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CHAPTER V
ENGAGED

Michigan.

DEAR MRS SANGER

May I confide in you? for I dare not talk to my mother the way I am about to write to you She would not understand

I am engaged to be married in June but dread it as we can hardly control ourselves now what would it be then? Can you help me please?

Is sexual intercourse wicked if children are not wanted? I believe this is one of the worse evils of today Is there anything one can do to prevent it? I don't mean to question God's ways but do you know any help for secret sin

Could you suggest the best book for my purpose? I feel most too bold in sending this letter to you but one must confide in somebody and I thought you could help me if anyone could Why were we made to want to indulge in that only for our own pleasures when children are not wanted Why couldn't sexual intercourse happen only when it was meant to be Is it because of sin?

That's why instead of looking forth with joy to next June I wish the months would drag along until then because it may mar our happiness as I have always looked upon this as a sin.

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EXCHANGE of promises and the assurance of mutual love usher in the period of engagement. These are days of elation, excitement and exaltation. The period of the engagement is one of happy anticipation and joyful preparation.

At the same time it is a period of great danger. Impulses must be controlled by intelligence and foresight. This period leads the lovers one step nearer marriage. It is a period of greater intimacy, greater self-revelation and more thorough knowledge of each other.

The greatest temptation for many engaged couples is to cast aside all discretion, all reticence and actually to assume an attitude of familiarity which is almost identical with that of many married couples, the only reservation being the physical consummation of marriage.

It is true that the custom of the betrothal (or engagement) should permit the suitor and

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the beloved to establish a greater intimacy than that acquired during the period of courtship. But the engagement must never be considered as a sort of trial marriage with one important factor missing.

Dignity, reverence and respect for each other are more essential during this critical period than at any other. For during the engagement the habits of mutual courtesy and thoughtfulness must strike root. If they are not permitted to, through faultfinding or laxity of relations, the subsequent marriage will not be founded on a satisfactory basis and is bound to fail or to sacrifice one or both of the contracting parties to intolerable misery and unhappiness.

Among young girls and young men today there has arisen a free and easy laxity of relationship. Modesty as it was understood in the past century has disappeared. A greater freedom in speech has arisen, a freedom which sometimes degenerates into license. Although they may refrain from going the limit, sexual liberties are indulged in by certain misguided couples.

Quite aside from all considerations of morality, the experience derived from such prac

tices is not great enough to risk the sacrifice of true and enduring love Their price is paid from the treasury of self respect and mutual love

Dignity respect reverence and romance are often destroyed by one false step along the path of physical indulgence Such practices often result in broken engagements and the unhappy humiliation of the girl who has permitted them Even though the engagement continue and marriage ensue she is often reminded of the favors previously given—making for suspicion and jealousy—the healthy reciprocity that should be maintained has been upset and an element of discordant moral weakness has poisoned the romance of betrothal

The greatest danger which lies in wait during the engagement is the destruction of this spirit of romance Intimacy may unconsciously be dragged down to the level of vulgar familiarity Through thoughtlessness and lack of foresight destructive quarreling may be indulged in The man and girl who indulge in quarrels begin to look at each other no longer with the eyes of love but with suspicion jealousy and criticism And what is tempo-

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rarily lost by such a practice is difficult, and often impossible to regain

The girl may begin to doubt the wisdom of her choice. The question arises in her mind 'Do I really love him?' She cannot make up her mind. She is torn between the desire to marry and to have all that her fiance offers and the desire to wait and to hope for someone else. She may be proud of his looks and his love for her. But with continued observation she may be annoyed and irritated by unpleasant or careless habits. She may discover to her dismay that his love for her has not wrought the miracle she had hoped for. His table manners which she had never noticed in the first flush of romance she may now discover to be hurried, awkward and crude. There may be dandruff on his collar and spots on his coat. There may be certain personal habits seemingly unimportant but which are none the less irritating to a fastidious and romantic girl—unclean fingernails, teeth, etc. picking at the teeth, nose or ears, all sorts of unconscious movements or gestures which should never have arisen and which in all events should be immediately corrected. Slight as they may seem they may cause in the girl a secret shame

Because of the tremendous importance of these seemingly unimportant things the suitor should make doubly certain that in every respect he is physically and personally attractive to the girl of his choice

There should be no carelessness in his attire It costs little to be well groomed in body and immaculate in dress Attention to such details aids in making the meetings and the tryst exceptionable and romantic events not mere workaday habits

The engaged man should never lose sight of the fact that all girls are romantic and he should do everything in his power to keep alive the exaltation that comes to woman in love

If however the girl finds herself engaged to a young man negligent in the details mentioned above she should avoid rushing into an immediate marriage Marrying to reform man of disagreeable habits or to teach one's mate the common decencies or the ordinary manners and amenities of life usually ends as a nagging contest developing in the victim a sense of social inferiority that is an endless source of unhappiness and in the other the misery of paying an endless penalty for the mistake of an ill advised marriage

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Most youths in the stage of development go through a series of awkward habits which are soon discarded. There are certain tendencies which are the result of early training and environment which may leave him but which on the other hand may return when he is off guard or if he permits himself to sink into complacent self sufficiency. It is a delicate problem to deal with. If the girl is clever she may cope with this and settle the problem once for all. But the first essential is to win the man's respect and confidence by the power of love never to indulge in tactless and cruel destructive criticism. To help the young man in this fashion through confidence and kindness is often to prove that he has in truth chosen a real helpmate.

