

YOUTH IDEALS

A GUIDE FOR THE YOUNG CATHOLIC

1. IDEALS.

This word “Ideals”—it’s always cropping up. “You must have an ideal”; “You must live up to your ideals”; “You’ve got to make your ideals live”.

What is an ideal? A plan you want to put into action? Yes, it’s an end in view, far away and high up, but which you want to reach, and which you work hard to reach with all the will-power you’ve got.

This goal is a long way away, not close at hand or round the corner; but you can see it in the distance. You will need a lot of time to get there. And getting there is no mean feat, no valueless accomplishment which doesn’t take will-power. It’s not like that at all—it’s like climbing a mountain; it’s an adventure with great possibilities; it’s a first-class show, as they say in sport.

That is what an ideal is. What is mine? Someone said “an ideal is the noble dream of a young man, come true when he is grown up.” I am a young man. What is the “noble dream” that keeps me on my toes? What ambition have I got of being a perfect man?—perfect as a workman, or perfect in my relations with my neighbour, or perfect in spiritual things. What ambition have I got for the fellows who work with me—for their progress, spiritual and temporal? What ambition have I got for the glory of God?

2. LIFE.

“Life is meant, not to be lived, but to be won (Bazin).

For a long time, the catchword “have a good time” has been fashionable. It means refusing yourself nothing and trying to enjoy every pleasure that’s going.

God has not given us these few years of life on earth that we may follow our own sweet will, as though this world were the only thing. These years are meant for doing what He has put us here for, i.e., His Will—and (which comes to the same thing really), by doing that to secure our own happiness, both here and hereafter. Suppose a workman made a punch, would it be reasonable of him to expect the ‘punch to do the work of a pile-driver? Of course not. Unless a tool is doing the work its designer planned it for, it gets out of order. The same with us.

But it takes a lot of courage to do the Will of God in everything. It means knowing how to win a battle over ourselves in many things, how to set ourselves against evil desires, how to be master of our passions, how to resist sin—at least mortal sin, and venial sin, too, if we’re going to be great-hearted. Life is a splendid thing when there is this heroism in it.

Life doesn’t mean “taking things easy”. Life means winning a battle, a battle first of all over ourselves so as to obtain the victory with Christ and to reign with Him.

3. HOME.

Be there. Be pleasant there. Be helpful there.

Be there — even if “home” means only furnished rooms; even if it’s cold, dingy, and dull; even if there is no air, no light, no space . . . If I have no home of my own and I live in a rented room, there is all the more reason to cling to my personal belongings, poor as they are. On the other hand, if I have a home, what makes it is the family, the people in it.

Be there—but certainly not to bluster, to moan, to whine, to grumble at this person or that. No! be there to be pleasant there, so that the others don’t think it’s a piece of bad luck that I’m in, but a thing to be glad of. Never go in without a smile. My parents and the family have their cares, their worries, their difficulties; if I am going to add my bad temper to their troubles, I am forgetting my duty to the family.

And then, I’ll keep my eyes open at home for chances of making myself useful. There are a number of odd-jobs I can do; putting a bell in order, mending a lock or a cupboard, putting the wireless right, overhauling a sewing machine, chopping firewood, working in the garden in summer. I’m a handy sort of chap—at least I ought to be:

what about giving a helping hand to my father or mother, or to my brothers and sisters? And no grumbling when they want a job done, even when it's a nuisance—especially when it's a nuisance. On the contrary, I'll be only too willing. Better still, I'll offer to do it. My own comfort shall not be my sole object, nor even my chief object. I'll get along all right myself. I must try to see how I can please others, how I can help them, how I can stand by them. Family life does your heart good, when each has this spirit of Christian generosity.

4. MY PARENTS

Be proud of them; respect them; love them.

I'll be proud of them. I'll defend their good name, as though it were my own. I'll never allow any word against them in front of me, even if they are wrong, even if they are not all they might be in the eyes of God, even if they are separated or divorced. They are always my parents. From them I get my life and my name.

Respect them. "Honour thy father and thy mother." That means obeying them in all that is not against what God commands or asks. It means never saying anything to wound or hurt them, particularly in front of the youngsters. It means never making fools of them; never riding rough-shod over them; never being off-hand with them; never answering them casually even if I have been better educated, even if their tastes differ from mine, even if I feel they do not understand me, even if they seem to be wrong.

