Let me make myself understood on two points, now, so that when discussion arises later, words may not be wasted in considering things not in question:

First — How shall we measure doing well or doing ill;
Second — What I mean by marriage.

So much as I have been able to put together the pieces of the universe in my small head, there is no absolute right or wrong; there is only a relativity, depending on the consciously though very slowly altering condition of a social race in respect to the rest of the world. Right and wrong are social conceptions: mind, I do not say human conceptions. The names “right” and “wrong,” truly, are of human invention only; but the conception “right” and “wrong,” dimly or clearly, has been wrought out with more or less effectiveness by all intelligent social beings. And the definition of Right, as sealed and approved by the successful conduct of social beings, is: That mode of behavior which best serves the growing need of that society.

As to what that need is, certainly it has been in the past, and for the most part indicated by the unconscious response of the structure (social or individual) to the pressure of its environment. Up till a few years since I believed with Huxley, Von
Hartman, and my teacher Lum, that it was wholly so deter-
mined; that consciousness might discern, and obey or oppose,
but had no voice in deciding the course of social development:
if it decided to oppose, it did so to its own ruin, not to the mod-
ification of the unconsciously determined ideal.

Of late years I have been approaching the conclusion that
consciousness has a continuously increasing part in the deci-
sion of social problems; that while it is a minor voice, and must
be for a long time to come, it is, nevertheless, the dawning
power which threatens to overhurl old processes and old laws,
and supplant them by other powers and other ideals. I know no
more fascinating speculation than this, of the role of conscious-
ness in present and future evolution. However, it is not our
present speculation. I speak of it only because in determining
what constitutes well-being at present, I shall maintain that the
old ideal has been considerably modified by unconscious reac-
tion against the superfluities produced by unconscious striving
towards a certain end.

The question now becomes: What is the growing ideal of hu-
man society, unconsciously indicated and unconsciously dis-
cerned and illuminated?

By all the readings of progress, this indication appears to be
the free individual; a society whose economic, political, social
and sexual organization shall secure and constantly increase
the scope of being to its several units; whose solidarity and con-
tinuity depend upon the free attraction of its component parts,
and in no wise upon compulsory forms. Unless we are agreed
that this is the discernable goal of our present social striving,
there is no hope that we shall agree in the rest of the argument.
For it would be vastly easy to prove that if the maintenance of
the old divisions of society into classes, each with specialized
services to perform — the priesthood, the military, the wage
earner, the capitalist, the domestic servant, the breeder, etc. —
is in accord with the growing force of society, then marriage is
the thing, and they who marry do well.
the guidance of intentional or actual parents have as yet been worked out. Therefore, I see no reason why the rest of life should be sacrificed to an uncertainty.

That love and respect may last, I would have unions rare and impermanent. That life may grow, I would have men and women remain separate personalities. Have no common possessions with your lover more than you might freely have with one not your lover. Because I believe that marriage stales love, brings respect into contempt, outrages all the privacies and limits the growth of both parties, I believe that “they who marry do ill.”

But this is the point at which I stand, and from which I shall measure well and ill-doing; viz.: that the aim of social striving now is the free individual, implying all the conditions necessary to that freedom.

Now the second thing: What shall we understand as marriage?

Some fifteen or eighteen years ago, when I had not been out of the convent long enough to forget its teachings, nor lived and experienced enough to work out my own definitions, I considered that marriage was “a sacrament of the Church” or it was “civil ceremony performed by the State,” by which a man and a woman were united for life, or until the divorce court separated them. With all the energy of a neophyte freethinker, I attacked religious marriage as an unwarranted interference on the part of the priest with the affairs of individuals, condemned the “until death do us part” promise as one of the immoralities which made a person a slave through all his future to his present feelings, and urged the miserable vulgarity of both the religious and civil ceremony, by which the intimate personal relations of two individuals are made topic of comment and jest by the public.

By all this I still hold. Nothing is more disgustingly vulgar to me than the so-called sacrament of marriage; outraging of all delicacy in the trumpeting of private matters in the general ear. Need I recall, for example, the unprinted and unprintable floating literature concerning the marriage of Alice Roosevelt, when the so-called “American princess” was targeted by every lewd jester in the country, because, forsooth, the whole world had to be informed of her forthcoming union with Mr. Longworth! But it is neither the religious nor the civil ceremony that I refer to now, when I say that “those who marry do ill.” The ceremony is only a form, a ghost, a meatless shell. By marriage I mean the real thing, the permanent relation of a man and a woman, sexual and economical, whereby the present home and family life is maintained. It is of no importance to me whether
this is a polygamous, polyandric or monogamous marriage, nor
whether it is blessed by a priest, permitted by a magistrate, con-
tracted publicly or privately, or not contracted at all. It is the
permanent dependent relationship which, I affirm, is detrimen-
tal to the growth of individual character, and to which I am un-
equivocally opposed. Now my opponents know where to find
me.