One indispensable truth the engaged girl must remember. The fiance's breath odor touch embrace and kiss must be pleasing to her. If they are not if there is an impulsive or instinctive emotional and physical recoil then under no circumstances should the engagement be prolonged. This requires courage and bravery. But do not forget that the life happiness of two persons is at stake.

The intimacies permitted during the engage

ment, the legitimate intimacies of kisses and caresses in the protecting atmosphere of poetic romance, thus fulfil a distinct and all important physiological function—the deepening of desire and the commingling of the spiritual and the physical. The engagement with its growing emotional bond is thus not merely a social convenience—it is the fulfillment of a necessary and vital process. The engagement continues the courting period. It is not the end of it. The bond should be tightened and strengthened—never loosened.

Lovemaking at this time becomes a tender and delicate process. The more exciting uncertainties have temporarily been settled. Responsibilities to one's self as well as to the loved one are increased. This is true particularly for the engaged girl. For while the lover may have too great a respect for the girl ever to reveal the depth and the power of his physical passion, her caresses may arouse him to a pitch beyond the power of his control. Young men have been known to seek relief through prostitutes or self abuse. Here is another danger to be avoided. The girl who has attained a realization of her responsibilities must therefore aim always to keep uppermost

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the spiritual aspect of the relation, so that these trysts are a source of strength and courage and ambition to her fiance instead of a physical indulgence in excitements which can not be satisfied

By the spiritual aspect I do not mean sentimental rubbish. The engaged couple should talk directly on matters bearing on their future communal life and happiness—aims and ambitions—the possibility of having children. They should read together—poetry, novels, books which intensify their sense of the beauty and the greatness of life. Frankness and honesty in matters of sex should not be avoided, nor should the problem of modern marriage be neglected. Both should aim to bring out of the other latent ideas on all subjects.

The engaged girl owes it to herself to ascertain her fiance's convictions concerning marriage. Is he a prude or a hypocrite? Is he woefully unconscious of his responsibilities? Has he gained his knowledge of sex from experience or from chance hearsay? Is his attitude toward women in general reassuring to one who has selected him as her future husband? Is he willing to submit to a health test?

I do not mean that the young woman should indulge in a legal cross examination. But it is perfectly possible for her to find out on various opportunities answers to these questions answers which may teach her much concerning the real nature of her fiance. It is especially important to determine his attitude toward women in general. If it is gallant chivalrous generous and respectful she may congratulate herself on her choice. If on the contrary she discovers that his attitude is cynical thoughtless derogatory domineering or brutal the girl may well break the engagement no matter how enticing and tempting the man's offer may otherwise be. For sooner or later the girl who marries such a man may find herself the victim of this attitude.

With the greater independence which young women have acquired in this century and the greater sense of equality this type of man is gradually disappearing.

The question will inevitably be asked. How long should the engagement continue?

This is a question that depends upon individual circumstance and no general answer can be satisfactory. Nevertheless there are

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certain general truths which appear self-evident

I believe first of all that the day of the long engagement is past. Young people should marry whenever that is possible within a year after the announcement of the engagement. Unless one or the other is unavoidably separated unless the case is exceptional there is no good reason for a longer engagement.

Postponement is usually excused on the ground of financial inability. Experience and observation have shown me that the man who excuses himself as too poor to marry and who is waiting until he has enough is either using this as an excuse or never does reach the point of solving his financial troubles.

A sound and happy marriage with a young woman who is truly a helpmate and shares burdens equally is the greatest aid to an ambitious young man. Instead of complicating them, marriage on this basis helps solve financial difficulties. No young man who is strong and ambitious should let poverty real or supposed, stand in the way of marriage.

I do not advocate hasty, flighty, reckless marriages. Caution and prudence on the

other hand can be carried to the point of disease, killing every fine impulse with delay and procrastination. It is possible to marry and live together on the same incomes necessary for the separate individuals providing a family can be avoided for a few years.

The length of the engagement must be decided by the couple concerned. The culmination in marriage should be from the beginning its true objective.

The day of the wedding should be set far enough in advance to permit adequate preparations and plans for its successful outcome. For both there is excitement and nervous tension without adding the additional confusion of hurry and lack of preparation.

It is not always possible to set the exact day of the month but the month may be chosen and plans made for the general time.

It is advisable that the young woman should when possible set the day taking care to avoid its coincidence with the menstrual period. Excitement, over activity and overwork not infrequently bring about the menstrual flow several days before the regular and normal time. If for instance this date is calculated to fall on May 5th 9th, it would be well to set

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the wedding day between the 15th and the 22nd of May or any time of the intermenstrual period except for one week before the next regular date

If you are as regular as clockwork then you may accurately set the exact date Eight to fourteen days after the beginning of the regular period would be the most advisable time To spare the nerves and the constitution it would be well for the bride-to-be to spend two days in bed at the time of the menstrual period These two or three days of repose away from noise and bustle this respite from callers and telephone and undue excitement will do much to restore poise and to regain the nervous energies often so carelessly expended in social activities during the final days of the engagement

Peace and quiet are more essential to the happy fulfillment of this great event than the ceaseless round of social activities ordinarily indulged in Absence from the fiance at this period is also advisable Such seclusion has a great psychological and physiological benefit that is never regretted The girl is by this step enabled to return with strength and poise regained, her love rejuvenated and freshened

She enters marriage with complete poise and strength, so that the wedding marks the beginning of her new life instead of entering matrimony fatigued, exhausted by excitement and nervous strain