Love them. By being glad to stay at home, I'll show them that films or football matches or friends have not the same attraction for me as home. Even if I give my people every spare minute, it doesn't come to much. Little as it is, I'll give it generously and ungrudgingly. I'll not be one of those fellows who learn the value of home-life, only when they have to break away from it. Perhaps my parents have very few pleasures; I'll give them at least the happiness of feeling themselves loved. Thus I can be the great joy of their hard lives.

5. TO BE HELPFUL

To my parents; to my friends; to everybody.

To my parents. In Brussels, there are three brothers, working in a book-binders. The eldest is twenty. Every night at home, they run a fatigue-party to fetch water. The pump is fifty yards down the street, and there are ten people in the house, so that they have to carry at least a dozen bucketfuls every night. When there's a job to be done for the family a decent young Catholic doesn't wait to be called upon.

To friends. What can be more annoying than having to lend your bike? If a friend asks me for mine to go on an urgent message—"Certainly, take it!" My tool is better than the next man's—"Here, try mine!"

To the priest. A bell out of order, benches broken by the youngsters, painting to be done, children to be kept in order, congregations to be counted. "Here I am, Father. Let me do it."

To anyone. Open a door for someone; give up your place in a tram; carry a bag for someone who is loaded; be ready to help anyone in difficulties.

In all this remember the words of Our Lord:

"As long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to Me." Generosity, then, and further, the spirit of faith behind it.

6. "WITH PLEASURE."

A fine phrase. "With Pleasure." It means a lot.

Someone wants a job done—"with pleasure." It will take a fearful lot of doing; it will take a good deal out of me; it will mean giving up spare time; it will go against the grain; all that makes no difference—"With pleasure."

At home I am wanted for an odd job: to mend a bell, to put a lock right, to straighten a key, to fix up a rabbit hutch, to mend a hole in the chicken-run—and just as I was going off to the pictures, or Bill was going to call for me. What an awful nuisance! "Come on, now, none of that." Answer this call for help with the magic phrase, "With pleasure."

Joan of Arc used to say, "Take it all in good part." That means: "Look on the bright side of everything." Do as she did. Nothing shall ever get me down. And when things aren't going too well, when I should like nothing better than to throw up the sponge — then particularly I'll remember the pass-word. The shrewd use of this phrase will fill me with happiness and will spread happiness about me—"With pleasure."

At each moment I receive from God Himself all that I am and all that I have. He is always thinking of me and is loading me with His blessings. To be useful and kindly to those He loves is a splendid opportunity for me.

7. TO BE A GOOD PERSON.

That is to say, a good worker, cheerful, obliging, hardy, but not foolhardy, quick in answer if possible, and ready with jokes. But not everyone has the same gifts, and it's silly to lay claim to gifts you haven't got. So, if mine isn't a ready tongue, then I must be simple, and very generous.

Generous, particularly. Someone used to say: Generosity is a crying need, I'm positive of that." That is really catholic. So then: at home, at the club, no hesitation in doing your bit to get someone out of a hole to further the general good, to make the next man's work lighter. Among your fellow workers, be stubborn on behalf of faith and morals. In this matter, there must be no ragging, no ugly hints, no slander on your Catholic name or on your religious practices. The workshop is a place for doing work or for learning how to work, and it was never meant for scoffing at people's beliefs. In all other matters, plenty of go and plenty of fun. Note the difference between nasty horseplay and mere high spirits, before you let yourself go. Don't be touchy about anything and everything. That won't do. If you are firm about these essential things, people will trust and respect you; and the firmer you are, all the more reason to be kind, friendly, and easygoing about everything else.

8. MY BEDROOM.

Not a palace, by any means: a little room right up in the roof or in a corner, without much space or light. And probably I don't even have it all to myself—my brothers, older and younger, share it with me. There are a number of us, and we're not well off; but we're happy all the same. I'm very fond of my bedroom, such as it is; and I'm fond of my corner of it. Like my tool-box at work, it is something that really does belong to me, a place where I can keep my own things.

Naturally there is a crucifix on the wall. If not, why not put one up?

Are there some pictures on the wall, cuttings from magazines, photos of the leading footballers? Why not have some pictures of the leading Catholics, of the great benefactors of the human race? Is there a nice picture of Our Lady? It is just as beautiful as the photo of a film star, but far more inspiring. If I like pictures, I could get myself some decent ones. They would have to be good. They would probably be simple, but there must be an air of distinction about them. These days there are some very beautiful ones about, and quite cheap, too. It's a good thing to get a refining atmosphere if you can.

And then the question of tidiness. Supposing someone chanced to walk into my room when I went out this morning and looked round at the mess I had left. It wouldn't be nice, would it? A slipper in one corner, a scarf in another; trousers lying about; underclothes in a heap. Why? I'll put all that right. I'll be economical and hate a mess: in this way I'll take care of my things.

