

Marriage: past, present and ...?

With marriage rates being the lowest since the end of the 19th century, we decided to interview an ordinary married couple on the topics of love and marriage. This is what we found out.

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Article history

“Come on in,” beckons us Mrs. Bennet, 44, a rather discontented-looking woman. She tells us she has been nervous ever since we called her and asked if she and her husband would like to answer some questions on marriage. We wanted them both to come round to our office. However, Mrs. Bennet said that, unfortunately, her husband saw ‘no occasion for that’. So we are here.

Tea and biscuits await our arrival, which cannot be said about our host’s husband. Mr. Bennet, 48, is sitting in an armchair in front of the fireplace, reading a book. “It is a truth universally acknowledged,” he starts reading aloud as we come in, “that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.” He winces in disgust. “Why won’t they ask a wealthy single man what he thinks about that?” “Anything wrong, dear?” Mrs Bennet joins us in the living room. “It was me who gave him that book to read, see,” she explains, “thought it would put him in the mood.” Mr. Bennet looks at his wife in amazement. “How would you know, my darling, if you have never read it?”

Married with five children for 23 years, Mr. and Mrs. Bennet seem to be perfect candidates to help us address the topical issue of the future of marriage. Mrs. Bennet starts with her past though. She got married when she was still in her teens. “One couldn’t wish for more at that time,” she explains. When Mr. Bennet married, “economy,” he says, “was held to be perfectly useless, for, of course, they were to have a son.” Five daughters later he admits he became desperate.

We ask Mrs. Bennet to comment on low marriage rates and the interference of politicians into this once private social institution. However, being a woman of “little information and uncertain temper,” as her husband describes her, she goes on talking about her daughters and their new neighbour, Mr. Bingley. “A very handsome and wealthy young man. That’s what Mrs. Long told me. What a fine thing for our girls!” Mr. Bennet takes another biscuit. “And how can it affect them, I wonder?” he says, munching. “Don’t be silly, my dear Mr. Bennet!” his wife cries, “I am thinking of him marrying one of them.” We finally get back on track.

“I’ve asked Mr. Bennet to go and meet Mr. Bingley several times now, but he is relentless,” sobs Mrs. Bennet, “even made a cake for him and all.” “Why would I want to go?” Mr. Bennett is relentless indeed, “Nowadays, girls just add him on Facebook and that’s it. Anyway, you can go and see him yourself if you want. You are still as handsome as any of our daughters.” “Oh, you’re just saying that,” she kisses him on the forehead.

It seems that they both forgot about us. We still have a lot of questions to ask, but we have to leave. We are not sure about the present state of marriage, yet we hope that this couple still has a future.