

Compulsory Marriage

The Government of Dalmaria
Broke Up Bachelorhood
and Spinsterhood
By P. A. MITCHEL

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The population of Dalmaria had been running down for years. The marriage houses, which formerly had been in vogue by the city government at the rate of about a hundred a week, had diminished to ten or a dozen a month.

To remedy the evil the government passed a law that all men should be married by their twenty-first birthday and no girl should refuse an offer unless she could prove the proposer to be a man of bad character or this she was not able to support her.

There was considerable opposition among the unmarried of both sexes at the passage of this law. Single men began to beat themselves to secure as soon as they expressed it—the least desirable girl in the town. A woman who had received a proposition was given a week to examine into her proposer's fitness and come to a decision. At the end of the week a new proposer might be accepted. Consequently the girl was not necessarily compelled to marry the first proposer unless no one else entered a claim. This was considered a very wise expedient since it admitted of competition. Nevertheless it resulted in considerable litigation. Girls finding themselves unable to decide between several applicants would defer decision till the limit of time had passed. Sometimes a young man within a few days of his twenty-first birthday would be not of ill had broken the law.

That which has been called the Dumblerton case has come down to us as a curious relic of this city of compulsory marriage. Irene Dumblerton was what is now called a flirt. It is said that she once met a man at a ball and so twisted his brain that within a couple of days he lay down to an eternal sleep on the bottom of a river. Another within a week after meeting her is reported to have climbed out of the sixth story window of a building and dived to the sidewalk below. Irene Dumblerton could do anything she liked with a man, either reduce him to tears or make him so hard that she could kill an elephant with him. Nevertheless the instances mentioned were somewhat exaggerated.

When the marriage statute became a law Miss Dumblerton saw that she must marry some man who might propose to her. She did not intend that the wrong proposer should come within the limits of the law. She did not mean to wait for a proposition, she made it her object to draw into her net within a week after her first offer as many suitors as possible in order that she might choose between them.

The morning after the law had gone into effect Miss Dumblerton received a basketful of proposals. Some of the proposers were desirable, some were undesirable and some midway between the two. She wrote all the names of men she considered available on cards and laid them in a row in order of their desirability. The next day brought an accession to the list with a consequent introduction of new names and a rearrangement of the order of value. The second and subsequent days brought still larger accessions, until at the last day of grace three-quarters of the eligible bachelors of her class had proposed to her.

One would think that with so many choices from Miss Dumblerton might find one—all the law allowed—to fill the position of husband. The truth is that the one she really desired, one whom she had previously declined, had not sent in his name as a candidate for consideration.

When Miss Dumblerton discovered that the proposal of Egbert Whitmarsh had not been sent in she was seized with a sudden apprehension. If seven days should pass without his having spoken again she would be obliged to choose between humiliating herself before the man she wanted or going to jail.

Miss Dumblerton lay awake all night thrashing her pillow like one in a fever over this alternative. At one moment she vowed that she would marry one of the men who had proposed to her, thus showing Mr. Whitmarsh that he was not wanted. At the next she decided to break the law and go to jail. Finally it occurred to her that Mr. Whitmarsh was not supposed to know of her change of heart, she concluded to make a virtue of necessity and inform him of that change.

That day—the last but one of those left her to comply with the law—she spent three hours writing letters to "My Dear Mr. Whitmarsh," "My Dear Egbert," "My Dear Friend," "Honored Sir," but she neither came to a decision as to which of these modes of address she would use, nor did any of the letters she wrote please her. Finally she threw them all in the wastebasket, went out, bought a few cigarettes and, putting one of them into an envelope with her card, sent it to Mr. Whitmarsh.

The reply came back to her: "You indicate that you would wish me not to forget you. This is heaping on me a sorrow's crown. If you realized my sorrows on your account you would bid me to forget you as soon as possible."

"I must tell him that I have changed my mind with regard to him? Yes? No? What shall I do? I have but till tomorrow at noon."

