

Is THIRTY the Love? Deadline!

Will Durant was born in North Adams, Mass., in 1858, and was educated in the Catholic faith by the Jesuits, receiving from them a degree of B. A. in 1897. After a period of newspaper work as a reporter for the New York Evening Journal, he became a professor of Latin, Greek, and French at Seton Hall. For the next ten years he devoted himself exclusively to scholastic pursuits, which included a trip to Europe and extensive study at Columbia in 1917. "The Story of Philosophy," written several years ago, has now totaled 200,000 sales and the publishers figure that at least 1,000,000 people have read it. At the present time when not engaged in lecturing through the country, Doctor Durant lives in New York City and writes for the magazines. He is married.

By WILL DURANT

And now what if I never said it at all? What if this report, of my denying the possibility of love after thirty, is as scintillating as the famous philosophical remark that all men should shoot themselves at thirty-five? Slowly I am learning, my lesson: I must never joke with reporters, they will quote me without the smile, and they will be certain to ignore modifications.

But it would be a shame, now that this learned discussion has gone so far, to say that the common has a purely imaginary source. Perhaps the best thing to do in the premises is to bust down what really was said with sundry imprecations that come as afterthoughts, and to indicate what basic problems lie at the root of our rather frivolous debate.

The original query was intelligent and fundamental. Can we restore the old moral code? It is a good question because it suggests the possibility that the old code is permanently gone, and that our current "immorality" is but a groping trial-and-error transition to a new code of honor and decency.

For the old code was developed with an agricultural society in view; it assumed a brief adolescence, and a rapid arrival of the male at economic self-sufficiency; it assumed that marriage would come early, and that children would come early and often. On the farm it was cheaper to marry; the wife was an asset, not an ornament; the children soon earned their keep, and became profitable investments of one's energy; therefore marriage came young, motherhood was sacred, and birth-control was immoral.

And in the complex industrial life of the city men attain class later, late, and in the middle class latest of all, a wife is so expensive a luxury that only the poor can afford to marry; children are frowned upon by landlords, and cannot earn money for us till they are fourteen or sixteen; immigration, and the suction of the city upon the country, replenish the population very well; the streets are so littered with children that they interfere with our eight-cylinder juggernauts; there is no evident necessity of adding to their multitude.

Above all, the advance of medicine, sanitation and parental care has reduced the death rate to a fraction of what it was; the birth rate had to come down, or else Ecclesiastes and Malthus would have been right in believing that when goods are increased, they are increased that consume them, and the last condition is as bad as the first. So the commandment to breed and multiply loses its urgency in the city; marriage comes late, and children are an oversight of love. Social necessity, which makes all sound morality no longer requires large families; early marriage is not indispensable for the maintenance of the race, and birth control, which the tired and virtuous Tolstol condemned as a great sin, is taken up by the nicest ladies in the land. All things change.

Consequently there is no necessary permanence, nor any inherent holiness in the moral code which came down to us with our religion and our politics. "Immorality" is mostly other people's morals, or the morals of other days. As the industrial revolution altered our lives, destroyed our homes, packed us into apartment boxes, replaced the family with the individual and the state, subjected religion to science, and art to industry, so it is rapidly dissolving the moral code developed in and for an agricultural age. Invention, which is the mother of progress, is transmitting the curse and instrument of our "immorality." Adolescence lengthens, and maturity of mind and character, like maturity of means, comes nearer thirty than twenty. A man of thirty is young now, in body and soul; woman, who in the past was old, decrepit and trustworthy at forty, now retains her beauty into the "dangerous age"; and if Balzac were alive he would write with admiration of la femme de quarante ans—the woman of forty years.

Perhaps in the end, sexual development will also be delayed; and then a new adjustment of nature and industry may come, with later puberty, a longer period of growth and education, later marriage, later climacteric, and a lengthened life. When that new adjustment comes, man will be on a higher level of health, power and thought than ever before. The prolongation of adolescence lifted man from brutality to civilization; which of us can tell the fruits of that further prolongation of adolescence which goes on today under our very eyes?

