

*TRAILING COAT-TAILS**KLIP-IN-DIE-BOS*

Why Marry?

THEODORE JAMES

There was a prime reason for the marriage of the man and the woman, when this is looked at dispassionately. There was a reason for the apple in the Garden of Eden. So I said to the Xhosa woman of 40 years, 'Isn't it a bit late to think of adopting so young an infant?' Whereupon she answered me with all the old-world wisdom of a tribal matriarch, 'But I must have someone to look after me when I am old.' There was one of the needs of human beings expressed with all simplicity.

In settled communities without a public welfare system which cares for the very young and the aged in one way or another, this reason for marriage is as real as ever; but in our westernised, 'modernised' society with all its traditional taboos and mealy-mouthed morals thrown to the winds of the world, marriage appears no longer to be a necessary functional arrangement for the maintenance of social stability.

China has put this to the test and officially declared that marriage in the traditionally recognised manner is needed only for the propagation of the Chinese child when such propagation is deemed to be necessary; and the Chinese State has deemed that presently this is not necessary, and has accordingly set about discouraging marriages in the young and passionate, and encouraging all forms of contraception, and late marriage if a woman of 25 and a man of 30 still persist in doing what has come to be regarded as a rather heterodox, if still permissible, practice.

Of course, we know there are other reasons for marriage: hereditary titles and other rights, and desirable appendages whose ultimate attachment has some interest and concern for the still-living possessor of them, but marriage, with the inherent meaning which is retained by the Church particularly and by old-fashioned parents generally, is, as the phrase goes, 'for the birds'. The way things are going these days will render marriage no longer necessary, perhaps even undesirable; for that kind

of marriage implies the practice of a discipline which includes responsibility, and our present age is fundamentally both irresponsible and irresponsible. 'Let us have lustful liaisons', is the cry of the libertine and the 'liberated', and leave marriage for the minority who care for that sort of thing.

Besides, marriage in the old style has become less suited to our modern way of life, in which not only opportunity incites, but also industry entices, the young and not-so-young woman to go out to work or to go into business. The new life for the modern woman, which is a product of Western civilisation, has in itself created the means to make the life of a woman of today free of former inhibitions and prohibitions, quite fascinating and unbelievably promising and pleasurable, so that the need for a stable home in which children are to be born and reared not only becomes unnecessary, but unwanted. By this fact children in their turn become unwanted, for the hindrance their being there at all places upon the new life of the New Woman.

When 'accidents' happen, as they surely always will, and a child erupts into the domiciliary environment, it is looked upon as a pollutional factor that needs remedying by one means or another: a nursemaid, adoption, or simply sheer neglect. Neglect is, perhaps, less common than the innate maternal sense of duty which will constrain the parents, the mother in particular, to care for the child as best she can. Such care does not necessarily include any love for the child, and will cease, and let that be soon, when the child can be put out to foster- or other care, which will enable the mother to return to her usual fashion of earning a living, or spending her life.

Should we no longer use the word 'marriage' in the sense to which we 'old 'uns' have become accustomed? Should we not reserve that word for the ceremony and the state which, until this century with all its evils came upon us, have been fundamental factors in maintaining our social integrity?

And use some other word, we need not be too particular, like 'liaison', 'cohabitation', 'concubinage' — we have a number in the English language (some polite and some not so polite), or we could borrow from some other language; Afrikaans has 'samewoning' for that kind of marriage which has become a method of advertisement. The credentials of a member of the 'jet set', are that he or she has various qualifications and has 'been married 4 times'—and divorced, of course, 3, or is it 4, times?

We no longer, if we ever did, sing with Horace:
*Diva, producas subolem, patrumque prosperes
decreta super iugandis feminis prolisque novae
feraci lege marita.*

(O goddess, rear up our young and prosper the

senatorial decrees concerning marriage and the marriage-law, so that they result in many more children.)

Francis Bacon long ago said: 'He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune; for they are impedimenta to great enterprises, either of virtue or of mischief'; and 'a single life doth well with churchmen, for charity will hardly water the ground where it must first fill a pool.' . . . 'It is indifferent for judges and magistrates, for if they be facile and corrupt, you shall have a servant five times worse than a wife' . . . 'he was reputed one of the wise men that made answer to the question when a man should marry: "a young man not yet, an elder man not at all".'