

WHEN IS COMPANY-KEEPING LAWFUL AND PRUDENT?

When Is Company-Keeping Lawful?

The question in the above title is one about which there is much confusion today, not only in the minds of young people themselves, but in the minds of many of their parents, teachers and interested elders. The confusion arises from the fact that solid ethical principles no longer enter into the thinking of thousands of people. Much of modern education scoffs at the very idea that the human mind can come to any convincing conclusions about ethics, morality or religion. It is to be expected, therefore, that many will be induced to follow their instincts and their inclinations, especially in a matter so strongly and universally appealing to naked and tainted instincts as company-keeping.

Nevertheless there are sound moral principles to be applied to the lawfulness of company-keeping, and all who have retained respect for their reason and some basic Christian faith must want to know what they are and then to get together in applying them to their own lives and teaching them in the areas reached by their influence. The subject should be of special concern to parents, teachers, youth leaders and, of course, to all, young and old, who are in a position to be attracted to any form of company-keeping.

By company-keeping in this treatise we mean steady, concentrated, exclusive association between two people of different sexes. Such steady and exclusive association between man and woman is accepted by all the world to mean that the man is "courting" the woman, and that she is permitting herself to be courted. Thus, if a boy takes a girl out once or twice or oftener a week over a period of time, and it is therefore clear to all who know them that he is concentrating on her, these two are keeping company, whether they are willing to call it that or not. If a lad in the ninth grade is sweet on a little girl in the same grade and takes her to a show or some other evening event at least once a week, they are keeping company whether their elders laugh it off as innocent puppy love or not.

There are two factors that must be considered in setting down moral principles with regard to company-keeping. The first is that its purpose, as evident universally in the direction toward which company-keeping leads, is possible future marriage. This does not mean that when one starts keeping steady company with someone, he or she is thereby at once committed to marriage with that person. A period of steady company-keeping may in time bring about the discovery that marriage to the particular companion involved is out of the question. Even in that case it will have fulfilled its ethical purpose as a testing or trying out period for marriage. But the idea of possible marriage can never be excluded from steady company-keeping.

The second factor on which the moral principles governing company-keeping are based is even more important. It is the fact that company-keeping between a man and a woman or a boy and a girl involves a certain amount of unavoidable danger or inclination to sin. From the very nature of human beings this danger can be perceived. In all normal men and women God has implanted a strong instinct toward marriage and the things of marriage, i.e., the pleasures connected with marriage. The purpose of this instinct is to lead them, in favourable and right circumstances, toward and into marriage, where these inclinations can be virtuously satisfied and through them God's purposes of continuing the human race fulfilled. However the inclinations themselves have no power to recognize this wonderful plan that is so clear to the reason. They make themselves felt with increasing fervor, the longer company-keeping goes on. In that fact lies the danger of company-keeping, and experience proves that it is no merely theoretical danger. In short, the danger is that the inclinations of company-keepers may induce them to do things that their reason and faith tell them are lawful only in marriage.

Now this danger may be legitimately encountered, while it is rendered less imminent by judicious spiritual and practical means, only so long as the true purpose of company-keeping is kept in mind and so long as its goal of marriage is within lawful and reasonable reach. When marriage is impossible or unlawful or out of the question entirely, there is no

moral justification for facing the intrinsic danger of steady company-keeping, and no balancing protection against inclinations to unlawful thoughts, desires or deeds.

It is on the basis of these undeniable principles and facts that the following statements about the morality of company-keeping can be made. Each one of them, it is true, stigmatizes as evil, practices that are very common in Society today. The stigma cannot be escaped by those who act contrary to the natural law that God has made clear to the mind of man. And we know that there are many people in the world who will want to avoid the stigma, both for themselves and their children. Let it be noted that we are considering the subject not only from the viewpoint of the natural law, but also from that of the requirements for true Christian marriage.

A. Steady company-keeping is lawful only when a valid marriage is possible to both persons involved.

This principle clearly excludes many individuals from the moral right to steady company-keeping.

