



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

“MARRIAGES ARE MADE IN HEAVEN.”

“The Omnipresent,” said a Rabbi, “is occupied in making marriages.” The levity of the saying lies in the ear of him who hears it; for by marriages, the speaker meant all the wondrous combinations of the universe, whose issue makes our good and evil.

GEORGE ELIOT.

THE proverb that I have set at the head of these lines is popular in every language of Europe. Need I add that a variant may be found in Chinese? The Old Man of the Moon unites male and female with a silken, invisible thread, and they cannot afterwards be separated, but are destined to become man and wife. The remark of a Rabbi, quoted in *Daniel Deronda*, carries the proverb back apparently to a Jewish origin; and it is indeed more than probable that the Rabbinical literature is the earliest source to which this piece of folk-philosophy can be traced.

George Eliot's Rabbi was José bar Chalafta, and his remark was made to a lady, possibly a Roman matron of high quality, in Sepphoris. Rabbi José was evidently an adept in meeting the puzzling questions of women, for as many as sixteen interviews between him and “matrons” are recorded in Agadic literature. Whether because prophetic of its subsequent popularity, or for some other reason, this particular dialogue in which Rabbi José bore so conspicuous a part is repeated in the Midrash Rabbah alone not less than four times, besides appearing in other Midrashim. It will be as well then to reproduce the passage in a summarised form, for it may be fairly described as the *locus classicus* on the subject.

“How long,” she asked, “did it take God to create the world?” and Rabbi José informed her that the time occupied was six days. “What has God been doing since that time?” continued the matron. “The Holy One,” answered the Rabbi, “has been sitting in heaven arranging marriages.” “Indeed!” she replied, “I also could do as much myself. I have thousands of slaves, and could marry them off in couples in a single hour. It is easy enough.” “I hope that you will find it so,” said Rabbi José; “in heaven it is thought as difficult as the dividing of the Red Sea.” He then took his departure, while

she assembled one thousand men-servants and as many maid-servants, and, marking them off in pairs, ordered them all to marry. On the day following this wholesale wedding, the poor victims came to their mistress in a woeful plight. One had a broken leg, another a black eye, a third a swollen nose ; all were suffering from different ailments, but with one voice they joined in the cry, “Lady, unmarry us again!” Then the matron sent for Rabbi José, admitted that she had underrated the delicacy and difficulty of match-making, and wisely resolved to leave heaven for the future to do its own work in its own way.

The moral conveyed by this story may seem, however, to have been idealised by George Eliot almost out of recognition. This is hardly the case. Genius penetrates into the heart, even from a casual glance at the face of things. Though it is unlikely that she had ever seen the full passages in the Midrash to which she was alluding, yet her insight was not at fault. For the saying that God is occupied in making marriages, is, in fact, associated in some passages of the Midrash with the far wider problems of man’s destiny, with the universal effort to explain the inequalities of fortune and the changes with which the future is heavy.

Rabbi José’s proverbial explanation of connubial happiness was not merely a *bon mot* invented on the spur of the moment to silence an awkward questioner. It was a firm conviction, which finds expression in more than one quaint utterance, but also in more than one matter-of-fact assertion. To take the latter first, “Rabbi Phineas in the name of R. Abbahu said, We find in the Torah, in the Prophets, and in the Holy Writings, evidence that a man’s wife is chosen for him by the Holy One, blessed be he. Whence do we deduce it in the Torah? From Genesis xxiv. 50: *Then Laban and Bethuel answered and said* (in reference to Rebecca’s betrothal to Isaac): *The thing proceedeth from the Lord.* In the Prophets it is found in Judges xiv. 4 (where it is related how Samson wished to mate himself with a woman in Timnath, of the daughters of the Philistines): *But his father and mother knew not that it was of the Lord.* In the Holy Writings the same may be seen, for it is written (Proverbs xix. 14): *House and riches are the inheritance of fathers, but a prudent wife is from the Lord.*” Many years ago, a discussion was carried on in the columns of *Notes and Queries* concerning the origin of the saying round which my present desultory jottings are centred. One correspondent, with unconscious plagiarism, suggested that the maxim was derived from Proverbs xix. 14.

