect of sympathy in love, of hearty domestic felicity, is sadly diminished. The time for a marriage of love has gone by. The girl who loved him, and whom he could have married, years before if her portion could have been added to his own slender means, makes a *mariage de convenance*, or remains single. Had she been poor she might have married the man she loved; being rich, she loses her love.

We are convinced that the remedy for this evil will be found, in large part, in the connection of our false feeling in respect to marriage dowries. The parent does not see that in leaving his daughter to expect no dowry, he not only drives away the mercenary suitor—a thing which the young lady should be able to do—but prevents the advances of the most desirable suitors—the men who have only time between themselves and the winning of position and fortune. There are men of this sort even in our selfish city-life—men of quiet lives, of culture, of warm and sincere hearts; men who will not make haste to be rich, having better objects in view, and men who would make the best of husbands, yet finally die unmarried, because of the odium that attaches to “fortune-hunting.” The richest parent says in effect of his daughter: “Take her poor, or take her not at all.” There is no feeling that the bride ought to bring money according to her means, and the most desirable suitors are often penniless at the start.

On the one hand, every bride should feel it to be a privilege and a duty, rather than a favor, to contribute some portion toward the support of her house. On the other hand, a young man should not be thought mercenary or indelicate in desiring the dowry which alone can make an early marriage possible for him. Again, the parents should, as in Germany, provide their daughters, according to their ability, with a definite portion; and they should perceive that in withholding such a portion, and in favoring the sentimental prejudice which denounces the dowry system as “mercenary,” they are but increasing the chances, already too great, of their daughter’s marrying late or not at all; for the best men are too proud to seek them. It is this unwise prejudice against dowries that dooms many of our young men and maidens to a loveless and desolate old age. This is the conviction of

DAVID AND JONATHAN.

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