

HOME LIFE

Being a Quiet Talk to Parents and Children with Some Advice to Young People Contemplating Marriage

By A VINCENTIAN FATHER.

(With permission of the Superior.)

“Rejoice not in ungodly children, if they be multiplied neither be delighted in them, if the fear of God be not with them. Trust not to their life, and respect not their labours. For, better is one that feareth God than a thousand ungodly children. By one that is wise a country shall be inhabited, the tribe of the ungodly shall become desolate.” (Ecclesiasticus xvi., 1-5.)

INTRODUCTION.

THE man who would claim to be satisfied with the present trend of religion in the lives of our people in Australia must either have low standards in that matter., or he must be an incurable optimist. Most, if not all, of the leaders of Catholic thought are gravely perturbed, both with regard to the ever-growing laxity of belief in any definite dogmatic system of Faith and with regard to the consequent decline in moral standards. I say “*consequent*” decline, because to talk about being moral without being religious is either to expect very little from a person proclaiming to be moral, or to exalt purely natural virtue to the detriment of supernatural virtue. The truth is that Christ Our Lord taught a very definite dogmatic code, and demanded a very definite supernatural moral observance in consequence. With Him, definite beliefs and moral conduct, inspired by grace and observed in co-operation with grace, thus raising it to the supernatural, go hand in hand. Mere natural virtue is not meritorious for heaven.

Now, our country is fast drifting from these standards in both belief and practice. Our people are fast reverting to a more or less educated paganism. Much of the blame for this must fall on the secular system of education under which we live. Of that there can be no doubt. We have had fifty years of experience of it now, and the man who would say that the children of today have anything like the religious faith or the standards of moral conduct that children had fifty years ago would be simply shutting his eyes to plain facts.

The godless system of education is much to blame; but, in ultimate analysis, it will be found that the real blame lies at the door of each generation of parents that has come along since that fatal time in the history of our country, when so-called statesmanship fastened this millstone of secular education round the necks of our people. There can be little doubt that many non-Catholics who hailed that Public Instruction Act with delight, because they saw in it a blow at the Catholic Church, never dreamed of the ill-effects it would have on their own adherents. At that time, people outside the Catholic Church *did* go to their own religious services in goodly numbers, they *did* read their Bible, and they *did* teach their children a definite religion. Today, the attendance at their churches represents only a fraction of their numbers, and the children, in the greater number of cases, learn very, very little about religion in the homes or elsewhere. These will be the parents of the next generation, and any right-minded Catholic shudders to think what will be the state of religion amongst us in another quarter of a century. The ideas that prevail very generally about marriage, divorce, and other delicate matters have entirely destroyed, in the minds of many, the sacramental character of the union between husband and wife. It is all a terrible prospect.

A great observer of modern tendencies in England wrote some years ago: “*The careless and even irreligious homes of today are responsible for the falling away from the practice of religious duties.*” It is only too true, and even we Catholics who have so much to be thankful for in the fidelity of our people, have had sad experience of it. It follows as a matter of course that where parents are neglectful, their children will follow, and it is not only religion that suffers, but the whole social fabric is shaken. The family is the foundation of all social order, stability and progress. The home is the first training ground. The man who learns, at the knee of a prudent and holy mother, the lessons of modesty and truth will not usually be likely to employ eloquence, literature, art, etc., in the service of the devil. It is in the family that great saints and

great men are formed; examine the lives of such as history records, and you will usually find that they were all blessed with good mothers. It is men such as these that are the bulwarks of social order, so that the saying of the great Leo XIII. is seen to have all the force of truth: "*The well-being of individuals and of the community depends chiefly on the family and the home.*" It is there the future man and woman are formed, and, if they are to be real Christians in after life, they must spend their earlier years under the elevating and perfecting influence of a holy Catholic home.

Where, then, are we to look for salvation, under God, in the sad tendencies of our day and country? The answer is—we must look to the hearts of good fathers and good mothers. It is parents who can be the regenerators of society, and, in this matter, the call for good Catholic mothers is the most urgent. It may be truly said that the destiny of Australia, as to faith and morals, is in the hands of the present and future mothers.

The duty, therefore, lies heavily on Catholics to keep, first of all before themselves, and then before others, the sacred character of Matrimony. They must ever remember and proclaim the ideals of Christian parenthood—of the dignity of fatherhood, expressed in the same terms as the fatherhood of God; of the glory of motherhood, elevated in Our Lady's maternity to its pristine glory before the fall of Eve. They must ever remember and proclaim that marriage is a Sacrament, not a mere civil contract—Sacrament by which husband and wife enter into a soul union, similar to the mystical union between Christ and His Church. They must ever remember and proclaim that Christ has made the Christian father the representative of Himself, the Christian mother the representative of her who was chosen from eternity to be the Mother of the Eternal Son of God, and the Christian child a holy and sacred thing—the hope of the Church and of society, the type of everyone that wishes to go to Heaven—for none shall enter there unless they become as "*little children.*" They must, in this way, create an atmosphere in which mothers are regarded as privileged persons. In short, there unquestionably lies before Catholics the task of promoting once again the ideals of Christian marriage and home life, in the midst of a world that has lost these ideals. A return to the simple, innocent home life of other days will do more to restore religion and morality to our Australian people than all the legislation in the world. The children of today are running wildly after exciting pleasure. They look on home as merely a place in which to eat and sleep—as for their amusements, they seek them away from home, often in very dangerous, even sinful, circumstances, and, in so doing, they are neglecting the real gold of domestic joys for the worthless alloy of worldly excitement. "*Back to the Home!*"—that must be our slogan.

Let us, therefore, proceed to consider what is necessary in order that this much-to-be-desired state of things may be secured.

I.—THE MODEL HOME OF NAZARETH MUST EVER BE BEFORE OUR EYES.

What a home that was! Joseph, Mary, Jesus! The chaste foster-father, the virgin Mother, and the God-man! Perfect Son, perfect Mother, perfect foster-father, else he would not have been chosen. All three were united in the bonds of perfect love—parents, loving one another and their Child; Child, loving with both Divine and human love the parents—full, self-imposed submission of Child to parents, and full authority of parents over Child: "*He went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject to them.*"

No other home can ever equal this; but this must be ever before us as the model, and parents must strive to reach as near the model as human frailty will permit.

