

# Is THIRTY the Love? Deadline!

H. L. Mencken has been a headliner for a long time. After establishing a record for himself on the Baltimore Sun, he went to New York, and in company with George Jean Nathan conducted the magazine Smart Set, and then a new school of polyanthropic American literature. At present he is editor of the American Mercury, a magazine venture which is proving a tremendous success. His books, many of an insidious nature, are widely read. He is one of the most popular journalists in America. He is unmarried, but has always had interesting views of matrimony.

By H. L. MENCKEN

Doctor Durant's observation that no rational man ever falls in love after thirty is surely not new. I printed it in a book called "In Defense of Women" ten or twelve years ago. Nor was it new when I printed it. You will find it, if you search hard enough, in Shakespeare, and Shakespeare, I have no doubt, borrowed it from an Italian who had cribbed it from the Greeks. By retorting it in various forms, some of them voluptuous and others indignant, George Bernard Shaw has earned at least \$35,000, by my estimate, since the year 1886. And it is still good for an occasional outburst of lecturer's glands for Durant, and a cure of Assamian fever for Hester, which antedates 1821 for me.

But, like all other truths, it is not to be taken too literally. I have seen men of thirty-five magnificently in love, and full of a fine, fierce pride in the fact. But these same men also wrote poetry, and believed that a couple of quinine pills, taken before going to bed, would cure a cold, or other ailments, they were excessively romantic, which is to say, bawdy Durant, I suppose, referred to more rational fellows, as I did in my book, and the Greeks long before either of us. Such rational fellows can and more fall in love, in the full romantic sense, than a dry congressman can resist a drink. Their very incapacity for it, indeed, is one of the chief proofs of their rationality.

For this romantic love, when all is said and done, is simply nonsense, and hence not worth much mourning. Its cause, I am informed by agents in the medical colleges, is an ebullition of the hormones; its effects are indistinguishable from those of a somewhat prolonged and injudicious jag. The victim, looking at black, sees white. The lady who has knocked him off, sees through his glazed eyes, becomes an amalgam of Florence Nightingale, Marie Antoinette, Lola Montez, Edith Cavell, Grace Darling, and the tenth and best wife of Belshazzar, king of Babylon. His view of her, in the sight of all other people, is apt to seem comical. And when she marries her, he commonly finds that it is painfully croceous. Very few early marriages are genuinely happy. They may last, but so do gallstones last. I add politely that what is pain for the gander is probably funny for the goose.

But though the romantic love described in the works of the standard poets is thus mainly a function of youth, and cannot survive into actual maturity, I see no reason why a man sliding into the forties should not marry satisfactorily, and make a good husband. His illusions may be gone, but if the lady he chases his eye on is a really charming there may be a great many soothing redittles. The plain fact is that many females of the human species are lovely, and that their lovelessness survives even the harshest spectacles, especially when competently made up. The have amiable wits, and are amusing. They know how to be agreeable. They are tolerantly cynical, and do not expect too much either of God or of man. I can easily imagine even the most hard-boiled of men falling for such a wench. In fact, I have seen them fall—and observed them happy afterward.

This, to be sure, is not romantic love. It is not idealistic. It sees nothing that is not actually there. But, as I say, which is there may be very charming. If it is, then it is not to last. For charm is almost as durable as gallstones: it is no more a function of mere youth than it is a sign of illusia. The genuinely charming woman remains charming at sixty. She can no more fade, in any real sense, than a diamond can fade. It is not necessary to fall in love with such a woman in order to appreciate her. Appreciating her is a function, not of the hormones, but of the higher cerebral centers. In other words, it is a function of men beyond thirty-five.

As for women, I don't believe that they ever fall in love at all. They are far too intelligent to do it. When one hears of a woman falling wildly in love with a movie actor, or a gypsy violinist, or the curate of the parish, one simply hears of a woman who is trying to bring the darling of her heart to terms. Let him show the proper signs of disturbance, and she will promptly forget poor Jack Gilbert. No woman above the intellectual strata of a cabwoman or a rock-thrower is romantic. In even the prettiest fellow, when she has looked at him seriously, she sees a good husband.

## The Answer to Prayer

By MARTHA WILLIAMS

"I DON'T care what you say, I'm going to pray for it," Miss Louzy exploded, her eyes snapping. "Give me the Lord right to his face to send. In a fitful husband—because I don't see how else you'll get one. Ain't a man for fifty miles around that's worth anything, and the way the place is left you can't leave it till you're forty, neither rent it and go board some-where else. You're cin' twenty-one now—first thing you know you'll be a cranky, dried-up old maid same as I am—and I wouldn't wish worse luck on the hatefullest girl in town."

"Stop! You'll ha's me crying," Peggy Drew returned, her eyes dancing, as she listened to her old friend and housekeeper. "I feel it in my bones that the coming man will get here—after awhile. What ails you, Louzy? Don't you know the woods are full of fellows to marry if you keep your eyes open?"