She dashed off the words, "I have changed my mind," and, placing the message in the hands of her servant, told him to take it at once to Mr. Whitmarsh.

The reply was, to say the least, annoying: "To me who have loved you from the first moment I laid eyes on you your message is unintelligible. How can one change one's mind so quickly in a matter of love? Love is not an opinion, it is a mingling of souls."

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Miss Dumblerton. "Only fifteen hours left, and this stupid man will either force me to marry one I don't wish and whom he doesn't wish me to marry or he will send me to jail!"

Miss Dumblerton was in despair. Could Mr. Whitmarsh have changed his mind? Were she assured of this, though to marry another would be to blight her life, she could bring herself to do so. But to give up a man she loved and whom she could not convince that she loved was maddening. She exclaimed the law that was forced her into such a position. After awhile she decided what she should do next. She sent Mr. Whitmarsh the following message: "Have you not heard that there are times when a woman says the meaning 'Yes'?"

The reply that came back to her was, "Does a woman who says 'Yes' mean 'No'?"

Miss Dumblerton stamped her foot and decided she did everything except tear her hair. That she would have done had it not been for her sleeping beauty. They were not sleeping, they were both awake and determined to make one more appeal. She wrote:

"The law compels me to accept by tomorrow, or a number of others I have received."

To this the reply came: "You will do with grief. How happy would I be to leave you if only you cared me. But a marriage of convenience is impossible. To marry one I decidedly love merely to convey a message to your friend means my own ruin."

When Miss Dumblerton received this message a suspicion came to her that Mr. Whitmarsh was not quite a fool after all. Indeed, it occurred to her that he was playing with her. Was it in revenge for the treatment he had himself received at her hands or did she propose to punish her for what she had inflicted on his sex? At any rate, she could go no further. She considered the plan of writing him to come to see her with a view to determining by observation what was his real attitude toward her, but she felt that she had already demeaned herself to the extent, and she could not bring herself to do so any further.

On the morning she must accept one of her suitors or violate the law a basket of beautiful, rare flowers came to her with Mr. Whitmarsh's name attached. For a few moments she was overcome. Could it be possible that he would relent? She waited a while, but received no further word from him and abandoned herself to despair.

"The state against Dumblerton!" called the clerk of the court.

Miss Dumblerton stepped to the front. "Irene Dumblerton," said the judge, "you are charged by the matrimonial bureau with a violation of its manly laws in that you have refused to marry Alfred Tringhamman, one of fifty-four proposers, and you make a claim that you are of bad character, so that he cannot support you. Do you plead guilty or not guilty?"

"Guilty, your honor."

"How comes it," rejoined the judge, "that with so many suitors to choose from you cannot find one to please you?"

The lady stood silently looking at the floor.

"This your honor," said the prosecuting attorney of the matrimonial bureau, "is the most disgraceful case we have had. This woman ever since the case of a matrimonial agent had drawn suitors to her, keeping them from proposing to any one of them herself. And now we have all these bachelors who claim that they have complied with the law in proposing to her to encumber the calendar with their cases. I trust that your honor will inflict upon her the heaviest penalty the law allows."

"Once more, Irene Dumblerton," said the judge, "I ask you to choose one from among the fifty-four men who are willing to marry you. I would remind you that the law does not permit a woman to change her mind and be released from the penalty after sentence has been imposed, though she may do so before she has received her sentence. The extreme penalty that I can impose upon a woman refusing to marry is ten years imprisonment, with the addition of one year for every man who has made her a proposition. It will therefore be my duty to send you to prison for sixty-four years, and when you are again free to marry, you being eighty-six."

"Eighty-four, your honor."

"You will not find a matrimonial market equal to that of today. Will you choose?"

The woman remained silent.

"Then, Irene Dumblerton, I sentence"—

A Well Planned Escape

Liberty Came to One Whom the Law Imprisoned
By CARRINGTON FORD

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It is said of men who make enormous fortunes by wrecking large properties that they always have a lawyer at their elbows to advise them that they shall keep within the law. It would have been well for James Maxson had he done the same. The difference between Maxson and these men is that they are rather putting themselves within the pale of the law while Maxson spent recent months putting himself in a position where the law was obliged to punish him.

