

MALE AND FEMALE

I AM rather enamoured of the current *TIFH* series *Films Hollywood Dare Not Make*. But I feel I am going one better in producing some of the material that I hope some day to shape into one of the Reports Kinsey Dare Not Make. Or rather, perhaps he dares to, but I'm getting in first. I do feel that in an age that concerns itself increasingly with the Emotional Side (I am always going to lectures on The Emotional Aspects of Childbirth, The Emotional Aspects of the Doctor-Patient Relationship; and of course the Emotional Aspects of Hospital Board Management are always well to the fore) it is high time we gave some thought to the emotional problems of the primary school child. I cannot pretend this is an exhaustive study—I'm afraid I'm not the type of parent to whom the children tell *everything*—but herewith some potentially valuable observations on Love Among the Lower Classes.

OF course it's a very touching moment in a woman's life when her daughter first confides to her that she's in love. Susan must have been six at the time, and on the face of it there seemed no serious objections to the business. His name was Denis Woolston, I knew his family, they were the same age and of similar intellectual accomplishment. I was quite prepared to give my blessing. "Would you like to ask him to your party?" I suggested.

Susan blushed. "Oh, no, I couldn't possibly. You see he doesn't know he's my boy-friend. He likes Carol much, much better than me." "Awkward," I agree. Carol is Susan's best friend.

"But, dear," I continue briskly, "you can scarcely call him your boy-friend if he likes Carol much much better."

"Of course he's my boy-friend," says Susan with sad nobility, "because I shall always like him so much better than anybody else."

I squeeze her hand, in gratitude for having bred a child of such sensibility.

Some months later I am dusting the bookshelf when something slips out. It's a note from Timothy, Carol's brother, beginning Darling Susan, and ending, after many assurances of ill-spelt esteem, with the information that a present is enclosed. I show the note to my husband. We are delighted for Susan's sake. There's nothing like another conquest to blunt the fangs of unrequited love. We give it to Susan.

She pounces upon it eagerly, skims through the first part and fastens on the last sentence.

"Where's the present?" she demands accusingly, shaking the note in defiance of the laws of probability.

"Don't look at me in that tone of voice," I say, miffed. "I haven't eaten it."

So cosy, really, what with Carol being Susan's best friend. A double wedding?

The thud of books being thrown from the bookcase brings me back to contemporary events.

by M.B.

"It isn't there," sniffs Susan. "I'm going straight round to that Timothy's and ask him what he's done with My Present."

"Don't you think, dear —," I begin, but realise that any words about Nice Girls would be wasted on one who is pursuing her object with the righteous fervour of a deserted wife intent on her alimony.

She is back in a few moments.

"Tim wasn't in—he's gone to Cubs." (Learning to be a wolf, I wonder?) "But I gave Mrs. Williams the note and she says she'll ask him about it just as soon as ever he comes in. I'm going back to play with Carol."

Sense rather than sensibility, I'm afraid.

An hour later she bursts in, excited. "Tim hasn't got the present any more. He says it was ages ago and he ate it. And he's got another girl-friend now, too. But he's going to buy me some more as soon as he gets his next week's pocket-money."

My egalitarian principles are affronted.

"I don't think you ought to let Tim buy you chocolate out of his pocket-money. You probably get just as much as he does."

(And you'd think any nicely-brought-up girl would have More Pride. It isn't as if they were still—well—.)

Susan is philosophic. "O.K., I'll get him to give me a dub on his bike instead. And you can give us eightpence to get some ice-creams at the store."

"Very well," I say, reaching for my purse. Eightpence is a cheap price to pay to preserve one's daughter from the stigma of being a gold-digger.

YES, I reflect, girls certainly are a worry. Now boys—boys are so much easier. George, though he's nine now, has never given me the slightest anxiety where girls were concerned. He would certainly not be injudicious enough to leave compromising letters in other people's bookcases. But is he, perhaps, a little abnormal in his concentration on male friendships; is there perhaps something too defensive about his constant reiteration that all girls are mad?

But there was, I console myself, Margaret Delahunty.

It was one of those incidents at the family tea-table when Susan was still in the throes of her abortive affair with Denis Woolston. George had made some unkind reference to the business and Susan had retaliated by referring to Margaret Delahunty.

"Well," George had retorted with considerable spirit, "I might do worse. She's very clever and she looks nice and she's a very good cook."



"Hubba hubba Ding Ding" shriek three voices in unison

"How do you know?" I asked, interested.

George maintained an obstinate silence.

"She let him eat her play lunch the time he forgot his," crowed Susan.

I glowed inwardly. Looks, brains, a kind heart; what more could any mother ask for her son?

But somehow it all came to nothing. The competition was perhaps too strong—rather sobering to think of all those eight-year-old boys so definitely knowing a good thing when they saw one—or perhaps George was a little discouraged by the fact that Margaret got five excellents in her report to his none. Men are inclined to be stuffy about female intellectual superiority.

But there was obviously a gap in George's emotional front which needed to be filled. Next time I attended an At Home at the School I decided to look over the field.

A plump motherly little girl immediately attached herself to me.

"Are you George Botthamley's mother?" she asked, awed.

"Yes," I admit.

She snuggles up to me.

"Mr. Weldon says George is one of our best workers," she confides.

"Well, isn't that nice," I purr.

"Of course he's a bit dreamy, Mr. Weldon says."

"Indeed," I bridle.

"And he bites his nails. But then we all have our little habits, Mr. Weldon says."

I look at her suspiciously. Can it be Mr. Weldon she's holding a torch for? But no, her eyes follow George round the room in a most satisfactory fashion.

When I get home I ask George about her. "Who is that nice motherly little girl with the fair plaits? She seems so interested in you."

"Motherly, that Felicity Fairburn? Bossy, you mean. Jeepers! And what's more she's a Thief. She went and pinched my ruler and my rubber."

"Perhaps she wanted to sleep with them under her pillow."

"What?" says George.

"Nothing," I say.

"Jeepers!" says George.

Next time I meet Felicity it's in the holidays, at the Zoo. George disappears over the horizon.

"Haven't you got George with you?" asks Felicity, balked.

"He was here a moment ago," I apologise. "Perhaps he's gone to see the lions."

"Come on, Deborah, we're going to see the lions," orders Felicity, and sets off at a brisk pant dragging her young sister at her chariot wheels, without noticing her wail that they've seen the lions twice already.

Perhaps a little on the managing side, I reflect, but her heart's in the right place.

WHEN little Jimmy starts school I have no worries that his schooldays many be marred by that distrust of the opposite sex which has perhaps prevented George from getting the most out of co-education. But sex antagonism rears its ugly head the very second day. It's raining, and I try to put him into Susan's outgrown raincoat, an impeccably male garment that used to be George's.

"I don't wear girls' coats," he snarls.

"But it's a boy's coat," I plead, demonstrating that it buttons on the correct side.

"It's a mad old girl's coat!" he shrieks, and eventually sets off sweltering happily in his tweed.

Apart from this he settles in well, looked after lovingly by the little girl next door, an attractive blue-eyed blonde who tells us she's going to marry Jimmy when she grows up.

Susan hides the dismay she undoubtedly feels on Prue's behalf.

"But I thought Robert Stevens was your boy-friend," she comments.

Prudence tosses her curls.

"He used to be but I don't like him any more. He's rough. He kicks."

"Who, you?" asks Susan, intrigued.

"No, just things. Stones and dogs."

"Jimmy bites," contributes Mary, our three-year-old. "People."

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