1) All validly married persons, whether they are living with their lawful spouses or not (so long as the spouse is living) are prohibited by the natural law from keeping steady company with anyone other than their partner in marriage.

There are many examples of the breaking of this natural law, each one involving serious sin for the violator.

The married employer who regularly takes a certain woman employee out for a social evening, has long tête-à-têtes with her, lets her know how much he thinks of her and “needs” her, is keeping company contrary to God’s law. This is true even though he were to avoid for a long time making affectionate physical advances or leading her into outright sins.

The married man whose business requires that he travel, and who has a “girl friend” in one of the cities to which he often goes, who has dates with her whenever he goes to that city, is doing something seriously wrong by this company-keeping.

The married doctor or lawyer who uses his professional relationship to a certain client as a justification for keeping company with her by regularly taking her out to dinner, shows, social evenings, and above all, by regular hours spent alone in her company for the sake of her friendship, is deceiving himself and doing seriously wrong.

The married woman who permits a male friend to call on her regularly when she is alone at home, lets him spend hours in her company, welcomes his attentions and displays of affection, is guilty of infidelity even before any actual adulterous actions take place.

The married woman whose husband is absent with the armed forces, who takes up steady dating with a certain man while he is gone, is sinning against the fidelity she owes to her husband.

Because it is forbidden for married persons themselves to keep company with anyone, it is equally forbidden and seriously sinful for single persons to enter into company-keeping with someone who is married.

2) Steady company-keeping is unlawful for divorced but validly married Christians.

This principle is exactly the same as the first one listed, because validly married persons are still bound to their partners for life even after they have obtained a divorce. It needs to be set down separately because too many Christians have adopted the pagan idea that a civil divorce makes them free to marry again, or at least to keep steady company with a new friend. It comes back to the fundamental truth that company-keeping is lawful only to those who can be validly married to each other.

The all but universal argument of divorced persons for entering into new company-keeping alliances is that “they have a right to some happiness in life.” Having failed to find happiness in a first marriage through their own fault, or the fault of their partner, or the faults of both, and seeing dozens of divorced persons around them acting as if they were perfectly free to plan for another attempt at marriage, they feel that they are being cheated out of something if anyone tells them that Christian principles demand that they give up all thought of a second marriage or the company-keeping that might lead to it, so long as their partner is alive.

The truth, however, is very clear, and it must be restated again and again. By inexorable logic it establishes the following conclusions:

A Christian who has entered a valid, sacramental, consummated marriage is married for life. He or she will never have

freedom to marry as long as the partner to that first valid Christian marriage is living. Christ made this clear in one of His simplest statements: “He that putteth away his wife and marrieth another is guilty of adultery; and he that marrieth her that is put away is guilty of adultery.”

Since there is no freedom to marry for divorced Christians, there is no justifying reason available to them for steady company-keeping. Rather, there are clear reasons making such company-keeping seriously wrong. First of all, it means entering the danger spoken of above, and the added danger of an invalid marriage, without a proportionate reason. Secondly, it means endangering the soul of the other person involved in the company-keeping, and also depriving that person of opportunities for a good marriage. Thirdly, it means giving scandal by adding one more example to the too many already given, of how Christians can be faithless to the teachings of Christ in regard to the indissolubility of marriage.

Since it is wrong for married and divorced Christians themselves to enter into steady company-keeping, it is equally wrong for single persons to accept their invitations to steady company-keeping. Moreover, it lays an obligation on single persons to find out, almost as soon as they start going out with someone, whether that person is married and divorced or not. The freedom with which divorced persons circulate in society today, and the frequency with which they offer their steady companionship to others without saying anything about the fact that they have been married, imposes a duty of special caution upon the single.

This is hard doctrine, says the young divorcee or divorced man. They are all in favour of the note to be found in the recently published Dartmouth Bible, at the bottom of the page recording Christ’s teaching about divorce and re-marriage, to the effect that the modern world has found this doctrine too difficult and has rejected it. In so doing the modern world has rejected all of Christ, together with His redeeming death and heaven. But any man or woman who still professes to be a believing Catholic, who wants to save his soul, who fears hell and wants to reach heaven, must be obedient to the teaching of Christ on this matter of company-keeping after divorce. If marriage after divorce is adulterous for Christians, company-keeping in the same circumstances is entering an unnecessary danger of sin, risking open rebellion to Christ, and a form of infidelity to a living and lawful spouse.

