

On Predestination

(An Imitation of Charles Lamb)

Samuel Gordon

"And God announces in the heavens," says the Talmud, "forty days before the birth of a child, if he shall be rich or poor, if he shall be strong or weak, if he shall be wise or foolish, AND WHO UNTO HIM SHALL BE HIS MATE." Such a broad statement is much too comprehensive to consider at one time, but let us regard only the final clause in some of its many aspects and imports. Unfortunately the sages do not expand on their brief reference to predestination in marriage; hence, the reader is left entirely to his own mental resources in elaborating and embroidering this simple and yet potent statement.

On first encountering this fine phrase, Mr. Average Man might well be impelled to sit down, and with folded hands wait for his heavenly selected help-meet to knock on the door, and respond to his greeting with a wifely salute and a noncommittal, "O, yes, you'll have to sign this marriage license." Mr. Man realizes, after three distinct rings of the doorbell turn out to be the gas man, the installment collector, and the Fuller Brush salesman, that he must not take the Talmud too literally. With his bubbling enthusiasm only slightly restrained, Average cogitates, and concludes with this ponderous certainty, "God has written who is to be my wife, all right, but"—displaying his natural aptitude for the law—"He can adequately fulfill this bond as well when I am sixty as when I am twenty. If I intend to enjoy an average amount of marital bickering, I must be up and doing, that I may annex my chosen mate at a proper age."

Here Mr. Man almost faints

when it dawns upon him that the Creator can still technically meet the bill by inflicting a divorcee upon him. By now he is in a pother of indignation and bewilderment and is rapidly approaching either dementia praecox or a pure state of atheism. He has committed the sin of trying to think too deeply about things which must be taken on faith, indeed a fault common to all mankind except the solitary few who are either fanatics or fools.

Leaving Mr. Man in a state of equilibrium between his clashing contemplations, I pause to consider the devious workings of the heavenly manifesto among my personal friends. I am confused in trying to determine how this girl has managed to discard eleven gentleman friends, during our acquaintance, without encountering her star of destiny. Why does the all-seeing Deity permit such needless tampering with a young virgin's affections, especially since all too easily it might have permanent effects on her affections, with the resulting mix-up when her allotted soul mate does make his belated entrance. Though it is right that I admire the initiative and perspicacity of this fair damsel, out to discover through trial and error whom God chose for her some sixteen years ago, it is doubly mystifying to hear mingled sentiments of loyalty to different beaux—none I am sure the ONE—from her lips.

Can it be that God was in such a hurry that he dropped an extra male into my young friend's heavenly mail box, or did He in His omnipotence produce a surplus of men that there should be enough to divide between the women and the armies? Perhaps He put one soldier and one

husband in a compartment, with the mental reservation to have the soldier patriotically pass on before he could play havoc with the celestial scheme of matrimonial predestination. And while the powers that be are saving up taxes for another war, consider the tragic consequences of the powerful and equal tugs exerted on a girl's heartstrings by her two predestined parcels, since she is naturally unable to differentiate where God himself has not made a choice.

If this is puzzling, how about the numerous men and women who find great pleasure in life, first with one partner and then with a second or even a third. I do not refer to these changelings who alter partners through divorce decrees, but those who lose loved ones through natural processes, only to discover anew an affinity, and to stroll again down life's green ways in happy abandon. Does he pick such characters as the ones who are to be compensated for a terrible paucity of gray matter and human feeling by the presentation of two living foils instead of the customary one?

But even if predestination is a fact, in spite of these conjectures and criticisms, can Mr. Man violate the ironclad edicts of Emily Post by leaping off a trolley, risking death before the crunching wheels of a truck whose driver has one eye on the traffic and another on the passing parade of pulchritude, and then dare to hail a fair young Venus with such an inane phrase as "How do you do?" First, Average breaks the rule that he should not speak to a stranger, secondly, he is strongly liable in this day of enlightened womanhood to receive the open palm of the athletic young woman directly above the line where the fuzz begins, and finally, he is very likely to be immediately incarcerated as a presuming masher. (Vile creature that he is, without even the redeeming feature of a pleasing technique).

Mr. Man, sorely provoked, holds communion with his inner conscience. "Wouldn't the chosen shop girl also feel the quickened pulse of affinity and thus recognize the approach of love on labored arches?"

Speaking in the scholarly accents the inner conscience always affects, conscience twits him upon his logic thus, "You should know that no human sales girl just off from her labors can find time to detect the exhilaration of divine match-making and a quickened heart beat, just when she is busy applying the artifices of rouge, lipstick, and mascara. She undoubtedly will attribute it to her aching right big pedal appendage where that big clumsy floor-walker, handsome though he is, stepped on it when he stopped to flirt a wee while." Not only does Mr. Average Man sorrowfully refute predestination, but he swallows the bitter pill of knowing that an illegal, nay a devilish rival, is added to the lists of romance. He must be an agent of Satan since only Mr. Man's name is written in the books of heaven.

I remember my own experience with the gospel. She was a dark fair maiden, with a vivacious face and a heart of pure twenty-two carat gold. Her carriage was dignified, yet graceful. Her eyes were dark pools of pulsating passion. Her lips were curved at that just correct angle of the arc, and her teeth were fairer than the wildest dream of a toothpaste advertising man. Though my hapless heart felt the strong tugs of divine intercession, all was for naught, for she went her way, serene and unseeing, and I, a shattered defender of predestination, retired to my lonely nook to think, to suffer, and to call up another girl on the telephone.

Yes, predestination must be taken into account by all careful students of life, the universe, and the motivating influences behind human action.