

# MY TEN CHILDREN

Maude E. Lawless

Sometimes, my husband expresses to his friends his joy and pride in our large family. Most of them respond with a question: "Yes. But what does your wife say?" It is the wife who has to carry the children and bring them into the world, to nurse them through illnesses, do most of the extra work that children make, and manage a growing family as the next baby comes. Has the wife the same pride and joy as her husband? It is a fair question. And here is my answer.

## *Work.*

Yes. There *is* work in being the mother of a large family. In fact, there is a life's work. I need not enlarge on the hardship of pregnancy *and* childbirth. There it is, to be borne. And everyone knows that a baby takes most of the mother's time. Colds, coughs, teething, measles—they all mean work and anxiety for the mother. She has also to watch over the development of her child's character. When she has many children, work and anxiety are repeated, many times. And they are a large part of a mother's *happiness*. Work of some kind is, or should be, the lot of every human being. It is necessary for our growth in mind and soul. A mother's work is of the noblest and happiest kind. She gives her time and energy not to making things for an employer, but to making children, who are her own and God's. When she cares for their health, she has the joy of caring for a precious possession. When she forms their character, she is helping God to bring immortal souls, who belong to her, into His Kingdom.

## *Shared Burdens.*

It seems trivial to count the cost of so great a happiness and privilege. But, if the cost must be reckoned, let our reckoning be exact. The hardship of mothering a large family is easily exaggerated, especially by those who look at it from outside. Childbearing is not, normally, an illness. It has its pains and discomforts, but it is natural and straightforward for those whose life has the Christian simplicity which our religion recommends to us. The work of a growing family diminishes with the years. Could there be more devoted and understanding helpers than older children who love their parents and their little brothers and sisters? They are delighted to help. At about the age of three, children begin to want their part in household activities. They should be encouraged. Household work can be made as interesting and absorbing as games. The children grow up accustomed to work as a team, and feeling that they have a *right* to help and to take part in all family activities. They know their home and how it is run; they are quick to see what needs doing, and they know how to do it. A mother needs patience to train them. It would be easier, when they are unskilled, to refuse them the share in work which they want. But such patience is fully repaid by the help they are soon able to give, and by their quickness to see and supply the needs of others. Besides, that is the best training they could have for managing families and homes of their own.

## *Order.*

A mother needs to train herself for the work she has to do. There is no denying that the work is hard. There is so much of it that it could be unbearable if it were tackled without system. However well-trained she may have been in childhood and youth, a mother has to learn by experience how best to order her day and get in all her work. That also requires patience and the sort of humility which she will learn from mistakes. Above all, with so many cares and such responsibility, a mother must grow in trust in God, acting on the knowledge that she is doing His work in a state of life made and sanctified by Him. Trust in God is a great comfort: and it gets things done.

## *Christian Marriage.*

I have now reached the point where I wanted to begin. So far, I have been justifying large families for the benefit of critics. Having answered their criticisms, I can now speak my mind, which is that the large family should be taken for granted: it is the small family which needs to explain itself. Knowledge of our own nature shows us that God wishes men and women to live together in the permanent state of marriage and to have children. Living straightforwardly, with the grace of God uplifting and perfecting their human nature, they will naturally have many children. That is

right, naturally and supernaturally. Surely, Almighty God will not ask large families to justify their existence: but would it be surprising if He asked small families what kept them small? Worldliness and selfishness seem to have a large say in the size of families. It is as though parents budgeted for a certain standard of living. They determine to have a certain social standing, with all that it means of expense for house, clothes, schools for children, recreation, and so on; and, according to that budget, they reckon how many children they can afford. Am I right to call that worldliness, a preferring of what is passing for what is permanent? Other parents find themselves forced to accept a certain wage-level; and they, too, reckon how many children they can afford to have. I sympathise with them; I know the difficulties they face. But can we wonder that there is so much wrong with our social system when even Catholics trim the designs of God to make them fit a system instead of fighting for a system which will allow God's creatures to enter fully into His plans?

### *Blessings.*

Any mother can speak of the joy of having a child—her own flesh and blood, dependent on her for bodily life, turning naturally to her for food and care and protection, growing to know and love her, and given into her charge by God for the implanting and cultivation of supernatural life. So great is a mother's love for her child that she may feel that her joy and love will somehow be diminished if she has many children. I assure any mother who thinks in that way that she is wrong. The joy of having many children (I have ten) is immeasurably greater than the joy of having one child. As for love—a mother's love is not a limited commodity to be parcelled out amongst children, who receive, each one of them, a smaller share as the number of children grows. We know by instinct that our friend does not love us less when he makes another friend. We know that the love we have from Our Lady is always her whole love. It does not wax and wane as the number of her human children goes down and up. Each child has all the mother's love. And her love grows. Devotion to a growing family, with all that it means of unselfishness and sacrifice, makes a mother's heart greater and warmer. There is more love for each just because there are more to love. Besides, her love is stronger, and more sustaining for herself and her children, because it is purified of the softness and self-seeking which ruin the character—and the life—of only children or children in very small families.