What, after all, is it that makes a real home? Is it a magnificent house, beautiful gardens, rich food, clothing and furniture, every means of enjoyment—even of luxury? Far from it. These things do certainly contribute to exterior attractiveness, but it is not they that really make the home. Even amidst luxurious comforts, and in spite of the most extensive equipment, the true home atmosphere may be painfully absent. On the other hand, the home may be poor, the furniture plain and only what is essential, the food and clothing ordinary, and yet there may be happiness there, for which earth has few rivals. The Holy Home of Nazareth was poor, but the very joy of Heaven was there.

The fact is that what makes the real home is loving care, sweetness of disposition, genial kindness, mutual understanding and sympathy, tolerance of one another's failings. It is all a question of the right attitude of mind and heart

of all the inmates towards each other, regulating all mutual intercourse, and their having a power to transfigure the environment, and invest it with a beauty and magic which, of itself, it does not possess. In such a home parents and children love to be with one another, poor though their surroundings be, because their hearts are in tune. How often one sees the contrary in richer homes! The members of the family have no pleasure in one another, because the bond of love is not there.

The nearer the home approaches to that of Nazareth, the more perfect it is as a home. To ensure this there must be certain relations between husband and wife, between parents and children, and between the children themselves. These relations arise only when each one does what duty demands. Let us examine in detail.

11.—THE DUTIES OF PARENTS.

Before going on to discuss these, it is necessary to lay down the fundamental principle that the very essence of Christian marriage is sacrifice. The very wedding ceremony is a declaration of the sacrifice of individual liberty, and the surrendering of sacred rights to one another. Conjugal life, to be Christian at all, must rest on self-denial in order to rise to devotedness, because human beings devote themselves to others only in the measure that they renounce themselves. Hence, even before married persons are blessed with children, occasions for self-renunciation will arise. Once children come, the need for such a spirit is increased. In the light of this, what are the duties of husband and wife between themselves?

(A) .—HUSBANDS AND WIVES.

Scripture, which is God's Word, says: "*Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church and delivered Himself up for it,*" and "*Wives, be subject to your husbands, as it behooveth in the Lord.*" Observe the note of sacrifice in each case—the husband must have for his model in loving his wife the love Christ had for His Church; but Christ *delivered Himself up*, out of that great love of His—He sacrificed Himself. Even so must the husband sacrifice himself, that he may ever be faithful to the wife of his choice, and may labour to support her: The love he bears her will be ever the motive power for this sacrifice, and we must always remember that, when we speak of love in this connection, we mean that queen of all the virtues—supernatural love, transforming mere natural love into the sublime. The wife, on her part, must be *subject* to her husband, and this means sacrifice. This, however, does not mean a servile subjection, as in the older, rougher days of the world, but simply a recognition of the Divine plan that man is the head of the family. By giving this submission in the Christian sense, the wife will naturally gain a gentle sway over her husband, so that, while he reigns as king, she reigns as queen. The husband will see in his partner a consecrated and sanctified being belonging to God, and, hence, his relations with her will always reveal esteem, reserve, modesty, gentleness, considerateness—all springing from Christian love. All this will the true woman win, if she is submissive in the sense indicated, and if she ever remembers that the keynote of the life of married woman is devotedness, which, animated by faith and sustained by courage, will enable her to rise to the heights of heroism. All true Catholic mothers are veritable heroines.

This fundamental spirit of self-sacrifice will find a call for its expression in the forbearance that married life will inevitably demand. Before marriage, it is often true that each saw in the other a paragon of excellence. When they begin to live together, the usual story is one of disillusionment to some extent at least. The mind that seemed so bright before is not quite so bright as it seemed, the heart is not quite so tender, the character reveals unexpected roughnesses. Here is need for forbearance on the part of each towards the other.

Cares and anxieties arise, sometimes poverty comes, not rarely sickness rears its ugly head. Tempers become frayed, and there is constant need for mutual forbearance.

It is in these circumstances that the need is felt of that grace which the Sacrament of Matrimony gives, and, when Catholics seek ever more grace in their religious observances, they become strong to bear with one another; they strive to be always meek and indulgent towards each other, readily yielding to one another where no principle is involved; they strive to minimise and make allowance for each other's defects; they eschew fault-finding; they fix their gaze on the good

points of one another, rather than on their defects. As a consequence, they gradually conceive a greater, and yet greater, esteem for each other, without which no love can stand the strain of the years—an esteem that arises from the conviction that each one really meant to practise self-sacrifice when they took one another “*for worse*” as well as “*for better*.” So much for husband and wife—now for—

(B) .—PARENTS TOWARDS CHILDREN.

No marriage is complete without children. Sometimes God denies them to married people who long intensely for them. It is through no fault of their own that they are childless, and, if they are truly Catholic, they strive by increased love to make up to one another for the disappointment each must feel. It is especially as age advances that they feel their deprivation, and, like the true Catholics that they are, they seek to grow nearer to God and dearer to one another in Him.

Usually; however, God does bless parents with children, and happy indeed are those parents who welcome each little stranger as it comes along, glad to see their little world peopled by those who will carry on their name. Children are the gift of God. As Scripture says: “*The inheritance of the Lord are children.*” He wants them for His kingdom hereafter, and those parents that obediently do His Will He blesses in many ways. Experience constantly proves that the largest families are the happiest, and the parents of such are the most contented.

True, each little arrival means more pain and toil, but God’s grace is there to sweeten all, and the affection of each child has a character all its own. Moreover, the bond of union between husband and wife grows all the stronger, if they, with brave Catholic spirit, fight their difficulties and win their victories together. Each child furnishes a new object in life, it spurs to industry and frugality in temporal concerns, and to greater earnestness in spiritual matters. In every way each child is a blessing from God.

Presupposing, then, that, as true Catholics, the married couple welcomes all the children God sends, let us see what are the duties of parents towards their offspring.

There are some general principles to be enunciated before one descends to details.