Does this mean the end of all happiness for the divorced Christian? By no means. True happiness begins with a reasonable hope of reaching heaven, no matter what price may have to be paid for it. Divorced persons may keep their title to the happiness of heaven, so long as they renounce another marriage and the things that could lead to it while their partners are alive. There is no such thing as a title to happiness on earth at the price of sin, and no such thing as winning heaven without carrying a cross.

3) Divorced or separated persons who have doubts about the validity of their first marriage may not enter upon steady company-keeping

a) until they have set about finding out from the proper authorities whether their first marriage was valid or invalid;

b) and until they have some authority (outside themselves) for the opinion that their first marriage may be declared invalid. Even then they must exercise reserve and restraint in company-keeping, and readiness to give it up if the hope of a declaration of nullity should prove false.

There is a principle in the moral law to the effect that one may not act in a state of doubt as to whether one’s action is lawful or unlawful. To do so would be to accept responsibility for the possible evil involved. Either the doubt must be resolved by recourse to authority, or the doubter must be able to find a reason for acting in some principle covering the matter of the doubt. In the case of one who doubts whether his first marriage was valid, therefore, company-keeping is lawful only when he has taken steps to resolve the doubt and attained at least some solid probability that he will be free to marry.

There are many different attitudes to be found among people in regard to this matter, each one covered by a moral principle. Here are the principal ones :

a. There are those who foolishly think that any marriage can be declared invalid if they approach the right people and take certain action. This is untrue. The Catholic Church presumes all marriages to be valid unless solid, objective evidence

for their invalidity can be produced and sworn to by reliable witnesses. No divorced person may take up company-keeping, therefore, on the principle that “any marriage can be nullified by the Church.”

b. There are those who think that their first marriage must have been invalid because of purely personal reasons. For example, if “the husband turned out to be a cad,” or “if the wife started to run around with other men soon after marriage,” etc. Such reasons have nothing to do, by themselves, with the validity or invalidity of the marriage contract, and do not impart a right to new company-keeping or a second marriage.

c. There are those who have a fairly good case for a declaration of nullity, but one that ordinarily will require a long process, possibly a number of years, before a final decision will be handed down. This may be because of complications demanding much testimony, many documents, etc. Persons involved in such cases are bound to exercise reserve in company-keeping, realizing that it may be a long time before they will be declared free to marry. They must also exercise patience, knowing that, having failed in one marriage, they are asking a great favour in seeking freedom for another try.

d. There are those who have a certain case for a declaration of nullity, and one that can be handled with some dispatch. Thus a Catholic whose first marriage was before a judge instead of a priest, or who attempted marriage with a validly married but divorced person, can know that, with the proper documents, his case can be settled quite soon. If one priest has not the time to handle it, he should go to another. If he is truly repentant, he, too, will be patient over any delay. His company-keeping is lawful, however, because he is certainly not validly married.

e. There are those who can find out by one interview with a priest that there is no chance for their being declared free to marry because their first marriage was clearly valid, sacramental and consummated. For these, steady company-keeping is unlawful.

B. Steady company-keeping is lawful only when marriage is considered an acceptable prospect within a reasonable time.

Again, this principle is based on the danger that is connected with steady company-keeping. If marriage is out of the question for years or already decided finally against in regard to a certain boy friend or girl friend, there is no sufficiently good reason for remaining in the sphere of danger.

There are two special kinds of cases to which this principle applies.

1. First, it applies to school children, either in the grades or early high school years. Children or adolescents who would not and could not entertain the idea of getting married for several years and who have the added handicap of not yet knowing too much about their own passions and inclinations, are entering an unnecessary and strong occasion of sin by taking up steady company-keeping.