Here we may, for a moment, pause to consider whether any

parallels exist in other ancient literatures to the belief in heaven-made marriages. It appears in English as early as Shakespeare—

God, the best maker of all marriages,
Combine your hearts in one. HENRY V., v. 2.

This, however, is too late to throw any light on its origin. With a little ingenuity one might, perhaps, torture some such notion out of certain fantastic sentences of Plato. In the *Symposium*, however (§ 192), God is rather represented as putting obstacles in the way of the union of fitting lovers, in consequence of the wickedness of mankind. When men become, by their conduct, reconciled with God, they may find their true loves. Astrological divinations on the subject are certainly common enough in Eastern stories; a remarkable instance will be given a little later on. At the present day, Lane tells us, the numerical values of the letters composing the names of the two parties to the marriage-contract are added separately, and one of the totals is subtracted from the other. If the remainder is uneven, the inference drawn is favourable; but if even, the reverse. The pursuit of *Gematria* is apparently not limited to Jews. Such methods, however, hardly illustrate my present point, for the identity of the couple is not discovered by the process. Whether the diviner's object is to make this discovery, or the future lot of the married pair is all that he seeks to reveal, in both cases, though he charm never so wisely, it does not fall within the scope of this inquiry. Without stretching one's imagination too much, some passages in the *Panchatantra* seem to imply a belief that marriage-making is under the direct control of Providence. Take, for instance, the story of the beautiful princess, who was betrothed to a serpent, Deva Serma's son. Despite the vigorous attempts made to induce her to break off so hideous a match, she steadfastly declines to go back from her word, and bases her refusal on the ground that the marriage is inevitable and destined by the gods.

As quaint illustrations may be instanced the following: "Raba heard a certain man praying that he might marry a certain damsel; Raba rebuked him with the words: 'If she be destined for thee, nothing will part thee from her; if thou art not destined for her, thou art denying Providence in praying for her.' Afterwards Raba heard him saying: 'If I am not destined to marry her, I hope that either I or she may die,'" meaning that he could not bear to witness her union with another. Despite Raba's protest, other instances are on record of prayers similar to the one of which he disapproved.

Or again, the Midrash offers a curious illustration of Psalm lxii. 10: “Surely men of low degree are a breath, and men of high degree a lie.” The first clause of the verse alludes to those who say in the usual way of the world, that a certain man is about to wed a certain maiden, and the second clause to those who say that a certain maiden is about to wed a certain man. In both cases people are in error in thinking that the various parties are acting entirely of their own free-will, while as a matter of fact the whole affair is predestined. I am not quite certain whether the same idea is intended by the *Yalkut Reubeni*, in which the following occurs:—“Know that all religious and pious men in this, our generation are hen-pecked by their wives, the reason being connected with the mystery of the Golden Calf. The men on that occasion did not protest against the action of the mixed multitude (at whose door the charge of making the calf is laid), while the women were unwilling to surrender their golden ornaments for idolatrous purposes. Therefore they rule over their husbands.” One might also quote the bearing of the mystical theory of transmigration on the predestination of bridal pairs. In the Talmud, on the other hand, the virtues of a man’s wife are sometimes said to be in proportion to the husband’s own; or in other words, his own righteousness is the cause of his acquiring a good wife. The obvious objection, raised by the Talmud itself, is that a man’s merits can hardly be displayed before his birth—and yet his bride is destined for him at that early period.

Yet more quaint (I should perhaps rather term it consistent, were not consistency rare enough to be indistinguishable from quaintness) was the confident belief of a maiden of whom mention is made in the *Sefer ha-Chassidim* (§ 384). She refused persistently to deck her person with ornaments. People said to her: “If you go about thus unadorned, no one will notice you nor court you.” She replied with firm simplicity: “It is the Holy One, blessed be he, that settles marriages; I need have no concern on the point myself.” Virtue was duly rewarded, for she married a learned and pious husband. This mention of the “Book of the Pious” reminds me of the circumstance under which the originator of the latter-day Chassidism, Israel Baalshem, is said to have married. When he was offered the daughter of a rich and learned man of Brody named Abraham, he readily accepted the alliance, because he knew that “Abraham’s daughter” was his bride destined by heaven. For like Moses Mendelssohn, in some other respects the antagonist of the Chassidim, Baalshem accepted the declaration of Rabbi Judah in the

name of Rav : "Forty days before the creation of the child, a proclamation (בר-יקול) is made in heaven, saying: The daughter of such a one shall marry such and such a one."