In the old days to which I have alluded, I contended, warmly
and sincerely, for the exclusive union of one man and one
woman as long as they were held together by love, and for the
dissolution of the arrangement upon the desire of either. We
talked in those days most enthusiastically about the bond of
love, and it only. Nowadays I would say that I prefer to see
a marriage based purely on business considerations, than a
marriage based on love. That is not because I am in the least
concerned with the success of the marriage, but because I am
concerned with the success of love. And I believe that the
easiest, surest and most applicable method of killing love is
marriage — marriage as I have defined it. I believe that the only
way to preserve love in anything like the ecstatic condition
which renders it worthy of a distinctive name — otherwise it is
either lust or simply friendship — is to maintain the distances.
Never allow love to be vulgarized by the indecencies of con-
tinuous close communion. Better to be in familiar contempt of
your enemy than the one you love.

I presume that some who are unacquainted with my oppo-
sition to legal and social forms, are ready to exclaim: “Do you
want to do away with the relation of the sexes altogether, and
cover the earth with monks and nuns?” By no means. While I
am not over and above anxious about the repopulation of the
earth, and should not shed any tears if I knew that the last
man had already been born, I am not advocating sexual total
abstinence. If the advocates of marriage had merely to prove
the case against complete sexual abstinence, their task would
be easy. The statistics of insanity, and in general all manner
after long hesitation, struggle, and grievous, grievous pain, can
the wrench of separation come. Oftener it does not come at all.

A chapter from the lives of two men recently deceased will
illustrate my meaning. Ernest Crosby, wedded, and I assume
happily, to a lady of conservative thought and feeling, him-
self the conservative, came into his soul’s own at the age of
thirty-eight, while occupying the position of Judge of the In-
ternational Court at Cairo. From then on, the whole radical
world knows Ernest Crosby’s work. Yet what a position was
his compelled by honor to continue the functions of a social
life which he disliked! To quote the words of his friend, Leonard
Abbot, “a prisoner in his palatial home, waited on by servants
and lackeys. Yet to the end he remained enslaved by his posses-
sions.” Had Crosby not been bound, had not union and family
relations with one who holds very different views of life in
faith and honor held him, should we not have had a different
life-sum? Like his great teacher, Tolstoy, likewise made absurd,
his life contradicted by his works, because of his union with a
woman who has not developed along parallel lines.

The second case, Hugh O. Pentecost. From the year 1887
on, whatever were his special tendencies, Pentecost was in
the main a sympathizer with the struggle of labor, an opposer
of oppression, persecution and prosecution in all forms. Yet
through the influence of his family relations, because he felt in
honor bound to provide greater material comfort and a better
standing in society than the position of a radical speaker could
give, he consented at one time to be the puppet of those he had
most strenuously condemned, to become a district attorney, a
prosecutor. And worse than that, to paint himself as a misled
baby for having done the best act of his life, to protest against
the execution of the Chicago Anarchists. That this influence
was brought to bear upon him, I know from his own lips; a
repetition, in a small way, of the treason of Benedict Arnold,
who for his Tory wife’s sake laid everlasting infamy upon
himself. I do not say there was no self-excusing in this, no
of aberrations, would alone constitute a big item in the charge.
No: I do not believe that the highest human being is the un-
sexed one, or the one who extirpates his passions by violence,
whether religious or scientific violence. I would have people
regard all their normal instincts in a normal way, neither glut-
tonizing nor starving them, neither exalting them beyond their
true service nor denouncing them as the servitors of evil, both
of which mankind are wont to do in considering the sexual
passion. In short, I would have men and women so arrange
their lives that they shall always, at all times, be free beings
in this regard as in all others. The limit of abstinence or indul-
gence can be fixed by the individual alone, what is normal for
one being excess for another, and what is excess at one period
of life being normal at another. And as to the effects of such
normal gratification of such normal appetite upon population,
I would have them conscientiously controlled, as they can be,
are to some extent now, and will be more and more through the
progress of knowledge. The birth rate of France and of native-
born Americans gives evidence of such conscious control.