Maxson was a banker, a young and able one, with a lovely wife and two beautiful children, whom he adored. Without knowing that he was doing so he violated the national banking law and was sent to prison for ten years. The party with his wife and children was hurried beyond measure. He felt that to serve the terms of his term would break him down completely and he would not like to resign them. A number of very strict friends decomposed him to the prison doors, and all that he could do for him to escape was to beg for him to be pardoned. Maxson begged them to assist him to escape, and they promised to do so.

Two of them, Woodruff and Somers, met the same evening at Mrs. Maxson's house to form a plan on which to liberate Maxson and carry off liberty. It was agreed that Mrs. Maxson, who enjoyed daily access to the prison, should furnish some of the officials there to see her and induce them either through sympathy or by bribery to assist her husband to escape out of the penitentiary enclosure.

The execution of a plan of escape made a wonderful difference with the Maxsons and his family. The easiest way to turn a child's toy disappointment is to divert his mind with the promise of something to take the place of the object coveted. The man is but the grown child. It was comparatively easy for Maxson to endure his captivity so long as his mind was occupied with and his hopes were centered on his escape.

On her second visit to her husband she began to study the details there with a view to selecting one or more of them to interest in her escape. Maxson, being much broken down in health at his entrance into the prison, succeeded in getting himself transferred to the hospital. There Mrs. Maxson while visiting him made the acquaintance of Thomas Boyle, a hospital warder, a man with a kind disposition, who took pains to tell her the story of her husband's incarceration. How he had managed to escape from the prison doors in a different way from what he did he would have been still a respect of banner instead of a felon. They also told him of the work of the hospital boys, how they were the children were constantly taking when they were coming back to them of her own distress. In this way she won the man's sympathy and finally by offering to make him independent in case he would promise to get her husband beyond the prison walls she captured him to her purpose.

Boyle thought the matter over and decided upon taking in an assistant. A night watchman named Hunter had access to the main office room of the prison where was kept a key that must be obtained or duplicated before there would be any hope of getting Maxson out of the prison building. Boyle told Mrs. Maxson this endeavor to interest Hunter in the plan by offering him a large sum of money. She succeeded, and after she had done so Boyle communicated with Hunter, and they formed a plan together to get Maxson out of the building and into the prison yard. There they were to assist him to scale the walls, and he was to be met by his friends on the other side.

The key required was to open Maxson's cell. It hung on a nail in the warden's safe. Hunter could get to it only when the garden was present. To take the key from the cell and not return it immediately would have revealed the fact that Maxson was to be permitted to escape. Hunter's object was to secure an impression of the key from which a duplicate could be made. When he was ready to operate he rushed from the warden's office and told him he had heard something like a shot in the other end of the prison. The warden went to the door and listened. Hunter while the man's back was turned slipped the key he wanted from its nail and hung another in its place. Then Hunter left the office, saying that he would go and see if there was any trouble. When he returned he had a wax impression of the key and, watching his opportunity, exchanged the real key for its substitute.

Meanwhile Boyle had procured a ladder, which he had concealed in an convenient place to be used by Maxson in climbing the wall. There was a second wall which the prisoner would need to climb, and Mrs. Maxson had arranged with his two friends, Woodruff and Somers, to be outside this second wall at the time of the escape to throw a rope over for him to climb upon. He was to make known his presence by throwing a stone over the wall.

There were so many contingencies

to the success of the plan that Boyle and Hunter were both gone with it. Hunter would have been out had it not been for the earnest pleading of Mrs. Maxson. It was she who could do to hold him to his purpose. When all else failed she agreed to double the amount of the reward. That decided him. Nothing remained but to appoint a certain night when Woodruff and Somers should be ready at the outer wall and the attempt should be made.