I will close with an Agadic story, in which the force of this predestination is shown to be too strong even for royal opposition. It does not follow that the pre-arrangement of marriages implies that the pair cannot fall in love of their own accord. On the contrary, just the right two eventually come together; for once, free-will and destiny need present no incompatibility. The combination, here shadowed, of a predestined and yet true-love marriage, is effectively illustrated in what follows:

"Solomon the King was blessed with a very beautiful daughter, who was the fairest maiden in the whole land of Israel. Her father observed the stars so as to discover by astrology who was destined to be her mate in life and to wed her: when lo! he saw that his future son-in-law would be the poorest man in the nation. Now, what did Solomon do? He built a high tower by the sea and surrounded it on all sides with inaccessible walls; he then took his daughter and placed her in the tower under the charge of seventy aged guardians. He supplied the Castle with provisions, but he had no door made in it, so that none could enter the fortress without the knowledge of the guard. Then the king said: I will watch in what way God will work the matter.

"In course of time a poor and weary traveller was walking on his way by night, his garments were ragged and torn, he was bare-footed and ready to faint with hunger, cold, and fatigue. He knew not where to sleep, but on casting his eyes around him he beheld the skeleton of an ox lying on a field hard by. The youth crept inside the skeleton to shelter himself from the wind, and while he slept there, down swooped a great bird, which lifted up the carcass and the unconscious youth in it. The bird flew with its burden to the top of Solomon's tower, and set it down on the roof before the very door of the imprisoned princess. She went forth on the morrow to walk on the roof according to her daily wont, and she descried the youth. She said to him, 'Who art thou? and who brought thee hither?' He answered, 'I am a Jew of Acco, and a bird bore me to thee.' The kind-hearted maiden clothed him in new garments; they bathed and anointed him, and she saw that he was the handsomest youth in Israel. They loved one another, and his soul was bound up in hers. He was ingenious and witty; and one day she said, 'Wilt thou marry me?' He replied, 'Would it might be so!' They resolved to marry. But there was no ink

with which to write the *Kethubah*, or marriage certificate. Love laughs at obstacles. So, using some drops of his own blood as ink, the marriage was secretly solemnised, and he said, ‘God is my witness to-day, and Michael and Gabriel likewise.’ When the matter leaked out, the dismayed custodians of the princess hastily summoned Solomon. The king at once obeyed their call, and asked for the presumptuous youth. He looked at his son-in-law, enquired of him as to his father and mother, family and dwelling-place, and from his replies the king recognised him for the self-same man whom he had seen in the stars as the destined husband of his daughter. Then Solomon rejoiced with exceeding joy and exclaimed: Blessed is the Omnipresent who giveth a wife to man and establisheth him in his house.” The moral of which seems to be that though marriages are made in heaven, love must be made on earth.

I. ABRAHAMS.

NOTE.

The chief passages to which the reader is referred are: *Midrash Rabbah*, Genesis § 68, Leviticus § 29, Numbers §§ 3 and 22; *Midrash Tanchuma* to the portions *כי תשא*, *מטות* and *וישלח*; *Midrash Samuel*, Ch. v.; Talmud, *Moed Katon*, 18b, and *Sotah*, 2a.—Dr. Bacher’s latest work *Die Agada der Tannaiten*, II. (1890), contains on pages 168-170 important notes on some of these passages.—I have freely translated the story of Solomon’s Daughter from Buber’s edition of the *Tanchuma*, Introduction, page 136. It is clearly compounded from several stories too familiar to call for the quotation of parallels. With one of the incidents may be compared the device of Sindbad in his second voyage. He binds himself to one of the feet of the rukh (*i.e.* the condor or the bearded vulture); and in another adventure, he attaches himself to the carcass of a slaughtered animal, and is borne aloft by a vulture. A similar incident may be noted in the *Pseudo Ben Sira* (ed. Steinschneider, page 5). Compare Gubernatis, *Zool. Myth.*, II. 94. The fabulous *anka*, too, was banished by God as punishment for carrying off a bride.