Parents and educators have the obligation of training those under them to understand this principle early in life and to put it into practice. It is utterly unrealistic for parents to argue that the only way to make sure that their children will some day be happily married is to let them start keeping steady company when they are very young, before there can be any thought of marriage. When marriage becomes possible, the normal tendencies of human nature will take care of the preliminary courtship necessary, if the children have been brought up in normal association with the members of the other sex. Let it be noted that we are not at all saying that individual dates between the very young are wrong. Steady company-keeping, with all the signs of being in love and courting and being courted, is what is spoken of here.

School principals and teachers have the same obligation of using their influence and authority to inculcate the above principle. It is tragic that some of them promote “affairs” and “love-making” and steady company-keeping among the very young, Catholic schools sometimes fail in this, as well as non-Catholic.

2. Secondly, this principle applies to even mature persons who have been keeping company with someone for a considerable time, but have come to the certain decision that they will never marry the one with whom they have been going steady. Whether this be because the companion absolutely refuses to consider marriage, or because the other is certain that marriage would be an irreparable mistake, company-keeping should stop when marriage has become out of the question.

The decision never to marry a certain person with whom one has been keeping company must be final and sure before it demands that the company-keeping be ended. It sometimes happens that a girl will make frequent statements to her family and friends that she would never marry a certain man who is rushing her; but she is not at all sure in her own mind, and may, as many others have done in like circumstances, marry him in the end anyway. So long as the possibility of a valid marriage remains, the company-keeping has a justifying reason.

On the other hand, however, it is not lawful to continue keeping company with someone when marriage is out of the question entirely, just for the sake of having a regular partner for dates, good times, etc., and for the satisfaction of one's vanity. Too often men, and sometimes even women, will carry on a casual affair with someone whom they would never marry, just in order to indulge in the pleasures of marriage without the responsibilities of marriage. The habitual sins of such a state make the eternal loss of one's soul progressively more imminent. God will not be mocked by those who mock the institution of marriage.

What about the case, someone will ask, in which a couple have found themselves in love, have become engaged to each other, and yet find that there is some real obstacle to their getting married for a long time? For example, one of them may have dependent and sickly parents who have no one else to take care of them. Or the boy may be without income until he finishes two or three more years of schooling and training for a medical degree or for some other profession or trade.

In such case the company-keeping is not unlawful, together with the waiting for marriage, on condition that both cooperate in the use of extraordinary means to remain free from sin while waiting out the years. They should both receive the sacraments often, and they must avoid circumstances and intimacies that they know would tempt them gravely to sin. It is a sad thing that sometimes a couple who, on the one hand, are praying that God will soon remove an obstacle to their marriage, will on the other hand, be regularly committing sin with each other, thus nullifying every prayer they ever offer to God.

Sometimes, too, a couple will put off marriage for foolish reasons. The man wants to make a fortune before he gets married. Or the girl, too attached to home, wants to wait until her mother dies. Or both agree to wait till they can afford the finest of homes and every possible convenience. The sins into which such as these may fall while foolishly putting off marriage are doubly malicious in God's eyes. They have no good reason for prolonging the dangers of company-keeping.

Finally, the question must be asked: Is it lawful for a man who has a living but divorced wife, to keep steady company with a girl, with the idea that he will marry her only if and when his lawful wife dies? Is the same company-keeping lawful for the girl?

From the principles set down above the answer to this question should be clear. Steady company-keeping, i.e. regular and frequent dates between the two, would be wrong for two reasons; first, because it would be entering into an unnecessary and grave occasion of sin without a sufficient and proportionate reason; second, because it would give scandal, both to the individual involved and to all who learn of the steady company-keeping that the married man is carrying on. It is such practices that continually lessen more and more people's regard for the indissolubility of marriage.

After all this has been said, individuals may still have doubts about the morality of company-keeping in which they are involved. When such doubts arise, a confessor should at once be asked for a decision and direction.

When Is Company-Keeping Prudent?

When, two people, young or middle-aged or even old, find themselves attracted to each other and inclined toward company-keeping, the first thing they should ask of themselves is this question: Is this company-keeping lawful? It is lawful, of course, 1) only if both persons are free to marry, i.e., not bound to a living husband or wife to whom they are still validly married, and 2) only if they have good prospects and the general intention of marrying within a reasonable time.