More important than tidiness in my room is my behaviour. If the walls of my room could speak, what would they have to say? Could they speak well of all my deeds and words?

9. GETTING UP IN THE MORNING.

Speed, modesty, care about thorough cleanliness.

Speed. As soon as it's time to get up, out of bed! No turning over: laziness will suggest many excuses, for instance, that you're tired, "There is still a minute or two. Wait a bit and then hurry." No! It's time now. And try to get into the way of doing every duty perfectly and exactly. Keep true to this ideal of loyal service—don't stray from it for a second. God is waking you up: He wants you to get up. Very well, up you get.

Modesty. Probably I'm not the only one in my bedroom. Thoughtfulness for the youngsters! If they are still asleep and

it's not time for them to get up, I'll make no noise: charity. If they are awake, and can see me, I'll be cautious in my conduct: purity. Even if I am alone, my conduct must always be seemly: naturally, some things are necessary—no scruples; but nothing at all that could lead to sin.

Care about thorough cleanliness. I mustn't wear clothes any old how; nor go out untidy or dirty, without having thoroughly washed my face, hands and teeth (that, by the way, is not a fancy-trick), and without having carefully brushed hair, clothes, and shoes. To be neat and tidy outside is often a sign of being neat and tidy within. And this, too, is good practice at self-denial and at overcoming myself, because it's always easier to let myself go than to look after my appearance. We can't help getting dirty at work—that's one thing; but we can help getting dirty from neglect and lack of care—that's quite another question. I must be careful about this.

10. MORNING AND NIGHT PRAYERS.

I must never begin or end any day without raising my heart to God. If I haven't much time, I'll be brief, but never leave it out. That's flat! No day of my life.

In the morning. I've got to move quickly. I must decide beforehand what I am going to say and stick to that whatever it costs. But indeed I must realise that these short vocal prayers should not be my only ones. If I'm by myself while I'm dressing or going to work, why not keep my thoughts steadily fixed on God or on some scene in Our Lord's life which I might choose the previous night before going to sleep? It would be real prayer, fruitful and profound, to pray about one of the following: those Legion of Mary leaders to be helped, that fellow to contact, that question discussed at the last meeting, that point in the monthly programme to be made sure of, that victory to be won over myself, that missionary to be backed up, those people to be led to the Faith.

With this at the back of my mind, I shall be able during the course of the day to lift up my soul now and again above my work, not with the result that my work is not so good, but with the purpose of making it holy, of giving it a noble motive, of transforming it.

In the evening, I have more time. It's true I'm tired, but what are five minutes out of the day's 1,440? Nothing will persuade me that I can't find five minutes—or 10 or 15—out of the 1,440. I can crowd my mind with holy and good thoughts and ideas. And then, my prayers. I'll get everybody in the room to join in; I'll pray together with my brothers. If they are not in the way of it, and if we don't have family prayers before going upstairs, I'll get them used to the idea little by little. Later on, when I have a family of my own, we'll never miss out family prayers.

11. MY PARISH CHURCH.

Among the chimneys, the tall houses, the angles of the roofs, the scaffolding, the roof-tops, the spire of the parish church stands out clearly, pointing. Amid the monotony of our occupations here below, the steeple is like a finger-post of stone, directing my thoughts: "Think of God. Lift your minds up in this direction away from the earth. Do not let the call of the factory whistle and the roar of machines prevent you from hearing the bell for prayer. Certainly, working for money must take up room in your life, but there is room also for thoughtful prayer—and that has a higher reward."

Has my parish church a place in my life—a cherished place? It was here (or in some church just like it) that Baptism made me a child of God; here, Confirmation made me a soldier of God; here, the Sacrament of Penance puts me back into a state of grace when there is need; here I learn by humble, earnest prayer how not to lose that state of grace. It is here in the church that I am told about the great designs of God in this world and about my own duties. Here I can be fed with the Body of Our Lord, whenever I wish. Here, the Sacrament of Matrimony will make me one for ever with her who will be my companion for this life and for eternity. When I die, they will bring my dead body here to pray over it before the burial.

I will love my church; behave well there; pray well there; visit my Master there sometimes; hear Mass regularly there, go to Communion there as often as possible.

12. SUNDAY.

Sunday is “the day of the Lord.” It should be a more prayerful day, a day of rest and recreation, a day of apostolate and self denial.