The night arranged for was very dark, a high wind blowing furiously. This was in some respects an advantage, for the operations of the conspirators were less likely to be noted. After midnight Boyle gave Maxson a suit of clothes, let him out of his cell and conducted him to the prison yard. Boyle knew just where guards and watchmen were stationed and how to avoid them. In the yard they found Hunter. Boyle withdrew the ladder from its hiding place and put it up against the wall.

It was far too dark. It looked as if, after all the planning and plotting the attempt was to be a failure. There was no possibility of the warden getting to the wall. His assistants were wild with terror. They had as much of chance as a man they were trying to set free. To return him to his cell would be to incur again the risk they had run in getting him out. They must put up with that, wait.

"For heaven's sake, Hunter," gasped Boyle, "what shall we do?"

"I'll go to the dining room and get a table."

The table was brought and stood near the wall. The ladder was placed on it, but it was still too short. Maxson climbed to the top and set his fingers on the warden's key.

"Quickly," called Boyle in a hoarse whisper, "and get Hunter, who were both strong men, had the ladder the height of their shoulders. A little earlier called Maxson. As he climbed after they raised it as high as they could reach, and the prisoner got to the top.

Boyle and Hunter were not to be in danger of discovery. Until they had removed the ladder and the ladder had been returned to their places they were safe. But they accomplished it all. They were safe. Each had a promise of what to do was a small fortune.

Maxson took a jump in the dark. What was before him he did not know. He could not see. He might break his neck or might break a limb. The latter alternative seemed more to him than the first, for if he were unable to walk he would be recaptured, placed in close confinement and would doubtless die in prison. He must take the risk. Hanging by his fingers he let go and dropped. He struck soft ground and, though jarred, was not injured.

What there was about him was not revealed until the heavy clouds scattering across the sky. Woodruff tried to take to reach the outer wall he did not know, but placing his back against the wall he had scaled, he walked straight forward. He had not long to walk before he encountered the warden's key. He was that they had been instructed to do as near as possible to the point where he was to scale the first wall. He groped about in the dark to find over the wall but could feel nothing but dirt. On for a couple of minutes but he might see some object that he could use.

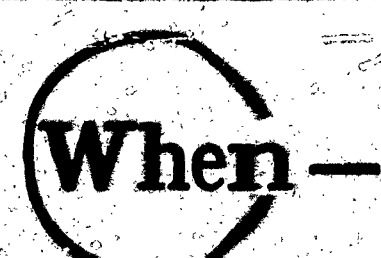
After spending what seemed to him half an hour hunting for a device it might be used with success feeling that his friends would find the attempt had either been postponed or had failed and would go away he went to the wall, clutched it bravely and for a moment gave way to despair. Then it occurred to him to throw over some loose dirt, sweeping some damp earth in his hands. He made a ball of it and tossed it over the wall. He listened, but no sound came. The stillness was terrible. He caught up another handful and, walking a short distance to his right, threw that over. Again he listened. Suddenly something fell on the ground near him, but how near or in which direction from him he could not tell. He rubbed about him for some time, when suddenly he encountered a rope.

With a stifled cry of joy he pulled on it. He encountered resistance. Walking to the wall he bore his weight on the rope. It was firm. Then he began to climb.

It was all his strength could accomplish to take him to the top. Indeed, without the incentive he possessed he could not have done it. Once on the wall he called in a low voice. Woodruff answered and told him to drop. He did so, and his friends each grasped one of his hands. Then they hurried him away.

There would be no safety in meeting his family. When he was missed their movements would be watched. He was taken to a place some distance from the jail, where a carriage was waiting and driven twenty miles to a railway station. His friends had brought with them materials for a make-up, and when he alighted at the station he appeared as an old man.

Maxson was concealed for weeks in the house of one of his relatives. When the excitement attending his escape had worn off he took passage under an assumed name for Australia. There he was joined by his wife and children, and there he lives today, but far from where he would be able to meet any one who would recognize him. Twenty years have passed since he made his escape, and now he would not be known as the same man.



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