First of all, then, let it be taken for certain that no family can be really happy unless children are brought up “*in the fear and admonition of the Lord.*” Religion is the very basis of true family life. It refines, elevates and ennobles human life and character. A father drops the sceptre from his hands when he drops religion in belief or in practice. Much more so does the mother fall from her pedestal, on which she should be enthroned as queen, if she grows careless where religion is concerned. The religious mother is the angel of the family; she is the “*valiant woman*” of the Bible, “*whose praise is from the uttermost coasts.*” Her power over both her husband and her children is immeasurable, because she stands for all those qualities that command influence over others—viz., love, tenderness, devotion, mercy, sacrifice.

On the other hand, the woman without religion is a poor support for husband or child—she is but a frail and broken reed. Mothers there are who think they do enough for their families when they provide them with food, clothing, lodging, and care in sickness—they allow their children to mix with whom they choose—they send them to godless schools because of some imaginary temporal advantage: as a result, these children grow up with little faith—they know not the refining, chastening influence of religious practice, and they often have but little respect for home or parents, looking on home as a place of restraint from which they long to be free, and which they desert as soon as opportunity comes. Home for them has not the divine spirit and sacred charm it should have. As for themselves, they have little sense of responsibility because they have no moral balance, no divine law to guide them, and hence they are creatures of mere impulse, or of passion, or of slavish imitation of others, be the example good or bad. A home without religion is not a home at all. The second general principle emphasises the need in which the soul of a child stands of cultivation and guidance, and it is in the home this must begin—yes, and not only begin, but be continued even when school and church are called in to do their share in the training of the child. The home is the place where the first and most lasting impressions are made, and where are acquired many of the principles and habits that will endure through life. In modern family life there is need of more attention to home education. The complexities of modern life have destroyed to a great extent the sweet simplicity of home. The unrest of the world outside has invaded the peaceful sanctuary of the family, and brought in the

contentions, the discussions, and the alarms of that world.

Nothing will restore the home to its pristine purity but the ideal of home enshrined in the teachings of the Catholic Church—viz., parental authority, filial obedience, and family discipline. The father, or mother, who fails in this home training of the children will come under that scathing denunciation of St. Peter: *“If anyone hath not care of his own household, he has denied the Faith, and is worse than an infidel.”*

It hardly needs saying that Catholic parents should give saints’ names to their children at baptism, or that children should be baptized as soon as ever it is possible. Furthermore, god-parents must remember that they assume a serious responsibility with regard to the children for whom they stand.

With these two cardinal principles, we will now proceed to see what Scripture has to say concerning the principal duties of parents towards their offspring.

(1) Watch over them and care for them :—*“Beware of thy own children, and take heed of them of thy household.”*

(2) Instruct them :—*“Lay up these my words in your hearts and minds. Teach your children, that they may meditate on them.”*

(3) Correct them :—*“The rod and reproof give wisdom; but the child, that is left to his own will, bringeth his mother to shame.”*

(4) Bring them up in the fear of the Lord, and in obedience to His laws :—*“You, fathers, provoke not your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and correction of the Lord.”*

In those four texts you have a practical summary of what our duty demands. It might seem strange that I do not add any texts bidding you always pray for them to your last breath, and always give them good example; but, is it necessary to do this? You are bidden *to be watchful*, to see that they do right and avoid wrong; you are bidden to *instruct* them in what is right and wrong you are bidden to *correct* them, if they do wrong; you are bidden in general to *bring them up in God’s fear*, so as to do right and avoid wrong.

Now, what parent that loves the children can fail to see that he, or she, is *evidently bound to pray* for them that all this vigilance, instruction and correction may be effectual? Again, what parent is there that does not see that to instruct and correct children while at the same time doing wrong himself is to destroy the value of his words? Yes, watch, instruct, correct, pray for, and give good example to your children.

I might end with that, but let me say a word about what may be called the *“foolish fondness”* of many parents, which in reality is not real fondness at all. Twenty-five years of teaching experience gave us plenty of opportunity to observe instances of the harm done by this. Some parents pamper their children; they yield to their every whim, they cross them in nothing, they shrink from correcting them, and they become annoyed if the teachers in school correct them. This is not real love at all, and the day usually comes when such spoiled children prove a cross to their parents, and sometimes they even blame them bitterly for having neglected them.

You must not leave all the ugly work of correction to the school and the church. Both these places can do much, but, if there is no proper discipline in the home, much of the good done in those two places will be spoiled. Besides, you must remember that it is on *you* God imposes the duty of training your children for Him—the school is only your helper.

To make more detailed all that has been said under this heading, I will present the case again in another way, following the teaching of a great instructor of youth. He says that, in a true Catholic home, there should be found four things—viz., Order, Industry, Vigilance and Piety.

(1) *Order*.—Some parents allow children to go as they please. They are untidy, unpunctual, their speech is flabby, often full of “slang,” etc., and older ones are allowed to come and go as they wish, keeping late hours at night. That is a poor training. Home happiness can be sadly interfered with in that way. How unlike such a home must be to the Holy Home of Nazareth!

(2) *Industry*.—In a real home there ought to be no laziness, either on the part of parents or children. The house and all around it should be kept clean and tidy, even though it be a poor home, and the children should be obliged to do their share, according to their age and ability, not for some reward the parents might give, but because it is pleasing to God.

Teach them that—viz., to obey *because it is God's Will*. Work is good for everyone, and to keep children well occupied is the secret of their present happiness and of their future proud memories of home, as well as a training that will save them from much danger in after life. Lazy homes are a poor imitation of the industrious Home of Nazareth.

(3) *Vigilance*.—Parents must be ever on the watch to correct wrong tendencies in their children, and this watchfulness should begin even in the infant days of a child. The youngest infant soon begins to show its disposition, and it is a great mistake to put off correction till the child is older, on the plea that it is only an infant. Parents cannot too soon make it clear who is in authority, and they can, and should, begin to manifest that even to an infant. It will be much easier to assert authority over an older child, and even over a grown young man or woman, if the lesson of the authority of parents is clear from the beginning. They must watch, too, to remove danger from their children. They should know where the children go, who are their companions, how they spend their recreation, what they read, etc. Indeed, if you really want to know your child's disposition, watch him when he is at his games. There is no place where the bully, the cheat, the selfish child reveals himself more than when amongst companions of his own age. They must watch, too, to see that children say their prayers, go to Mass and the Sacraments, etc. School prayers can never take the place of prayers said by the side of the parents, and with them. Finally, they must seize every opportunity to study the dispositions of their children, and not be surprised if they detect evil tendencies. It is a mistake for a parent to believe that "*all his geese are swans*".