### *Working With God*

It is hard to put into words the happiness which comes from working with God. It is so rich and full. We bring children into this world, by the help of God; and we help Him to bring them into the eternal life for which they were made. Each time I found I was pregnant, I prayed much for the unborn child, that it would grow up holy and with a great love of God. I kept my mind quietly on beautiful and holy things. God is quick to bless, and generous in His blessing. My ten children are healthy and happy: they are good, and they love goodness. All the care that a mother gives to the spiritual training of her children is wonderfully repaid. She should teach them from their earliest years to talk familiarly with God. She should watch over them in their family life, where they learn, by practice, to love God and one another. It is there that they learn forbearance, and patience, and all manner of unselfishness. They find happiness in one another's ability and success and goodness. They take pride in their family, and, in any way they can, they help the common cause. It becomes second nature with them to think of Our Lord as a member of the Family, at home with them as they are at home with Him.

Children like that are a wonderful joy to their mother. As they grow older, they become her well-known and well-loved companions. They possess those lasting riches of a sound heart and a noble spirit. True, because there were many of them, they lacked, in childhood, what are called "advantages." There was no money for many new clothes, for much travel, and for amusements. Clothes had to be handed down from children growing out of them to children growing into them. But I think that we gained as a family by being without "advantages." My children learnt (the younger ones are still learning) to enjoy the simple good things of life. "The best things in life are free." They made their own fun and their own games. Those who have to be entertained are less alive in mind. They are dependent on money, and discontented without it. Their standards are worldly. They tend to judge themselves and others by what they wear and what they can afford. When they want amusement, they put on their hats and leave home to look for it. But my children have always found their happiness and their pleasure at home. They are companions for one another,

playing their own games, sharing a long history of family pleasure and happiness. When they think of pleasure and happiness, they think of them as a family affair, with home as their setting.

Working with God for her children's growth in grace, a mother may draw down on her family a blessing of a special kind. It is the blessing of vocation. It calls for sacrifice from the child who becomes a priest or a nun, and from their mother. But like all sacrifices made for the love of God and at His call this one is wonderfully rewarded. A vocation enriches the whole family. And the children who leave home to follow the vocation which God gives them are not lost to their families. For them, more than for the children who make homes of their own, "home" will always mean that family circle where they learned to love God under their mother's guidance, and to which they owe their natural and supernatural happiness.

### ***Education***

The education of my children is my business. I began it; and I shall continue it as long as my children look to me for help in living. That is why I know what I want from the State. The State must not undo the work I have tried to do for all these years. It must not attempt to substitute worldly standards for the spiritual standards which God wants my children to have and which I have taught them to the best of my ability. The State can and should give my children the technical information necessary for ordinary living or for a career; it should extend their knowledge and develop their minds; it should enable them to make the most of their talents; it should continue training of character along the lines I have laid down. Above all, it should help me in my great work of teaching my children to know and love God. That is what the State is for.

### ***Training of Parents***

Parents train their children. And children, it is worth remarking, train their parents. It is impossible to cooperate with God in the bringing up of a family without growing in wisdom and grace. The blessedness of giving is plain to see in family life, where the sacrifices made for the sake of the children enrich the parents. Parents must exercise restraint in speech, never differing in front of their children but waiting until they can talk over differences themselves. The children benefit, never seeing anything but unity of father and mother. The parents themselves, discussing plans and problems quietly, grow in affection and understanding. It is often a sacrifice for parents to go to Mass and to receive the Sacraments in company with their children. They have more calls on their time, more need and inclination for sleeping late. But when they have established the habit of worshipping God and seeking His grace in company with their children, in order to confirm them in the good practices of childhood, they find that those practices are good not only for children, but also for parents, and that to "become as little children" enlarges the happiness of family life.

A mother must have the home nice and fresh in the evening for the home-coming of her husband and her older children. After a hard day, she has to take time and trouble changing her frock and looking nice and fresh herself. She must smile and be cheerful, because the family depend on her. That can be hard work, which is demanded by devotion to others. And how well it is repaid! The family is happy and contented. And as for mother—she *does* look her best, she *is* young, and she *is* happy.

Large families are *right*. They are a wonderful gift of God. And I thank Him for mine.

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