“But,” say the advocates of marriage, “what is there in mar-
iage to interfere with the free development of the individual?
What does the free development of the individual mean, if
not the expression of manhood and womanhood? And what
is more essential to either than parentage and the rearing of
young? And is not the fact that the latter requires a period
of from fifteen to twenty years, the essential need which
determines the permanent home?” It is the scientific advocate
of marriage that talks this way. The religious man bases his
talk on the will of God, or some other such metaphysical
matter. I do not concern myself with him; I concern myself
only those who contend that as Man is the latest link in
evolution, the same racial necessities which determine the
social and sexual relations of allied races will be found shaping
and determining these relations in Man; and that, as we find
among the higher animals that the period of rearing the young
to the point of caring for themselves usually determines the period of conjugality, it must be concluded that the greater attainments of Man, which have so greatly lengthened the educational period of youth, must likewise have fixed the permanent family relation as the ideal condition for humanity. This is but the conscious extension of what unconsciousness, or perhaps semi-conscious adaptation, had already determined for the higher animals, and in savage races to an extent. If people are reasonable, sensible, self-controlled (as to other people they will keep themselves anyway, no matter how things are arranged), does not the marriage state secure this great fundamental purpose of the primal social function, which is at the same time an imperative demand of individual development, better than any other arrangement? With all its failures, is it not the best that has been tried, or with our present light has been conceived?

In endeavoring to prove the opposite of this contention, I shall not go to the failures to prove my point. It is not my purpose to show that a vast number of marriages do not succeed; the divorce court records do that. But as one swallow doesn’t make a summer, nor a flock of swallows either, so divorces do not in themselves prove that marriage in itself is a bad thing, only that a goodly number of individuals make mistakes. This is, indeed, an unanswerable argument against the indissolubility of marriage, but not against marriage itself. I will go to the successful marriages — the marriages in which whatever the friction, man and wife have spent a great deal of agreeable time together; in which the family has been provided for by honest work decently paid (as the wage-system goes), of the father, and preserved within the home by the saving labor and attention of the mother; the children given a reasonable education and started in life on their own account, and the old folks left to finish up life together, each resting secure in the knowledge that he has a tried friend until death severs the bond. This, I conceive, is the best form that marriage can present, and I opine

ence. Then irritations begin. The familiarities of life in common breed contempt. What was once a rare joy becomes a matter of course, and loses all its delicacy. Very often it becomes a physical torture to one (usually the woman), while it still retains some pleasure to the other, for the reason that bodies, like souls, do most seldom, almost never, parallel each other’s development. And this lack of parallelism is the greatest argument to be produced against marriage. No matter how perfectly adapted to each other two people may be at any given time, it is not the slightest evidence that they will continue to be so. And no period of life is more deceptive as to what future development may be than the age I have just been speaking of, the age when physical desires and attractions being strongest, they obscure or hold in abeyance the other elements of being.

The terrible tragedies of sexual antipathy, mostly for shame’s sake, will never be revealed. But they have filled the Earth with murder. And even in those homes where harmony has been maintained, and all is apparently peaceful, it is mainly so through the resignation and self-suppression of either the man or the woman. One has consented to be largely effaced, for the preservation of the family and social respect.

But awful as these things are, these physical degradations, they are not so terrible as the ruined souls. When the period of physical predominance is past, and soul-tendencies begin more and more strongly to assert themselves, how dreadful is the recognition that one is bound by common parentage to one to remain in the constant company of one from whom one finds oneself going farther and farther away in thought every day. — “Not a day,” exclaim the advocates of “free unions.” I find such exclamation worse folly than the talk of “holy matrimony” believers. The bonds are there, the bonds of life in common, the love of the home built by joint labor, the habit of association and dependence; they are very real chains, binding both, and not to be thrown off lightly. Not in a day or a month, but only
tion, as it is to any other condition which produces like results. In choosing one's economic position in society, one should always bear in mind that it should be such as should leave the individual uncrippled — an all-round person, with both productive and preservative capacities, a being pivoted within.

Concerning the sexual appetite, irrespective of reproduction, the advocates of marriage claim, and with some reason, that it tends to preserve normal appetite and satisfaction, and is both a physical and moral safeguard against excesses, with their attendant results, disease. That it does not do so entirely, we have ample and painful proof continuously before our eyes. As to what it may accomplish, it is almost impossible to find out the truth; for religious asceticism has so built the feeling of shame into the human mind, on the subject of sex, that the first instinct, when it is brought under discussion, seems to be to lie about it. This is especially the case with women. The majority of women usually wish to create the impression that they are devoid of sexual desires, and think they have paid the highest compliment to themselves when they say, "Personally, I am very cold; I have never experienced such an attraction." Sometimes this is true, but oftener it is a lie - a lie born of centuries of the pernicious teachings of the Church. A roundly developed person will understand that she pays no honor to herself by denying herself fullness of being, whether to herself or of herself; though, without doubt, where such a deficiency really exists, it may give room for an extra growth of some other qualities, perhaps of higher value. In general, however, notwithstanding women's lies, there is no such deficiency. In general, young, healthy beings of both sexes desire such relations. What then? Is marriage the best answer to the need? Suppose they marry, say at twenty years, or thereabouts, which will be admitted as the time when sexual appetite is most active; the consequence is (I am just now leaving children out of account) that the two are thrown too much and too constantly in contact, and speedily exhaust the delight of each other's presence.