But there is a second question that such persons should ask of themselves, both at the beginning and during the course of a period of company-keeping. It is the question: Is this company-keeping prudent? Not all things that are lawful are at

the same time expedient and prudent. This truth applies in a special manner to company-keeping.

Prudence is the virtue by which a person regulates all the actions of his present in accord with his future happiness, both in heaven and in this world. Prudence is the art of planning for the future: it means doing nothing in the present that one will seriously regret in the future. Every sin ever committed is a violation of prudence; it means indulging a momentary unlawful desire, for which indulgence a great penalty will have to be paid.

Because steady company-keeping ordinarily leads to marriage, a state of great responsibility that can be ended only by death, it is obvious that prudence must govern every man and woman who enter into it. Imprudent company-keeping is that which one's common sense can judge will lead to unhappiness in marriage or even unhappiness in hell.

Prudence must therefore supersede both the natural instinct toward marriage implanted in all human beings, and the emotional love that may be aroused toward a particular person of the other sex. God never intended that human beings be ruled by their instincts alone. Only brute animals are, according to God's plan, to be ruled by instinct alone, and they are protected by their very instincts from harming themselves by the pursuance of their desires. But God gave human beings reason and intelligence, the power to foresee their own future and to plan for it, and he expects them to use that power in following or resisting the instincts that He did implant in them. Thus a girl of twenty-five who rushes into marriage with anyone who comes along just because she feels a strong urge toward marriage is not only not acting with prudence; she is not acting as an intelligent human being.

Neither should a girl who finds herself strongly attracted to a certain man, or, as it is so often put, "madly in love," permit herself to think that, no matter what kind of man he may be, she must marry him. Such attractions die down and disappear with time, and sometimes they turn into bitter disgust and hatred. But marriage lasts until death and there is no escape from its duties and obligations till death sets one free. Prudence, therefore, demands that physical attraction be checked against the lifelong obligations of marriage and the prospects of lasting happiness with the person to whom one is attracted.

While it is not possible, in a short article like this, to analyze every conceivable case of company-keeping from the viewpoint of prudence, it is easy to set down many of the instances in which continued company-keeping would be fatally imprudent. Both common sense and experience come together to prove the truth of the following specific rules.

A. Company-Keeping and Character.

Principle: It would be gravely imprudent for anyone to keep steady company with a person who lacks the character necessary for fidelity to the obligations of marriage.

Character may be defined as "A life dominated by right principles." One of the essential purposes of company-keeping is to find out what kind of principles dominate the life of one's partner. Mutual agreement on right principles is absolutely necessary for a happy marriage. As soon as it is learned that a boy friend or girl friend is incorrigibly ruled by wrong principles, company-keeping with such a one becomes imprudent. Here are some examples of imprudent company-keeping as evidenced by the fact that a partner has been found to be ruled by some seriously wrong principle.

1) Company-keeping is seriously imprudent with one who has been found to deny the importance and necessity of the virtue of chastity.

Example: A girl is invited out by a certain man. He shows that he likes her very much and asks her to keep steady company with him. On the third or fourth date he makes it clear that he expects her to participate in sinful actions with him. In response to her objections, he scoffs at the idea of chastity; he states that he goes out with a girl "to have a good time," meaning a sinful good time; he quotes all the stock defenses of impurity, that "everybody does it," that "it's natural," that "you can't help it if you love somebody," etc.

If a girl continues to keep company with such a man, she will not only find herself plunged into sin in the present, but committing herself to a most unhappy future. If the company-keeping ends in marriage, she will find herself married to an adulterer, because any man who does not believe in chastity while he is single, will certainly not believe in fidelity to a wife when he is married.

There is a difference, let it be noted, in regard to a man who believes in the importance of chastity and yet on occasion is tempted against it and even falls into sin. Such a man can be corrected and made faithful to his own by a good girl. But the man who expresses in words and shows by his actions a disbelief in the necessity of chastity should never be accepted as a steady friend by any decent girl. Such men should be left to equally unprincipled and abandoned girls and women.