"Names, please!" from Louzy. Peggy giggled, but began gaily. "Judge Helm—"

"He's buried three wives already, and is scoutin' round for number four," Louzy interjected.

"Peggy nodded. "I'd jurtial—you'll have to admit. Not the least difference on the three headstones! Then there's Squire Taylor—he's just got one wife dead, and two livin' children."

"And so homely," said Louzy, "that you could break her over his head. You know what I think?"

"Mercy no," laughed Peggy. "I think your granny tied up this place in her will in pure spite for you. Such a rich man, and your daddy died. What she wanted was to make sure he'd never get it."

"He might by marrying you," said Louzy, "if you took the notion."

Peggy giggled. "That'll never happen," she said. "I can't stand him. But the rich man, come on, Louzy!"

"All right, child. Now let's see about supper," said Louzy. "I'll bet you we'll have six men asking to stay the night—you know they always come in droves with Brush creek past fording—'nd it's flooding fast."

"If we do, don't you dare tell them I made the waffles, the light rolls, the peach cobbler, nor even the broiled ham. I know you mean well by such amiable lying—but I shan't profit by it any longer," quoth Peggy.

Louzy had a weather eye for many things—especially the weather itself. Inside an hour—it was then four o'clock of the afternoon—a dozen meek flood refugees had accented and comfort in the big new homestead. The latest of them was far and away the wettest. Foolhardily, he had tried to swim the creek, not knowing the risk he ran. Good fiasco, good hap, had brought him through safe—but unrepresentable. Hat, coat, shoes, the waters had taken from him, giving him in return a waxy scratch all down one cheek, and teeth that chattered in spite of him.

Louzy and Black Sam betwixt them managed somehow to provide a hot bath, a hot toddy, and dry garments, but doing it was a bargain. Earlier comers had presented all things masculine—this lizzard wad, until his own clothes were dried, had to makeshift under blankets supplemented by one of Louzy's finest winter coats. Snowed out of his room, he wondered he fell asleep so deeply that even the supper riot did not wake him. Just as he came back to consciousness later that evening the floor beneath softly—light steps—rattled the bed, and a soft whisper reached him.

"Louzy! It ran, and this is what comes in answer to prayer, please, please don't pray any more."

Apparently the sleeper slept on—in truth, he was bawdy than wide-awake behind closed eyelids. But shortly he was up in all the majesty of his flowing robe, pounding hard on the floor, and, when Sam came running, donning his clothes—real clothes—real food, also, and full knowledge of where he happened to be. He swiftly found out—as swiftly he dressed himself, finding his outfit little better for water, and he took himself in search of his involuntary hosts.

Thus it happened that, pausing in the door of the warm, lighted living room, he saw Peggy, her eyes dancing, her cheeks glowing, her golden hair shining golden as the freight struck across it—and said inside, deep down: "There stands my wife."

But it was not until they had been three weeks married, and he had brought Peggy home again, that he brought to the meaning of the cryptic sentence he had overheard. When he knew he hugged Louzy—hard—then caught up Peggy, and danced her wildly up and down the long hall, the big rooms and up the broad stairway.

Racing down them still in a gale of laughter, he said between gasps: "All my life I've been a dreamer of dreams—but the wildest of them never showed me myself in the answer to a prayer."

## GROUP OF PAINTINGS VALUED AT \$250,000 TO BE SHOWN AT THE FAIR

DETROIT—A total of \$26,582 will be offered in the Cattle Department of the Michigan State Fair, September 2 to 8, the largest premium list in the history of the fair according to the management.

In addition to catering to the interests of the farmer and his needs, the Fair this year will provide an entertainment and educational program unequalled in its history.

Of outstanding interest from the educational standpoint will be a collection of 21 paintings, valued at more than \$250,000, loaned to the Department of Fine Arts of the Fair by the Metropolitan Museum of Art, of New York City.

This exhibition will contain examples of the various schools—the French, Dutch, German, and American. The majority date from the 18th and 19th centuries and the paintings are sufficiently representative to enable the na-

tional tendencies to be readily recognized.

World famous masters are included in the groups. The American school, both in landscape and portraiture, is well represented by 12 noteworthy subjects.

Due to the high valuation placed on the collection, a special detail of the Michigan State Police will be on guard day and night.

The Fair opens on Sunday afternoon, September 2, with a sacred concert by Lieutenant-Commander John Philip Sousa and his band of 100 musicians and soloists. It will give a special patriotic program in the evening and twice daily during the duration of the Fair will give programs.

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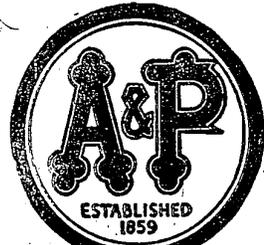
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