A more prayerful day. Each morning throughout the week I have to set off early for work, and I can’t allow myself more than a few minutes to gather my thoughts. During the day, I have only odd seconds to use for prayer. In the evening, I am too tired to give God much more—and God doesn’t mind. On Sunday I am freer: Mass, of course: Holy Communion not missed. Sunday must be for me a day of genuine prayer, not a humdrum exercise, gone through anyhow, without attention, without meaning. I must put all I’ve got into it, making a real effort to unite myself to God, to speak to Him, to tell Him I love Him, to ask Him for all the help I need.

A day of rest and recreation. The Church is right to insist that Sunday should be made holy. She knows that after a week of work the body needs a breathing-space, and the soul needs leisure. But I must keep an eye on the nature of my recreation; check up on the moral tone of the friends and houses where I have to visit; preserve my full independence. I would be wise to go in for open-air amusements like walking or cycling, rather than for indoor amusements like cards, billiards, or films.

A day of apostolate. I ought to make good use of Sunday to prepare myself for the apostolate, by going to retreats or study days. Again, I might make the most of my spare time, by visiting, taking round circulars, or trying out lines of approach. Instead of foolishly throwing away my pocket-money on drink and such like, I should use it for doing good; spend myself for my neighbour, give a friend pleasure; work for the common good.

13. MY MISSAL.

Have I got one? Through a silly fear of what people think, some men and young fellows imagine that it’s childish to use a prayer book in Church. Why? That’s absurd. If you go to Church, you go to pray; if a book helps you to pray, why not use a book? These people don’t go to Mass to pray at all. They go because it’s still “done” in their neighbourhood—a matter of routine or habit. No doubt they have the intention of performing an act of worship, and God is satisfied. But they think that their neighbours sneer at their Church going. So, although they do go, they try to excuse their conduct and to convey the impression that they go, not to pray, but simply because other people go . . . cowardice, idiocy, or simply laziness and ignorance.

My attitude must be quite different—instead of cowardice, etc., a fine pluck. The Mass is the Sacrifice of Calvary made present again. In the Host our Lord continues the whole offering of Calvary. Isn’t it right and fitting and to be recommended above all things that I should unite myself as best I can to His action? Since I realise very well that my faith is not particularly well-informed, wouldn’t it be a good thing for me to take the chance of getting a better idea of the treasures of my religion? I can do this in Church by thoughtfully reading the beautiful liturgical prayers, and by becoming familiar with the successive feasts which are a constant reminder of the big days in Our Lord’s life.

14. MY ROSARY.

The first thing to settle is: Have I got one? If not, I will get one as soon as possible.

If I have got one, do I use it? The Rosary is a prayer, both sublime and simple. To each decade: one Our Father, ten Hail Marys, one Glory Be. The Our Father is the prayer Our Lord taught the Apostles in the Gospel. He often used to tell them that they must pray, must lift up their hearts to God. One day they asked Him: “Lord, teach us to pray.” And Jesus replied: “When you pray, say: “Our Father,” etc. I cannot find a better prayer than that.

Then the ten Hail Marys in the decade. The first part of the Hail Mary is made up of the words of the Angel Gabriel and of St. Elizabeth. When the angel told Our Lady about the part she was to play in the coming on earth of the Son of God, he said: “Hail, full of Grace,” etc. And then, when Our Lady went to tell St. Elizabeth about the coming birth of Our Saviour, St. Elizabeth said: “Blessed art thou among women,” etc. The second part of the Hail Mary was added later by the Church. Can I do better than repeat to Our Lady those beautiful words of praise which declare her glory and our trust?

As regards the Glory Be—it is a prayer which St. Jerome put at the head of a letter to the Pope of his time, St. Damasus. The Pope thought the prayer was so beautiful, that he decided to make Priests say it after every psalm in the breviary. Later, when the use of the rosary spread, the Glory Be was put after each decade.

15. THE PRIEST.

In the eyes of every Catholic, the priest is a man who succeeds the first Apostles and Disciples chosen by Our Lord, and who, like them, has the duty of giving out the three most precious things in the world: the Word of God, the Pardon of God, and the Body of Our Lord in the Holy Eucharist.

One writer went so far as to say: “If you leave a parish twenty years without a priest, the people will worship animals.” The priest helps souls to look higher than the earth, to think sometimes of the life which comes after this.

There are two reasons why the priest should be very dear to me: first, because God has picked him out especially and has called him from his childhood to a work of self-sacrifice, charity, and apostolate; and secondly, because there is more light, more peace, and more tranquility where the priest is.