And to the first great point — the point that physical parentage is one of the fundamental necessities of self-expression: here, I think, is where the factor of consciousness is in process of overturning the methods of life. Life, working unconsciously, blindly sought to preserve itself by generation, by manifold generation. The mind is simply staggered by the productivity of a single stalk of wheat, or of a fish, or of a queen bee, or of a man. One is smitten the appalling waste of generative effort; numbed with helpless pity for the little things, the infinitude of little lives, that must come forth and suffer and die of starvation, of exposure, as a prey to other creatures, and all to no end but that out of the multitude a few may survive and continue the type! Man, at war with nature and not yet master of the situation, obeyed the same instinct, and by prolific parentage maintained his war. To the Hebrew patriarch as to the American pioneer, a large family meant strength, the wealth of brawn and sinew to continue the conquest of forest and field. It was the only resource against annihilation. Therefore, the instinct towards physical creation was one of the most imperative determinants of action.

Now the law of all instinct is, that it survives long after the necessity which created it has ceased to exist, and acts mischievously. The usual method of reckoning with such a survival since such and such a thing exists, it is an essential part of the structure, not obliged to account for itself and bound to be gratified. I am perfectly certain, however, that the more conscious consciousness becomes, or in other words, the more we become aware of the conditions of life and our relations therein, their new demands and the best way of fulfilling them, the more speedily will instincts no longer demanded be dissolved from the structure.
How stands the war upon nature now? Why, so — that short of a planetary catastrophe, we are certain of the conquest? Consciousness! The alert brain! The dominant will! Invention, discovery, mastery of hidden forces. We are no longer compelled to use the blind method of limitless propagation to equip the race with hunters and trappers and fishers and sheep-keepers and soil-tillers and breeders. Therefore, the original necessity which gave rise to the instinct of prolific parentage is gone; the instinct itself is bound to die, and is dying, but will die faster as men grasp more and more of the whole situation. In proportion as the parenthood of the brain becomes more and more prolific, as ideas spread, multiply, and conquer, the necessity for great physical production declines. This is my first contention. Hence the development of individuality does no longer necessarily imply numerous children, nor indeed, necessarily any children at all. That is not to say that no one will want children, nor to prophecy race suicide. It is simply to say that there will be fewer born, with better chances of surviving, developing, and achieving. Indeed, with all its clash of tendencies, the consciousness of our present society is having this driven home to it.

Supposing that the majority will still desire, or let me go further and say do still desire, this limited parentage, the question now becomes: Is this the overshadowing need in the development of the individual, or are there other needs equally imperative? If there are other needs equally imperative, must not these be taken equally into account in deciding the best manner of conducting one’s life? If there are not other needs equally imperative, is it not still an open question whether the married state is the best means of securing it? In answering these questions, I think it will again be safe to separate into a majority and a minority. There will be a minority to whom the rearing of children will be the great dominant necessity of their being, and a majority to whom this will be one of their necessities. Now what are the other necessities? The other physical and mental appetites! The desire for food and raiment and housing after the individual’s own taste; the desire for sexual association, not for reproduction; the artistic desires; the desire to know, with its thousand ramifications, which may carry the soul from the depths of the concrete to the heights of the abstract; the desire to do, that is, to imprint one’s will upon the social structure, whether as a mechanical contriver, a force harnesser, a combiner, a dream translator, — whatever may be the particular mode of the personal organization.

The desire for food, shelter, and raiment, it should at all times lie within the individual’s power to furnish for himself. But the method of home-keeping is such that after the relation has been maintained for a few years, the interdependence of one on the other has become so great that each is somewhat helpless when circumstance destroys the combination, the man less so, the woman wretchedly so. She has done one thing in a secluded sphere, and while she may have learned to do that thing well (which is not certain, the method of training is not at all satisfactory), it is not a thing which has equipped her with the confidence necessary to go about making an independent living. She is timid above all, incompetent to deal with the conditions of struggle. The world of production has swept past her; she knows nothing of it. On the other hand, what sort of an occupation is it for her to take domestic service under some other woman’s rule? The conditions and pay of domestic service are such that every independent spirit would prefer to slave in a factory, where at least the slavery ends with the working hours. As for men, only a few days since a staunch free unionist told me, apparently without shame, that were it not for his wife he would be a tramp and a drunkard, simply because he is unable to keep a home; and in his eyes the chief merit of the arrangement is that his stomach is properly cared for. This is a degree of helplessness which I should have thought he would have shrunk from admitting, but is nevertheless probably true. Now this is one of the greatest objections to the married condi-