All this is true, while the children are young and until the time comes for them to leave school to go to work. During those school days parents have great need to be watchful both over themselves and their children, lest, out of false fondness, they cripple the efforts of the teachers. It is no uncommon thing, in schools, for children to become critical of their teachers, and develop a spirit that is wanting in reverence. Parents must ever remember that these teachers hold the place of themselves during the hours children are under their care, and Catholic parents can never be grateful enough that there are men and women who sacrifice all to care for the children of others. Some children constantly bring home complaints, and parents always side openly with them in these differences with their teachers. We do not say that teachers never make mistakes. They do, and some complaints are justified, but a parent is unwise who lets his child see that he has to condemn the actions of a teacher. He should see the Superior privately, and, if he voices his complaint in a reasonable way, he will usually get full satisfaction. To weaken the authority of a teacher in the child's eyes is to stultify the parent's own efforts for the good of his child.

So much for school days. When these are over, the parent's vigilance should become all the greater. The young people are now going out into a world of danger, and the parent must watch even more carefully now over the company, the reading, the employment of leisure hours, and the practice of religious duties.

Young girls especially will require careful supervision at this age. It will be well to note the ideas these young people give out in the course of conversation in the home. A wise parent will draw them out, giving them an opportunity to express their views. There is no other way of arriving at an estimate of the young mind. This becomes all the more urgent when the growing boys and girls begin to mingle with the other sex. At this stage it falls principally to the parent to give prudent advice on sex matters; but, it must be *prudent* advice. Not every parent is capable of this, and it would be well to consult the priest. Catholics are fortunate in having the confessional, and, if parents see that their children are regular at confession, they will be saved from anxiety in this matter. This is where the value of parish sodalities, such as the Sacred Heart Sodality, comes in, keeping the young people regularly at the Sacraments.

Parents should be especially decided about company-keeping. They should show a very firm front, if there is question of non-Catholic association of any kind; but, whether the company be Catholic or non-Catholic, they should instil into the minds of their boys the highest respect for woman-kind, teaching them to treat every girl as they would demand that their own sisters be treated. On their girls they should impress a deep sense of the dignity of womanhood, as sisters of the Blessed Virgin.

When one of the children has reached the stage of being engaged to be married, parents should endeavour to shield him, or her, from danger, and warn against any familiarities in the absence of parents which would not be allowed if parents were present. Both girls and boys must be taught, but girls particularly so, that they must always be modest in

their relations with the person to whom they are engaged, so as to secure that they in turn will be treated by that person with respect and reverence.

To help in all this, parents should encourage the young people to bring their friends to the home, and they should not allow, without vigorous protest, any lonely walks, joy rides, or company-keeping in general in lonely places. The home should ever be made attractive, so that the young people will be glad to spend their time there, and not seek for their company and enjoyment elsewhere.

Finally, parents should teach their grown-up children the sacred idea of marriage, showing them that it is a divine vocation every sense of the word.

To sum up this question of vigilance, with its concomitant of correction—it all amounts to this:—The parents must assert their authority even from the infant days of their children, and having secured it, they must never let it go at any stage of life; otherwise, their children will become too independent, going their own way, and that is what lies at the root of most of the evils of today. That is why home life has lost so much of its sacred character, and has departed so far from the ideals of the Holy Home of Nazareth.

(4) *Piety*—This concludes the list of qualities which, in the mind of a great teacher, should be found in every true home—Order, Industry, Vigilance and Piety.

Just here comes in the element of example. Parents must themselves be good, practical Catholics. They must pray in the morning and evening themselves; they must be regular at Mass and the Sacraments. As for prayer, it would be advisable that at least the night prayers, but, if not all these prayers, certainly the Rosary, should be said in common. How can a parent reasonably expect his children to be pious Catholics if they never see their parents at prayer, if they see them on occasions miss Mass without a good reason, if they seldom see them at the altar rails? See to it, you parents, that the children say their prayers regularly; make them say their grace before and after meals; in every way foster the spirit of piety. Have the crucifix and Catholic emblems (pictures or statues) in at least the living rooms of the home; always keep holy water in the house. In every possible way, make the life of the home Catholic, without being unduly exacting, so that to live a Catholic life becomes as ordinary a part of daily routine as eating, sleeping, etc.

Here again the question of reading comes in. We have said that parents should not allow in their homes any reading that could be dangerous. For this reason they must keep a close eye on the papers and books the children bring into the house: but this is not enough. Young people *will* read in these days. See to it, then, that you bring a Catholic paper into the house every week. Read it yourselves, discuss it at table, etc., so as to gently lead the children to become interested in it. Bring also good Catholic books into the house—books of a nature to excite their interest. As for lighter reading, it would be unreasonable to expect that there would be none of this. In fact, with most young people, this will be their principal reading, at any rate till they reach a more serious, thoughtful age in life. It were, of course, to be desired that there were less of it, and more of serious reading, but we must take young people as we find them. Now, there is very grave danger in much of the light literature of today. All sorts of wrong ideas, both of faith and moral practice, are to be found skilfully and insidiously put forward by, the modern novelist and essayist. The average parent cannot be expected to read through all the books his children want to read, nor can he be expected to know what authors are safe and what are not. That would require study for which he has not time. Consequently, Catholic parents should gratefully make use of Catholic libraries, making their children become members of them, so that the works of fiction that come into the home may be safe and healthy. Some parishes have their own library also; here is another safe source on which to draw.

