

Marriages that Did and Didn't

A Story of Two Hundred Wives and Husbands

By MARY ROSS

“WHAT is there in your marriage that is especially unsatisfactory to you?”

With that as an opening wedge, Dr. G. V. Hamilton started in to explore the great adventure of adult life. It is the first of a long series of questions comprising his “objective analysis” of the experience of a hundred married women and a hundred married men, recently completed in New York City under the auspices of the Bureau of Social Hygiene.

Every effort was made to ensure the validity of scientific research. The questions—372 of them for the women who had been pregnant, 357 for other women, and 334 for the men—were typed on cards which were handed silently by the investigator to the subject, so that he or she could not be influenced by any differing shades of emphasis in the asking. The answers were taken down verbatim in private by Dr. Hamilton, and later transferred through a dictaphone to typewritten records, numbered according to a key which he alone knew, so that there could be no chance of identifying the speaker in the course of the later classifications and tabulations, which required, of course, assistance by other members of the research staff. Later these individual records were tabulated on punch cards, so that it would be possible to trace the patterns which seemed to have made for success or failure in the 145 marriages which were brought under this microscope. In 55 marriages both husband and wife were represented. Of the 100 women, 75 were mothers and the total number of their children was 161.

The subjects themselves were volunteers, who were interested in the study to the extent of offering to spend a considerable amount of time in answering candidly questions of the most searchingly personal nature. It took from two to thirty hours, according to the detail of the answers, to talk out the replies; the transcript of the whole record numbered 2,000,000 words. No pretense is made that it gives a general picture or a cross section of American experience or even of New Yorkers. The subjects came largely from successful business and professional groups, with a goodly sprinkling of the arts and sciences, representing an unusually high level of education and attainment. By the very degree of their interest in a scientific study of marriage and their willingness to explore their most intimate experience, they must be set off from a so-called “normal” group of married people. But except for two or three who were asked to withdraw because apparently they did not or could not answer truthfully, the response was given in obvious good faith, with intention to tell everything. In the

midst of the world's preoccupation with the varieties and moralities of sexual experience, these answers constitute, insofar as is known, the first and only body of first-hand data on marriage collected according to a specialized technique of scientific research, under controlled conditions.

To that first question laid before these 200 wives and husbands—“What is there in your marriage that is especially unsatisfactory to you?”—39 men and 25 women answered “nothing.” Two men and 11 women said “everything.” The other replies were classified under sixty-seven headings! Sexual maladjustment in which either wife or husband was felt inadequate, or in which the “blame” was not placed, was mentioned by 36 men and 45 women; an unsatisfactory economic situation by 20 women and 8 men. Seventeen wives and 10 husbands found marriage irksome because of “unfreedom, limiting duties,” and so on. Nineteen wives and 14 husbands cited the “fundamental personality defects” of their respective spouses as the chief cause of dissatisfaction, while the same number of women and 10 men mentioned “temperamental differences.” Jealousy, extravagance, the management of children, received comparatively slight mention.

THUS a preponderating majority of each sex found marriage unsatisfactory in some degree. Yet an even larger proportion of both felt that the game was worth the candle, nevertheless. Three later questions put this in different ways:

Do you wish to go on living with your husband (or wife) because you love him (or her)? Yes, said 78 men and 75 women; no, 11 men and 15 women, while the remainder gave qualified or inconclusive replies.

If by some miracle you could press a button and find that you had never been married to your spouse, would you do so? No, said 66 husbands and 64 wives; yes, 14 of each, while 1 and 9 respectively were uncertain and the rest inconclusive.

Knowing what you now know, would you wish to marry if you were unmarried? Yes, 77 men and 74 women; yes, qualified, 5 men and 10 women; uncertain, 4 and 2; no, and no with qualifications, 11 men and 8 women.

THIS article is a summary of portions of Dr. G. V. Hamilton's scientific report, *A Research in Marriage*, which will be published for professional distribution in the fall. A popular presentation of the more generally interesting and significant facts and findings will appear in a series of articles to be published in the *Woman's Home Companion*, beginning with the issue of next July.

One of the next leading questions stressed perhaps the clearest general showing of this study: that the women in this particular lot of New Yorkers were considerably more critical of marriage and more dissatisfied with it than the men. Each person was asked to describe the disposition of his or her particular spouse. Only 17 wives omitted mention of some unfortunate trait in their husbands, while the remaining 83 cited 266

undesirable characteristics. On the other hand, 29 men described their wives solely in complimentary terms, while the other 71 listed only 72 bad traits.

This distinction appeared more clearly in a "satisfaction grade" which Dr. Hamilton worked out to represent a synthesis of fourteen different questions which asked from one angle or another, for a general estimate of the success of the marriage involved. The highest rating on this basis was 14, registering a favorable answer to every question; the lowest, by contrary, 0. The study included 55 couples, whose answers could be directly compared since in the case of each they represented two estimates of the same situation. Among these the husbands' replies included 380 points on which they found satisfaction; those of the wives, 350.

