



SCIENTISTS SAY:

Not This—

But This

PSYCHOLOGY—SOCIOLOGY

# Would the World Be Better If the Women Proposed?

## Leap Year Raises Question But Scientists Say No; Successful Women Steer Proposals Anyway

**L**EAP YEAR'S here! And the ladies have their Big Chance to propose marriage, so we all understand.

Suppose American women in general—including feminine readers of these words—took that chance seriously. Suppose it was the custom for women to speak up and propose, not merely in Leap Year, but any year! Would our civilization improve?

Science Service has put this question to a panel of men and a woman, who have scientific background for a wise answer. It is a poser that would have tangled wise old King Solomon. He hadn't the slant on our social set-up. It is a question for the strictly modern psychologist, anthropologist, sociologist, and eugenicist. And here's what they say:

Women don't need Leap Year advantages to steer a proposal, is the summed-up verdict. It generally takes two to make a modern proposal. And as for civilization—but let the scientists speak for themselves.

"A social convention that women should make the first verbal suggestion of marriage would not change actual procedures very much."

Here speaks a well-known psychologist, Prof. Knight Dunlap of the University of California. He thinks the words, will-you-marry-me, or variants of that formula, play a minor part in modern marriage preliminaries.

"Marriage," he declares, "is based on mutual agreement, and the formal proposal is merely a step based on procedures which are at present as often initiated, in reality, by the woman as by the man."

Women do a good deal of the verbal proposing, anyway, he is pretty sure. And many couples find themselves saying, "I do," without either party having spoken a formal invitation to marry.

So—Dr. Dunlap doubts that our civilization would change to any important degree should etiquette and convention reverse popular form, and approve of women regularly popping the question.

But if women should take to proposing formally, it might change conventions of behavior in minor ways, Dr. Dunlap foresees.

For example? Well, that's hard to predict. But—taking a male-view shot at results of women getting the vote, he comments whimsically:

"An analogous case is presented by woman suffrage, the main social or political effect of which has been that men may now smoke in dining cars."

Agreeing with Dr. Dunlap's view that women's proposing would not help civilization along conspicuously, is the view of Dr. Hortense Powdermaker, anthropologist and sociologist of Queens College, Flushing, N. Y.

Any improvement in civilization is too complicated to be the result of reversing traditional speaking roles in courtship, says the only woman on Science Service's panel on marriage proposal.

And, as a student of human customs, she adds:

"Anyway, since the beginning of time women have been taking the initiative subtly."

More detailed explanation of why the roles of man versus woman in courtship are pretty good as they stand is furnished by a specialist in eugenics and human well-being, Dr. Paul Popenoe, general director of the Institute of Family Relations, in Los Angeles.

Declaring that for millions of years in evolution, the male has taken the initiative, seeking the female, he continues:

"It is the latter's role not to be aggressive, but to be seductive and alluring. It is not likely that this long-standing role can be reversed now without causing some discomfort to both men and women. In fact, few women want to reverse it.

"Those who demand that women be allowed to propose are mainly the unsuccessful women. They overlook the fact that no law now prevents a woman from proposing. She may propose any time she feels like it. Abundant evidence, however, shows that it is usually not worth while for her to do so. She is not proud of the exploit later; and I suppose no man ever felt flattered to have a woman propose to him.

### If She Is Clever

"A successful woman can maneuver a man into a position where he will propose to her, thus keeping in his hands, at least ostensibly, the traditional masculine initiative which is so dear to him. If she is not clever enough to get a man to propose to her, she may not be clever enough to keep a husband after she gets one.

"Surveys by the Institute of Family Relations show clearly that the average educated woman does not admire a man who is lacking in initiative, aggressiveness, and responsibility; she does not

## ● Who Started Woman's Leap Year Wooing?

Nobody knows, for certain, who invented the idea of women proposing during Leap Years.

In the middle Ages there were laws giving maiden ladies this liberty. Here is a Scottish law of 1288, which also gave bachelors a chance of escape by paying up to one pound (roughly \$5 in our money):

"It is statut and ordaint that during the rein of hir maist blissit Megeste, for ilk yeare knowne as lepe yeare, ilk mayden layde of bothe highe and lowe estait shall hae liberte to bespeke ye man she likes, albeit he refuses to taik hir to be his lawful wyfe, he shall be mulcted in ye sum ane pundis or less, as his estait may be; except and awis gif he can make it appeare that he is betroithit ane ither woman he then shall be free."

want to have to propose to a husband; and she should certainly not do so."