There, now, is a very comprehensive study of the duties of parents to their children. If they faithfully perform them, there is every hope that their homes will be homes of peace, like that of Nazareth. There will be no disunion in the home; the parents will be united with one another and with their children; the children will be devoted and obedient to their parents, and affectionate with each other. They will look up to father and mother as the most wonderful people in the world for them; they will be gentle, kind, forbearing with their brothers and sisters. The little differences that will inevitably arise will not be kept up. Tempers will be controlled. As a help to this, the rule given by a celebrated Bishop is not out of place—viz., “*Teach children to be polite to brothers and sisters as though they were strangers*”

Now, all this will require great tact and patience on the part of parents. It will require that they be constantly self-restrained themselves, never quarrelling, never bullying, never speaking an unkindly or unseemly word. Especially must they hold themselves in firm control when correction becomes necessary—correction which, in the case of younger children, may demand actual punishment. It is a safe rule never to correct in anger.

Finally, all this requires the grace of God. Call, then, the Divine Master to preside over your homes. Frequently invoke the aid of Mary and Joseph for guidance, so that you may make your home like that of Nazareth. As the Sacred Heart Sodality is such a feature of our parish life in many parishes, let every one of you see that your home is consecrated to the Sacred Heart.

Before concluding this long section of advice to parents, let us give here some few practical counsels, which long years of teaching experience have shown us to be of great importance in the bringing up of the young.

CONCLUDING PRACTICAL ADVICE.

- (1) Never give hasty or ill-considered commands; once having commanded after deliberation, insist on obedience.
- (2) Never threaten unless you are in a position to carry out your threat should necessity arise.
- (3) Let there be no divided authority between parents. It is fatal for one parent to go against the other in such a way as that the children know of the division.
- (4) Let there be no divided authority between the parents and the school teachers. Settle any differences privately between yourselves and the teachers, but do not let the children know.
- (5) Never punish in anger, and, if you must punish, let there be due proportion between the fault and the punishment. To punish as much for the breaking of a cup as for telling a lie is out of all proportion.
- (6) Don't let foolish fondness lead you to give in to every whim of a child. If you give in once to coaxing, you will find it harder to refuse next time. Remember that, in later years, well-disciplined children will bless their parents for having checked them, whilst, on the other hand, pampered children will only blame parents for their weakness.
- (7) Show no favouritism to one child over the other. Envy and jealousy can ruin the happiness of homes. Be just to all, and you may be as firm as you like.
- (8) Finally, never stand in the way of a child's vocation. This is further referred to at the end of this pamphlet.

Now we proceed to the question of the children and their relations with parents and with one another.

III.—THE DUTIES OF CHILDREN.

(A).—*Towards Their Parents.*

The law respecting children and their relations with those who bore them is as old as man himself. It is the Natural Law, written at first on the hearts of men, later promulgated by God through Moses and written on the second of the Tables of Stone, finally confirmed by Jesus Christ, our Saviour. We find it in the old familiar Fourth Commandment: "*Honour thy father and thy mother!*" That word "honour" embraces all—love, respect, obedience, support in life and death, and help even beyond the grave, if help be necessary.

We are all children. With many of us our parents are long since dead, but our duty towards them does not end till we ourselves die. They may yet be lingering in purgatorial pain, and it is our duty all through our lives to pray for them. Scripture tells us: "*It is a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from their sins.*" If this is true of the dead in general, as, of course, it is, how much more so is it with regard to those to whom we owe our being, under God? Let us, then, never forget them in our prayers. Above all, let us use the Mass, in which Jesus Christ Himself prays with us for them. If we can, let us have Masses said for their intention, and, if we cannot do that, let us hear all the Masses we can.

Many children still have their parents with them, and of these, many still live under the parental roof, whilst others have left home, either as single men or women to work their way in the world, or as married people with homes of their own. There is a common, almost a universal, notion that, when once one has reached the age of 21, the authority of

parents ceases. This is quite a mistake. As a matter of fact, there is no age limit in the matter. Our Lord did not cease His voluntary subjection when He reached the age of 21. Parents have responsibility for their children while ever life lasts for those parents. True, they cannot exercise that authority in the same way, or to the same extent, over grown-up children as they could over younger ones; but they are always bound to give them good example and to pray for them. They are also always bound to give prudent advice, and, consequently, there is always a duty for children, no matter what their age, to respect that advice.

Sacred Scripture abounds in instructions for children. We select here but a few directions, but they really cover all. Thus we read:— *“My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother, that grace may be added to thy head.”*

“Hearken to thy father that begot thee, and despise not thy mother when she is old.”

“Honour thy father, and forget not the groanings of thy mother. Remember that thou hadst not been born but through them, and make a return to them, as they have done for thee.”

“He that feareth the Lord honoureth his parents, and will serve them as his masters, that brought him into the world.”

“Children, obey thy parents in the Lord; for this is just.”

An examination of those texts will supply all that is needed for the guidance of children. Under the influence of true Christian love they must always *“obey the Lord”* those who *“brought them into the world,”* and without whom, under God, they *“would not have been born.”* For, *“this is just”*. It is eminently just that obedience, yes and love and honour too, be given to them. It is not only that through them life has been given to children, but they have done much, and suffered much, in the spirit of sacrifice, to feed, clothe, succour in sickness, and educate their offspring, so that justice, demands that these children *“make a return to them”* for all their gifts and sufferings.

Furthermore, it is essential that heed be given to their advice: *“Hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother—hearken to thy father that begot thee, and despise not thy mother.”* To this is added the telling words: *“When she is old.”* Children should always be guided by the prudent advice of their parents, and it is important to note that, even when they are old, their advice is of much worth. Indeed, it can be said that, until, through age they sometimes pass into a second childhood, simply *because* they are old, their advice in matters of conduct is all the more valuable. They may not have had the same advantages in education in their day as children have in our times, but it is a sad mistake to dismiss them as being *“out of date,”* *“behind the times,”* and knowing nothing of modern conditions. Moral conduct and true religious belief never grow out of date, and these parents of ours have been taught in the stern school of the world’s experience. They know where dangers lie for the young, perhaps from their own sad experience, and they burn with a loving desire to shield their children from them. In God’s name, young people, do not be carried away by the false spirit of independence which has seized upon so many of your companions today. This is the cause of most of the evils we see around us. Many parents of the present generation were not dutiful children to their own parents, and now they do not receive respect and obedience from their own children. Scripture tells us: *“He that honoureth his father shall have joy in his own children,”* and the reverse is too sadly true—viz., that he who did not honour his parents will receive little joy when he himself is a parent.