Is Balzac's "Coming Race" about to arrive?

Meanwhile, however, the interlude is chaos. Many of our people are of south-European origin, and will carry with them, for several generations, a racial habit of sexual precocity. The city will continue to stimulate desire, and to discourage marriage; everything will hinge upon that. Precocity will increase, and women will achieve the "single standard"—by imitating that of men. Men will have many loves, and live through them; and then, at thirty or so, they may marry. An increasing number of them will never marry at all.

Here at last we touch our original question: can marriage, postponed until thirty, be ever a real love-marriage, or anything more than a "marriage de convenience," with the banker playing the role of the father? Can a man love at thirty? Doubtless he can lose his head in the heat of desire; there is no age that is safe from infatuation, and Goethe at seventy could propose to a girl of sixteen. But could he have fallen at her feet in adoration? Could he have surrendered to her his Olympian egoism, and lost all thought of self in devotion to her? Could his love be no mere itching of the flesh, but a hunger and thirst to do services to the loved one, to be near her and feel the warmth of her presence and her comradeship?

Perhaps this full flush of love, more spirit than body, more devotion than desire, comes only to the young; and middle age seldom knows it except for one who has been loved from early years through all the vicissitudes of desire and through all the vicissitudes of fortune. (Our question is not whether love dies at thirty, but only whether love in its full flower, can come to a man of thirty for a woman whom he has not loved before.) It is a pity that when such complete love comes it is not permitted, in our cautious days, to weld the lovers into a marriage that shall be a vow burned in with the unlined emolop of youth, rather than a physiological partnership entered upon with the cold rationality of middle age, under the inspiring supervision of an older man.

The tragedy remains, in this melting time, that we love profoundly and unselfishly, and do not marry; that later we love again, less profoundly and intensely, and do not marry (the banker still frowning upon it); and that later we love once more, very moderately and reasonably, with an eye on the ledger—and marry. How can a man feel all the delightful sentimentality of love after ten years of adventures in love? We are then, in Balzac's phrase, *goutils* trying to play on a violin.

It is true that youth is not wise enough to make vows forever, that love-marriages, like other marriages, fall upon many rocks, but who has proved that middle age, in these matters, is wiser than youth? Youth is never so foolish in adoration as middle age is in desire. And what if love must end, never having been dowered by nature or in direct with an easy permanence; is it not better to know it in its divine completeness, to open every door of the soul to it when it comes? The pessimist broods over the brevity of all good things; the optimist resolves to enjoy them while they last.

The last word should be one of philosophic doubt: there is always a slight possibility that we are wrong, and that time will smile at—or ignore—our analysis. Who knows but that our generosity of necks and knees, our replacement of professional with amateur promiscuity, our reduction of women to appetizers and desserts, short-term investments, and show-windows of our pale prosperity, may be but an interlude between two ages of control?

As one mingles, for a stifled moment in Broadway's big parade, and observes the riotous tumultulation of an insatiable once subversive to reproduction and the race, the triumph of liberalism leaps to the eye and the mind; and one wonders if this timidity, moderation, too, like bitter Puritanism, may not bring a reaction that will swing us back helplessly to an extreme of suppression and restraint?

Many times in the past, men have experimented with marriage and the family; among the Greeks love could not claim even the moral status of Broadway. But we experimental variologists are but a small minority; let us step out from the center of our great world, a world in which there still are homes! Possibly our world will conquer and absorb that one, drawing all the glory and the new life and the novel code. But perhaps the family and the countryside will win; perhaps, we of the cities are ultimately sterile, and flourish now only because of the health and vigor that flow to us in every generation from the villa and the town. Let that stream run dry, and we shall face again the problems of reproduction and continuance; the species will assert itself against the individual; love may once more mean marriage, and marriage children. We are sports and freaks, and the race may pass us by.

It is just possible that when we are gone posterity will not care to imitate us, and that the world, which we make, heavy with wealth and bright with young ideas, will be inherited by the children of those who stand aside from us today, looking with doubt upon our great cities, and with hostility upon our careless joy. It would not be the first time that the race had triumphed over the individual.

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