EVEN the traditional grouch of American men against the propensities of their wives for gold-digging paled beside the corresponding criticism of the women. Eighty-seven men declared their wives "fair, sensible, or generous" in respect to money matters; only 66 women meted out corresponding praise; 4 husbands, but 17 wives, found that the other partner was extravagant, and 9 women declared their husbands stingy, unfair, or selfish. Another question varied this theme a little by asking "Is there friction between you on account of money?" Yes, said 4 men and 22 women, though a majority of each, 83 and 75 respectively, ruled out money as an important source of domestic disharmony by an unequivocal or qualified "no."

The importance of money in domestic life was tested in another way by comparing the "satisfaction" grades of people with the larger and the smaller incomes. For this purpose the subjects of the study were divided into arbitrary groups: all those who reported 10-14 points in satisfaction rated A; from 7-9, B, and so on. The subjects of the study were divided into two almost equal groups with male incomes above and below \$5,000. Of the women whose husbands had the larger incomes, 54 per cent fell in the A-B satisfaction groups, as compared to 36 per cent of those with the smaller incomes. For the men with incomes above and below that level, the percentages were 52 per cent and 50 per cent. "This suggests," Dr. Hamilton commented, "that the marital satisfaction of the men of my study is much less dependent on the size of income than is that of the women."

AND apparently one's husband's money does more to keep a wife happy than does money earned by the wife herself. Fifty-five women were earning nothing at the time of the study; 35 had earned nothing since marriage. Slightly more than 62 per cent of the wives who earned nothing fell in the A-B group, while only 35 per cent of all the other women in the study reached this level of contentment. Similarly 61 per cent of the husbands whose wives earned nothing attained the higher rating in general satisfaction, as compared with 45 per cent of the husbands of wage-earning wives. "Of course this suggests the possibility that wage-earning by wives unfavorably affects the contentment of both spouses," declares Dr. Hamilton, "but alternative explanations must be considered here. A tendency to seek paid occupation outside the home may be symptomatic of an already existing dissatisfaction with the marriage, and such dissatisfaction might be due to a great variety of causes." A further analysis of marital economics showed that the wives who had no definite money allowance, and the husbands who gave none, found marriage appreciably

more satisfactory, on this rating, than did the spouses whose income was definitely allocated. Among the 200 persons of this study, those who had saved money after marriage exhibited greater satisfaction with the marital situation as a whole than was experienced by those who lacked either opportunity or inclination to save, but here again it is impossible to determine which is cart and which is horse.

In a series of questions relating to "love affairs" from kindergarten upward, the sexes showed an almost precisely equal record. The 100 men reported 681; 97 women, 677. A higher percentage of both men and women who had less than 5 love affairs found marriage highly or fairly satisfactory than did those who recalled more than that number. Also the course of married life ran more smoothly for the men and women who had not experienced extra-marital love affairs than for those who had. Among the latter—those who had had them—31 per cent of the men and 27 per cent of the women reached the A-B satisfaction level; of those who had not, 59 and 61 per cent respectively. Here again, the moral is cloudy: Did the interest of these married people in persons outside the marriage bond affect matrimonial success unfavorably, or was such an interest the outcome of a relationship already flawed, the attempt to get elsewhere what marriage failed to provide?

TAKING the figures for merely what they are worth, the statement of the stories of a small group of people who cannot be considered as representative of general experience, it is interesting to notice that there seemed to be no correlation between marital success and the presence or absence of children; that the most successful marriages, according to these self-ratings, seemed to occur when the husband was the same age as the wife or, contrary to popular belief, when he was from one to three years younger (although there was an absolute failure in each of the few marriages in which the wife was the elder by as much as seven years); that the marriages of recent years had about the same proportion of successes and failures as those of the older members of the group; that, in respect to formal education, those who achieved the greatest satisfaction in marriage, both men and women, had not gone to college at all—while the least successful were those who had gone for a time but had not graduated; that relatives in the home, especially mothers-in-law, had quite as devastating an effect as popular tradition accords to them; and that business men and the wives of business men reported matrimonial success in considerably higher proportion than any of the other major vocational groups.

Among these other groups, engineering (11 men, and 12 wives of engineers of various sorts) showed a markedly low rating for both sexes. The one group with a record higher than that of the business group included 7 spouses, 6 men and 1 woman, in which the male partner's vocation was rated as "religious"; all of these attained the A-B satisfaction level. Perhaps, one might speculate, the business men—in general those with the higher incomes and the correlated record of satisfaction for both husband and wife—represented an adaptation to this age and its conditions which might in turn reflect a higher measure of personal integration and vitality.