I return for a moment to aged parents, and especially to the dear old mothers. When one sees a frail, wrinkled, white-headed, old Catholic mother, who gave all the best of her life to the rearing of-a goodly-sized family for God, one feels inclined to bow down in reverence, and it is often very saddening - to see the worn old face bedewed with tears because some child of hers has not continued to tread the safe path on which the good mother in earlier days set the infant footsteps. The old mother is ever turning towards the wanderer with one eye, and towards God with the other, uttering ever some such prayer as is contained in the following simple lines:— -

*“Child of my heart! If you only knew,-
How, in childhood’s days, I watched over you,*

*How, silent I stole to your bedside each night,
And prayed that God would guide you aright. -*

*“Child of my heart! As the days passed along-
Your life and mine were all joy and song.
Your life was twined about by my love,
And your love for me was heaven above. -*

*“Child of my heart! Those days are passed
For, days so sweet were too good to last. -
The world to your mind seemed fairer than home,
And, so, memory and I are left all alone. -*

*“Child of my heart! - How many the years,
Since you bade me ‘Good-bye’ mid sorrow and tears!
How many the years! ‘Tis a score or more, -
Since you left me alone at the old home door. -*

*“Child of my heart! - Since that terrible day.
How oft to your bedside I silently stray,-
And pray that your steps may turn homeward some day,
And joy will be mine ere I pass away!-*

*“Child of my heart! It will not be long
Ere my voice and my prayer shall be silent and gone:
But, while they are with me, God grant it to me
That both may be offered and calling for thee.”*

Children, children, be you young or old, give of your best, your very best, always to the father and mother to whom you owe so much.

(B).—Towards One Another.

We often see the beautiful text of Scripture: *“How good and pleasing a thing it is for brethren to dwell together in union!”* It is constantly applied to religious communities; but has it not also a special reference to the members of a family?

We have pointed out that parents should teach their children to be patient with one another, and, if small quarrels arise, to cultivate the spirit of forgiveness. We have said, further, they should teach them to overlook one another’s faults, to be kind to each other in word and act, to overcome selfishness, and be thoughtful for one another.

Now, in urging them to teach these things, the corresponding obligation lies on the children to learn these lessons and put them into practice.

If only children would do this, how much happier life at home would be today! The fact is that there has been a sad falling off in these matters, with the result that, in many cases, there is little or no real home life at all, as it used to be.

Circumstances helped much in other days. There were few attractions outside of the home, especially at nighttime. There were no picture shows, affording cheap entertainment, and it was but seldom that people could afford the means to go to the theatre. Money was not so plentiful as it afterwards became, till the present depression gave a setback to things.

There were fewer avenues for employment for girls, and the wages given to boys and young men were much less than agitation afterwards made them.

The result was that young people were more or less forced to make their enjoyment in the home. What more beautiful picture than to see the younger children of those days enjoying some innocent game in the presence of their parents, when their school work for the next day was done? What more beautiful picture than to see the older children, who had passed from school life, reading some healthy book, or discussing some question with the parents, or engaged in an innocent game of cards, etc.? Later on, the Rosary was said in common, all had their supper, and the younger ones went early to rest, whilst even the older ones were glad to retire before the late hours.

Sometimes an outing of some kind was promised for some approaching evening, or some friends were invited to the home for a social evening. It was not often, and, consequently, all looked forward to the joyous occasion, deriving much pleasure from the anticipation of it and preparation for it. The night came and all enjoyed the simple, innocent pleasure afforded. For weeks afterwards there was new joy in recalling the incidents or in planning for a repetition.

Those were halcyon days, and the members of a family grew up together, sharing one another's joys and sorrows; they learned to love one another intensely, and the success of one was the joy of all:

*"They grew in beauty side by side,
They filled one home with glee."*

How sadly different we often find things in the homes of today! Children are all the time hankering to get out into the streets or to some show; they look on home as a place of restraint—a place in which they remain only long enough to eat and sleep, and—shall I add? to growl. It is sad to see young people who can be like distilled sunshine amongst acquaintances and friends, and yet *"like bears with sore heads"* in their own homes.

*"We have greetings for the stranger,
And smiles for the sometime guest;
But for our own the bitter tone,
Though we love our own the best."*

We certainly should reserve our best for those of our own home; but this is a digression. We said that children today often look on home only as a place of restraint, and they are ever looking to the outside world for excitement. Home seems too dull for them. They have no appreciation of the simple, beautiful joys of loving intercourse with their parents, their brothers and sisters; and they have not this appreciation because they are misled by the wild, exciting joys of the outside world. They hear their companions, talking of the "good time" they had last night at this show or that, with such and such companions, etc., - and there is often a clash of the risky or sinful in what is spoken about. They themselves had to stay at home, and they had a dull time. Why? Because they had never learned the real joy of true family intercourse. Mind, it is often the parents who are to blame for this, because they do nothing to make home happy and attractive. The father may be often out of temper and quarrelsome; the mother may be often fretful and complaining, blocking the children in every innocent amusement. You hear the eternal cry: "Tommy, don't do that!" And when Tommy answers: "Please, Mum, I didn't do it," the answer is: "Well, don't do it again!" Parents can't expect children to be like grown-up people. They *must* make a noise, they *must* be making fun or doing mischievous things, and parents should learn to be children with their children, while, of course, always keeping things within bounds.