2) Company-keeping is seriously imprudent with one who wishes to marry but not to have children in marriage.

Example: A man is strongly attracted to a certain girl. He takes her out regularly over a period of time. He finds out, in the course of their frequent dates, that she has a horror of ever having to bear a child, or of having more than one or two children. Perhaps she indicates this only by her attitude toward children, showing distaste for being around them. Perhaps she openly states her belief that one can marry and exclude children from marriage, or at least exclude having more than one or two.

Once this is found out about a girl, (and every man keeping company should create occasions for finding out his girl's ideas about children in marriage) a man would be tragically imprudent in continuing the company-keeping. By so doing he would be placing himself in the way of a very sinful and unhappy married life. He should know that he would be expected to practice birth-control in such a marriage. This would chain him in a habit of sin that could lead him into hell, and at the same time it would create innumerable occasions of strife between him and his wife. The right principles about the place of children in marriage are absolutely necessary for the foundation of a happy home.

3) Company-keeping is seriously imprudent with one who has any serious and deeply rooted defect of moral character.

Example: To keep company with one who has been found to be an alcoholic, with a long record of futile attempts at overcoming the habit of drunkenness, would be the utmost folly, no matter how many favourable assets the person might possess. Marriage is almost never a permanent cure for drunkenness; in most cases the bad habit returns with double force after marriage, even though the most solemn promises to avoid it were made and kept for a little while.

The same is true of other moral defects, such as the habit of stealing, or evidence of unreasonable and uncontrollable jealousy, or of inability to control a violent temper, or any other moral defect that has not been faced and at least partially conquered. It must be remembered that the close and constant association of marriage makes even slight defects of character a test and a cross. Such crosses can be borne by normally good people. But unconquered grave defects of character will in due time make married life all but intolerable.

B. Company-Keeping and Religion.

A very urgent and practical question today is this: "Is it prudent for a Catholic to keep steady company with a person of a different religion or of no religion?" There is solid ground for the truth that to do so is more than imprudent, because, except in certain circumstances, there is the element of disobedience in such company-keeping. The Church forbids her children to marry those who do not believe as they believe; she grants dispensations for such marriages only with some reluctance and when there are good reasons for so doing. If the Church does not wish her members to marry non-Catholics, it can be deduced that she does not want them to keep steady company with such as these, which is the ordinary way of preparing for marriage.

There is nothing arbitrary or unreasonably dictatorial in this prescription. It is based on principles that are rooted in faith, proved by wide experience, and evident to the common sense and practical reason of anyone who can think clearly about the matter. The principles involved are these:

1) In general both the spiritual success and the earthly happiness of married life depend in large measure on unity of religious beliefs between husband and wife.

The first and most important purposes of marriage are spiritual. It is a state in which a husband and wife are to help each other to love and serve God and to win the happiness of heaven; and also to help each other to raise their children according to a single spiritual plan laid down by God. Clearly, if they do not agree on how God should be loved and served, they cannot help each other in this matter; indeed, they are more apt to prove to be hindrances to each other in the service of God. Clearly, too, if they do not agree on the plan that God laid down for the rearing of children, they not only

cannot cooperate in rearing the children, but one will be trying to lead the children one way while the other, at least by example if not by words, will be leading the child in an opposite direction. These are the basic reasons why so many mixed marriages end in compromises of faith on the part of the Catholic partner, and in confusion and loss of faith on the part of the children.

Even the earthly happiness that God wants married people to enjoy is interfered with and often ruined by difference of religious belief between husband and wife. Marriage is meant to be a union, not only of bodies and possessions, but also of mind and heart and will. Anything that prevents such a complete union is a source of friction, of separation, of conflict, of unhappiness. There is something important lacking in every marriage in which husband and wife cannot pray together, cannot attend church and receive the sacraments together, cannot plan together for happiness with God in heaven. Tolerance of each other's different beliefs is always a poor substitute for the unity that makes for happiness.