In this study the elusive quality of personal integration was measured most clearly and objectively, perhaps, in the capacity to attain complete expression and release in sexual experience. That capacity, in turn, seemed to be a highly significant factor in determining (Continued on page 57)

The Adult: His Work

By GEDDES SMITH

IN a recent first novel by a young American (Crude, by Robert Hyde) the twenty-four hours of the day are neatly catalogued:

Life was short, now. It was divided into spaces of eight hours. Out of these three spaces you had to sell one in order to live the other two. Of the two you lived, the first was spent in sleep so you could live the last. The last space was divided into a thousand little demonstrations of life, of what is meant by living.

That is one current concept of a man's work: it is something foreign to life, less a part of living than is sleep.

From T. V. Smith's admirable study of *The Democratic Way of Life*, I borrow another current concept of work:

Work is the omnipresent function of human life. Whatever quality of goodness in life we may particularly seek—whether liberty, equality, fraternity, or some more technical formulation—if the work at which a man earns his living does not contain it, we need not expect its appearance in any leisure that comes when his work-day is done.

Here are two poles between which we must seek some tenable attitude toward work: work is living; work is the irrelevant price we pay for living. The values of life lie in work; the values of life lie outside work. Like most opposites, both these propositions are probably true. But they can be reconciled and understood only in some clearer concept of maturity, for just as play is the distinctive function of childhood, work is the distinctive function of the adult.

It is a curious fact that we think one way about work and, mostly, feel another. Our orators celebrate the dignity of work. Artists fill our public buildings with symbolic figures of toil. We boast of our commercial and engineering achievements. Some of our serious thinkers question the wisdom of the eight-hour day because the ordinary man can't be trusted with leisure: work is his safety-valve and his salvation. Yet frankly, we don't like to work. Our stock-brokers and merchants have a cult of leisure. It is a thin and bloodless cult, and its ritual is sadly stereotyped, but it grows apace. We hang a busy sign on the office door, and study the time-table. We elevate to the dignity of a *de facto* aristocracy those who have accumulated or inherited enough money so that they need not work at all. We give lip-service to work, and hug our leisure.

WHEN a man thinks one way and feels another, contemporary psychology has a very useful suggestion to offer: Dig under the surface. Such inconsistencies usually point to conflicts—stresses and strains set up by opposing impulses—underneath. We want to work, and we want not to work. Why?

I suspect that one important reason for this conflict is that most of us most of the time do not really work at all; *we are worked*. I do not mean merely that we are, in terms of money and time and purpose, exploited, though this whole issue of *The Survey* might well be given to an exploration of the effect of our pyramid-profit system on the worker. Many of us have had the sense of futility that comes in a

job where our life's-blood goes to coin profits for another man's pockets. The situation I am trying to describe is like that, but on a much deeper level of experience. We are worked by forces inside ourselves which we are too immature to control. Because we are not masters of ourselves we are not masters of our work; we whistle to keep our courage up, and turn our backs on it the minute we can.

It is dangerous business, I know, to express an opinion about something that lies below the surface of your neighbor's consciousness. Some of the people who seem to me least aware of their own reasons for doing what they do are loudest in their protestations that they understand themselves down to the ground. There are, however, certain assumptions about human behavior which are so widely supported by clinical evidence and which seem so plausible and natural that even a layman has perhaps the right to use them as premises for the interpretation of what he sees about him.

FREUD, Jung and Watson have all emphasized the enormous importance of what happens to us in infancy and childhood—the experiences and attitudes which taken together make up the typical family situation. Each of us has a father, or some substitute for a father, who gives us the experience of authority or fails to do so, and affects us profoundly in either case. Each of us has a mother, or some substitute for her. Normally we have from the mother protection, security, unasked love. If we receive them we are shaped by them; if not, we are none the less influenced by the lack of them. We have a child, or we catch from others a clue to the experience of having a child, and we form habits of protecting, controlling, or exploiting those weaker than we are. Each of these experiences, for good and sufficient biological reasons, is loaded with emotion. It may well be that these emotions which we begin to feel so early in life are among the most important components of the motive power with which we are, or should be, charged throughout life. For the human animal is rather like a storage-battery: He holds within himself, by gift of racial and individual experience, the energy he works with, and that energy is a matter of emotion far more than of thought.

But a storage-battery may be short-circuited, and when that happens the energy that it holds can't get out and do any work: It turns in upon itself and ultimately destroys itself. This happens to people when the flow of experience is blocked. The emotions have a life-process to go through. There is a time for subservience to the father's authority; there is a time for adolescent rebellion; there comes a time when both subservience and rebellion should be outgrown, when we should seize for ourselves the authority that the father has wielded and symbolized, and become responsible only to ourselves for what we are and do. There is a time for dependence on the mother; there comes a time when dependence on anything that has power to mother us becomes a crippling weakness. There is a time for protecting