Oh! if only all our homes were real homes, what a difference it would make! Children would love to be most of their time at home; they would not be always wanting to be out of doors; and thus they would be saved from many of the temptations that lead them into bad ways, which gradually become bad habits, leading in the end to sorrow for the parents, and oftentimes to disgrace for the family,

Boys and girls, do try to live your lives principally in the home. Do try to bring back the simple joys of home life and you will be doing more for the future good of Australia than all the politicians and all the laws they send out from

Parliament House. Be happy with your own brothers and sisters. Let there be no quarrelling, no fault-finding, - and, if little disputes do arise, don't keep them up. Be kind to one another. Be thoughtful and unselfish, looking out for ways to give joy to the others. Above all, look up to your parents as the greatest man and woman in the world for you. Learn the joy of helping your mother in her endless household work. There is no joy like that of giving joy, and the child that gladdens its mother will know a deeper happiness in a word of praise from father or mother than the most exciting pleasure outside in the world can give. Be devout Catholics always, ever faithful to prayer, Mass, and the Sacraments, even if, perhaps, father or mother - is careless. If you continue in the home the religious training you received in the school and the church, you will one day have the happiness of seeing your father return to his religious duties. Perhaps father is not a Catholic at all. If you always pray for him, and always give him the example of what a Catholic boy or girl really means, you may one day have the unspeakable happiness of seeing him become a Catholic. We can speak from experience of this. We knew a home dear to us where the father was not a Catholic, and can assure you that amongst the happiest days life has ever given to the children of that home was the day when their father was at last received into the Church.

It is here that your parish sodality comes in. It may be the Sacred Heart Sodality, the Holy Name Sodality, or the Sodality of the Holy Family. It matters not which. If you are a faithful member of it, it will keep you regularly to your monthly Confession and Communion. That is what it is for; you may go to Communion as often as you like—indeed, the oftener the better—but always let one of those Communions be with all the other young men or young women of the parish; The example will help your parents and others.

If you cling to this, you cannot help becoming more patient and more kind in the home. You will be an enemy of all that could disturb the peace of the home—you will be an enemy to all uncharitable talk or action, in short, you will be happy yourselves and you will make the other members of the family happy, and home will be really a home, even if it be poor, as was the Holy Home of Nazareth.

In conclusion, let us make one special appeal to you. It is this: if, on reading this, you find you are out of harmony with your parents, or with one of your brothers and sisters, go to them and be reconciled at once. Restore peace, and then cultivate peace by every means in your power.

We suggest here a little prayer that may be helpful:

“Dear Lord, Who didst live home life with Joseph and Mary at Nazareth, giving thus to the world the model of the perfect home, be pleased to bless our home, and the homes of all the Catholic people of this parish.

“Fill the hearts of all the parents with deep, true love for one another and for all their children. Fill the hearts of all the children with deep, true love for their parents and for each other. Remove all differences, reconcile those who are at variance, so that peace may reign in every home.

“Make both parents and children patient in all their trials. Make them look with kindly eye on one another's faults. Make them kind, unselfish, thoughtful for each other. Above all, dear Lord, remove from the hearts of all the children that spirit of false independence which leads so many to slight the wise advice of those over them. Make them obedient at all times, and fill their hearts with respect and love for their father and mother and for one another.

“Deign also, dear Lord, to extend this blessing to every home, Catholic or otherwise, in our country. Give us back the simple, happy home life of other days, and thus save our country from the spiritual ruin to which it is hastening. Amen.

IV.—ADVICE TO YOUNG PEOPLE CONTEMPLATING MARRIAGE.

All that has been said serves to bring into bold relief the beautiful ideas of the Catholic Church regarding home life. It is not out of place, therefore, to say a few words at the end of this pamphlet to young people who are not yet married, but who one day will be, and who are, perhaps, at this moment contemplating taking that important step.

The first point—the one on which all the rest depends is that young people should conceive a very high idea of their own dignity, and that of a person of the opposite sex. Every human being is created by God, and endowed with very lofty prerogatives. Scripture says of man: *“Thou hast made him a little less than the angels; Thou hast crowned him with glory*

and honour"; indeed, God has made us to His own *"image and likeness."* Every human being was redeemed by Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the Blessed Trinity made man. Hear the Scriptures again: *"You were not redeemed with corruptible things, as gold and silver, but with the Precious Blood of Christ, as of a Lamb unspotted and undefiled."* Every human being should be baptized, and, if it is, then in Baptism it was sanctified by the Holy Ghost. Once again Scripture speaks: *"Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the spirit of God dwelleth in you?"* And what adds to this in the case of us Catholics is that we are so often united with Christ in the Blessed Eucharist, so that He actually dwells in us and we in Him: *"He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood abideth in Me and I in him."*

Finally, every human being was destined by God to be a bright spirit in His heavenly home, and if that design is frustrated in some cases it is entirely the fault of the individual. St. John says to us: *"Dearly beloved, we are now the sons of God, and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be.—We know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like to Him, because we shall see Him as He is."*

What a wonderful dignity, therefore, resides in a human being! If we always remembered that, how differently we would act! Young men, and young women, should always be mindful of that in their relations with one another, respecting each their own dignity, which they share with all the human race. Added to this, the young man should remember that God has ordained that man should be the head of the family. If, then, he is keeping company with a girl with a view to matrimony, it is his duty, during that preparatory time, to act always towards her in such a way as will give her valid reason to hope that he will be a fitting head of their future home. He should always hold her in reverence, never seeking any undue familiarity, and protecting her, even against herself, should she at times be weak. The young woman, too, should remember that she is, in one sense, a sister of the Blessed Virgin, while, in another sense, she shares with all the human race in being a child of hers by adoption, and by the special gift of Christ from the Cross.

During that dangerous time of courtship, when Human Nature is so liable to be stirred, the young man should adopt it as a rule to always treat his future partner as *he would demand that any other young man would treat his own sister*; the young woman should ever be mindful of her dignity *as sister of Mary*, and by her own modesty and reserve, help the young man to treat her with that reverence she has a right to demand. Both young people should make the matter of their proposed marriage a subject of constant prayer. They should, moreover, take their parents into their confidence and seek guidance from them. The courtship should never be conducted in lonely places, but in the homes of their parents, and there should be no familiarities which they would be ashamed for those parents to see.

We know that many young people of today will shrug their shoulders and smile a cynical smile as they read this, while the thought will be in their minds, even if it is not expressed: *"Old fashioned! Out of date! Not done in these times!"*

Well, the fact that you do not agree, young friend, does not alter the wisdom of the advice. It is a very good thing to be old-fashioned in some matters, and you can believe us when we say that if you observe these recommendations, you will have reason to bless your obedience some day; whereas, if you neglect it, the time will come when you will bitterly regret your false independence. Holy marriages are not built on ungoverned conduct before marriage.