What would improve matters, Dr. Popenoe believes, is this:

"Better education of both men and women for marriage, with the elimination of some of the feminist influence, will solve such problems as now exist. They cannot be solved by trying to override the age-old distinction between masculine and feminine behavior."

And that brings us to the plain-spoken recommendation of an anthropologist, Prof. Earnest A. Hooton of Harvard University, noted for his straight-from-the-shoulder criticisms of the human species.

"What this civilization needs is fewer and better babies," began Prof. Hooton's terse reply to the query about women proposing marriage.

Prof. Hooton in recent years has been warning all who will listen that mankind may be good at gadgets, but human beings compare unfavorably with apes in many ways as efficient members of the animal kingdom.

Human beings go right along, indifferent to the production of morons, criminals, and social ineffectuals. They are told that biological science offers hope for improving mankind. But they take little concern for the future.

All of which explains why, while Prof. Hooton prescribes "fewer and better babies" for a better civilization, he adds gloomily:

"Since both sexes are equally ignorant of human genetics, it makes no difference which chooses. 'Can the blind lead the blind? Shall they not both fall into the ditch?'"

Prof. Hooton is fairly cheerful about

the rising generation, though. He has given it credit for having enough clever youngsters to push ahead with the hard task of evolving a code of biological ethics. Such a code put into practice, he believes, would enable mankind to become more honest, unselfish, decent, and

considerate in all his human relations.

That anthropological advice seems a long leap from Leap Year—with which this account started—but it does end with an idea of science for improving civilization.

*Science News Letter, February 17, 1940*

### CLIMATOLOGY

## Apparent Climatic Shifts Are Really Fluctuations

### Experts Declare That Crediting the Warm West Coast Weather on Movement of Japan Current Is Just Guess

**A**PPARENT climatic shifts, such as the current one that has brought a warm winter to the whole Pacific Coast while the entire country east of the Rockies has had to shovel snow, are to be regarded as fluctuations in a longer or shorter cycle rather than permanent changes. Such is the consensus of opinions independently expressed by scientists of the U. S. Weather Bureau, the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey and the Hydrographic Office of the U. S. Navy. And whatever causes them, a supposed shift in the Japan Current must not be held responsible.

There is a slow, wide swing in air temperatures, not only for the Pacific Coast but for the whole world, that takes about a century to go through, stated J. B. Kincer of the U. S. Weather Bureau. There was a succession of warm years about a hundred years ago, and we seem to be having another one now. In between, shortly after the middle of the nineteenth century, there was a group of low-temperature years, with cool summers and severe winters. Rainfall cycles (if they can properly be called that) are of considerably shorter duration than this long temperature swing, Mr. Kincer said.

Crediting recent warm Pacific Coast winters to a southward shift in direction of the Japan Current was scouted as unfounded guesswork by both H. A. Marmor of the U. S. Coast and Geodetic Survey and Comdr. H. Hartley of the Hydrographic Office. It is a case of reasoning backward: A shift in the Japan Current could cause a change in climate; the climate on the Coast seems to be changing; therefore the Japan Current has shifted.

The only trouble with that proposition is that nobody knows whether the famous current has shifted or not. It would be possible to go and find out,

but that would take ships, men and money, none of which are available now—or likely to be, with Congress cutting deep even into existing research appropriations.

Until valid evidence to the contrary is brought forth by a well-supported well-planned, long-continued research program, there is no justification for supposing that the Japan Current has shifted or is shifting. If revolutionary changes had taken place in the ocean bottom recently, with tremendous, world-shaking earthquakes, we might be justified in assuming a shift in the current; but such cataclysmic events have not taken place. So we must let the "Kuro Siwo" flow in peace.

From the Pacific Coast, Prof. George E. McEwen of the Scripps Institution of Oceanography, at La Jolla, Calif., offers support to his scientific colleagues in Washington. "Although it may seem as though the climate is changing," says Prof. McEwen, "there is no evidence that the trend will continue in the same direction."

*Science News Letter, February 17, 1940*

### ANTHROPOLOGY

## Set Important New Date For American History

**A**N IMPORTANT new date for history books has been worked out by two Harvard University geologists: Nearly 25,000 years ago the first Americans arrived. Dr. Kirk Bryan and Louis L. Ray reached this verdict by intensive study of the camp ground of Folsom Man in Colorado, and it looks as though a long scientific argument over antiquity of man in America is about over. Incidental weather note: Folsom hunters found Colorado chillier than it is today.

*Science News Letter, February 17, 1940*