For these reasons all serious-minded Catholics desire to marry only Catholics like themselves. For these reasons they accept the authority and agree with the wisdom of their Church in warning them against keeping company with a person not of their faith. For these reasons, if they happen to be attracted to one who is not a Catholic, or to keep company with such a person because there are few Catholics in the area where they live, they are determined in their hearts either to win that person over to their faith, or not to permit the company-keeping to lead to marriage.

2) It is impossible for a Catholic to find happiness in marriage to a person who not only does not accept his religion as true, but who even ridicules it, rejects some of its basic moral principles, and gives evidence that he (or she) will resist having the children raised as Catholics.

Under this principle several different types of persons may be listed with whom it would be fatally imprudent for a Catholic man or woman to continue to keep company and thus to be impelled toward marriage. They are:

a. One who ridicules the Catholic religion as superstitious, who expresses contempt for priests as "secret evildoers" or mere "money-seekers"; who makes fun of the Mass and the sacraments and other Catholic rites and ceremonies.

b. One who does not believe in the indissolubility of marriage, stating that "if it doesn't work out, divorce and marriage to somebody else should be permitted."

c. One who insists that sinful birth-control is lawful and necessary in marriage, and makes it clear that no matter what promises are insincerely signed, this will be demanded after marriage.

d. One whose whole attitude and conversation make it clear that when the time comes for raising children, obstacles will be placed in the way of raising them as Catholics.

For any Catholic to marry, with open eyes, one of these types of person, is to make himself (or herself) guilty beforehand of all the sins that will inevitably follow upon marriage. Too often Catholics forget this fact; they have fallen deeply in love with one such, and feel that they can let the problems take care of themselves so long as they can marry the person whom they love. But God never intends that love should sweep away reason and free will. If reason makes it clear that sins will result from a certain marriage then the free will is guilty in cause of all the sins by consenting to the marriage. That is why the Canon Law of the Church states that such marriages are forbidden by divine law.

C. Company-Keeping and Other Circumstances.

The question of the prudence of company-keeping in respect to accidental circumstances outside the important topics listed above is more difficult to solve. Character and religion are the two essentials to be looked for in a partner for marriage; other things can be important to some but not to others; they do not necessarily render marriage imprudent in all cases. In these matters, therefore, only certain presumptions can be set down. Every such presumption will yield at times to specific conditions. Some of the circumstances that prudence must consider in company-keeping are the following:

1) Difference of age. Is it prudent for a girl of twenty to keep company with a man who is twenty years older than she is? Or for a man to keep company with a woman who is ten or more years older than he is?

There is a general presumption that the closer to the same age a man and woman are, the fewer will be the adjustments they will have to make to each other over the years in marriage. There is also a presumption that it is imprudent for a man

to marry a woman who is many years his senior — more so than for a woman to marry a much older man.

However, there have been successful and happy marriages in which husband and wife differed greatly in age. If two such persons possess good character and sound religion, and willingness to face the special adjustments that these age-differences will demand, their company-keeping and eventual marriage should be neither frowned upon nor forbidden.

2) Difference of social position. Is it prudent for a rich girl to keep company with a poor boy? Or vice versa?

There is a presumption here again that there will be some special difficulty to be faced by one who is accustomed to luxury and plenty, in marriage to one who has known nothing but poverty and struggle. The difficulty will be almost insurmountable over the years, if either one is lacking in solid religious principle and sound moral character. But where there is such religion and character, such a marriage could turn out very happily.

3) Opposition on the part of parents. Is it prudent for a young man or woman to keep company with someone whom the parents seriously dislike, even to the point of showing animosity and threatening to have nothing to do with their own child if he or she marries this person?

Each case of this kind must be solved on its own merits, preferably with the help of a priest or spiritual advisor. Sometimes the parents are completely at fault, because their dislike is based on some unimportant accident such as nationality, looks, background, etc. Sometimes the son or daughter is the one at fault, because the objections of the parents are based on solid grounds pertaining to character or religion. No general rule can therefore be laid down other than this, that the physical attraction sometimes called love should not be permitted to be the sole arbiter in the case. Prudent counsel should be sought from trusted and experienced advisors.