In all this, I have naturally been taking it for granted that the young people keeping company are both Catholics. Here again, I can see, in fancy, many young people giving that contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, smiling that would-be superior cynical smile, and uttering those scathing words: *"Out of date!"* The young mind of today is saturated by the foolish drivel that is to be found in the popular novel, and is represented in so many scenes of the cinema—viz., that somewhere in all the world there awaits each one his soul's mate, quite irrespective of differences of Religion, or of incompatibility in other ways. A pretty mess this nonsense has made of many marriages in modern times! The Divorce Courts are working overtime, and there are countless unhappy marriages that are never brought into the light of publicity, all because young people will not be guided in this matter by their parents and others interested in their welfare.

It is inevitable that young people of different Religions will meet one another in a country like ours, where so much division exists; but a young Catholic who is wise will take care not to let the affections be entangled in the beginning, and thus will easily avoid the snares into which others fall. Fulness of union can never be where there is disunion about the vital matter of life—viz., Religion.

If, however, Catholic young people will persist in going their own way, and, in consequence, find themselves caught in the toils, it is well for them to be reminded of what the Church demands in this matter. She will not allow the marriage to be celebrated before a priest, unless the promises she requires are given, as she ordains. These promises are:— (1) *“That the non-Catholic party will not interfere with the Catholic party in the practice of his, or her, Religion.”* This promise must be signed by the non-Catholic party. (2) *“That all children of the marriage must be brought up in the Catholic Faith.”* This promise must be signed by both parties. (3) *“That the Catholic party will use all possible means to lead the non-Catholic party to see the truth of the Catholic Faith.”* This promise need not usually be signed—a verbal undertaking is enough.

Seeing that this is so, it is hard to understand how it is that, in many of these cases, the Catholic never says one word to the other about these matters until they come to make arrangements about the marriage. Sometimes the priest has to tell these facts, and there are unpleasant scenes, giving very bad promise of what the result will be when once the parties are joined together.

Another thing that is often not mentioned between the young people is that, if the marriage is to be a mixed one, it cannot take place before the altar, and the nuptial blessing cannot be given.

Should the non-Catholic party prove obstinate, and the Catholic party be so weak as to yield to the pressure of the other and of the relatives and friends, the Church will not allow a priest to officiate. Then follows marriage outside the Church, and, as sure as the sun shines, there will come a day, perhaps not far distant, when the Catholic will know tortures of conscience, and the happiness of family life will be shattered.

The Church is opposed to mixed marriages; consequently, a young Catholic should be extremely careful when choosing a partner for the holy union of marriage. If young people had been guided by parents and others in this matter in the past, we should not have the sad leakage from the Church which we have had, and the religious outlook for Australia would be much brighter than it is.

We bid you, then, think well before marriage on the dignity and responsibility of Matrimony and its sacred purpose, both of which will serve to impress on you the heavy responsibility you take upon yourselves in entering in the married state. Dismiss once and for all the notion that marriage is all a beautiful romance. The nonsense of the modern novelist about *“being happy ever after”* does not often stand the test of life. Marriage is a solemn, life-long obligation, founded on the spirit of mutual sacrifice, and, therefore, even common prudence would demand that young people should ponder well and long on the suitability of their partner; they should pray much for guidance, and they should be only too grateful to parents, and to others interested in them, for their advice, which is the result of long years of knowledge of life.

A final word to young men and to parents:—

*To young men:—*There is nothing more common in these days of depression than to hear people say: “What a fool I was!” They look back on other days when money came easily to them, and they see that, if they had been in any way careful, they could have a fairly solid sum of money behind them today, whereas they have nothing. When they examine where the money has gone, they find that one channel through which it flowed was the entertainment of girls whom they never had any intention to marry. It was the fashion of young men to have what they called a “good time,” and they allowed themselves to be carried away by the talk and the doings of companions. Now they see that they were foolish, even in a worldly sense. As for the spiritual point of view, they now have many regrets. Yes, they were doubly foolish. That silly philandering has led them nowhere. Girls were only too ready to take all they could get from their “boy friend.” It is to be hoped the young people of these days will learn the lesson. Young men should find their companionship amongst young men, and their amusement in healthy, manly sport. It is time enough to begin the other thing when they are in a position to be serious about it, and intend to be serious. “Old-fashioned” again? Yes! But many of the old fashions were sensible.

*To parents :—*Don’t be selfish with regard to your children, when they are at an age to marry and want to do so. Many a father and mother who married early place all sorts of obstacles in the way of their children when it comes to settling

their own lives. Then again, some children feel called by God to devote themselves to Him, as Nuns, Brothers or Priests. Sometimes Catholic parents oppose every obstacle they can. They fear to lose their children, forgetting two things—viz., (1) that *they* did not hesitate to leave *their own* parents when they wanted to marry, and (2) that the children that go to Religious life are the ones least lost to their parents. The other children marry, and, though that does not mean that they lose their love for their parents, it *does* mean that they divide their interest more than do children who go into Religion. The latter have for the rest of life only two interests—viz., God and their family, whereas the former have three—viz., God, the family from which they came, and the family that they form. It is a terribly serious thing to interfere with a child who has a vocation to Religion, and a Catholic parent who does so must fear the Judgment very much. As for the other children who do not feel called in that way, their vocation is to marry, and bring up a family of their own for God. Here again, the needless obstacles that some parents place in the way often cause much unhappiness, and sometimes drive children into going their own way and marrying in spite of the parents. Selfishness lies at the root of such an action, and parents should beware of it.

CONCLUSION.

You who read this little pamphlet, do try to realise that the writer has only one object—viz., to try to do what little he can do to help to the formation of really genuine home-life amongst our people. That is the only road to real happiness in life for the individual, to social and moral stability for our country, and to an increase in the number of happy, glorified souls in Heaven, which is the eternal perfection of all that is embraced in the meaning of that short, but beautiful, word—Home.

Cum Permissu Superiorum:

Nihil obstat:

J. DONOVAN,

Censor Theol, Deputatus.

Imprimatur:

** D. Mannix,*

Archiepiscopus Melbournensis.

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