Often I may hear evil spoken about priests. There is a good deal of calumny and exaggeration in it. Certainly, the priest is not an angel; he is still a man—God has been very merciful in entrusting the priesthood (the threefold charge mentioned above), not to angels who would have seemed too much above us to understand our miserable state, but to human beings who can sympathize with all our weaknesses.

A great spirit of faith, then, and a deep charity: I’ll never allow myself an adverse judgment about this curate, or that parish priest, or about the clergy as a body. If there is ground for criticism in the priest as a man, I shall look only on the sacred office given to him. I’ll never allow an insult to a priest in my presence, nor malicious talk about my parish priest, or about parish priests. In the parish, be always on the side of the priests— a chosen ally.

16. MY CONVICTIONS.

Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, was looking round for a man who was serious minded, not greedy for money, independent in character. Someone recommended to him a young engineer who was at grips with great difficulties.

“I expect him tomorrow at lunch,” said Nobel drily.

The young engineer was there on the second. They sat down to table. Nobel launched into one of those spirited tirades at which he could be brilliant, and he fiercely attacked the idea of religion. The guest went pale. He was a thorough-going Catholic, and the talk was offensive to his convictions. Seeing his distress, Nobel became still more bitter.

Then the engineer could stand no more of it: he made clear what he thought, contradicted his host, refuted him, and hit back without caution. The conversation became heated. Suddenly Nobel let out a roar of laughter and shook hands warmly with his opponent.

“I like you,” he said, “you have a favour to ask, and instead of playing up to me, you fight me. Good! Sincerity means more to you than self-interest. I’ll take you.”

It is a mistake to think that my prospects will suffer, because I am firm and frank about my convictions. On the contrary, from the worldly point of view, this will usually win me the esteem of my equals and my betters, of those, at least, whose esteem is worth having; others don’t matter.

From the supernatural point of view: can God do otherwise than bless my generosity In defending Him, in showing myself in my true colours, in proclaiming my faith? At the same time, if unpleasantness results, well, so much the better. At least I shall have something worth while to offer Our Lord.

17. MY POCKET MONEY.

How shall I spend my money? My parents leave me the balance of my wages, and I can spend it as I please. What shall I do with it?

There are three ways of spending money: the stupid way; the dangerous or bad way; the excellent way. Which way

shall I choose? But surely it's obvious!

The stupid way: public-houses, too many magazines, extravagance in clothes, betting.

The bad and dangerous way: debasing films, certain dance halls, unhealthy papers, bad company.

The excellent way: for the church; help towards Catholic pamphlets; sometimes, perhaps, help to a friend in need; a small alms for the foreign-missions. Thrifty but not miserly, I'll plan wisely to put something on one side for a rainy day and for my future home. I shall be very glad later on to have cut out now that waste or that useless expense. Wisdom, Foresight, Generosity.

18. MY READING.

What must I not read?

Books which are indecent, immoral, and degrading. There's no need to stress that point, it's too clear. Another thing: I have too much respect for myself to sink to those depths, and too much respect for God who, since my baptism, dwells in me.

Books that are dubious, or "shady", as they say; books which put love in a false and stupid light; books which create fantastic dream lands. I've got only a little time for reading: so I'll choose always books that are worth while. I will get information about them, pick and choose, be hard to please. I'll not blindly take the advice of any Tom, Dick or Harry, for he may be already more or less evil-minded, or merely of a different age, or of a different code of morals, or of different surroundings, or of different ideals. In this matter, as in all others, I must preserve my freedom.

What ought I to read?

First, good Catholic books, papers and leaflets. Besides, there is a lot of very good stuff which would be invaluable to me, as a man, as a workman, and as a Christian.

Then, when I want light or improving books, I'll read those which I find by experience are good and useful, getting advice when necessary.

19. DISCIPLINE.

Nothing holds together, and nothing lives without organisation, and organisation itself falls to pieces without discipline.

This is true in all spheres. Lenin himself said, "If the Bolshevik party had not been ruled with a rod of iron, it could not have retained power for two and a half months, to say nothing of two and a half years."

20. THE DISTRICT WHERE I LIVE.

Town or village; a working-class neighbourhood of some sort or other, where my parents live; a dingy group of small houses, all much -the same to look at; or a new housing estate, very neat with its rows of roofs, its bright colours, and its flourishing gardens; or a suburban street, where big lorries rumble past, or crowded trains clatter along it doesn't make any difference. My home is one of a number of houses, whether it's in a pleasant neighbourhood or not, and—am I fond of the district where I live? Do I think about it? Can I see through the brick walls and realise that souls are there, preparing an eternity for themselves? The wail of the factory-sirens, muffled or shrill— can I hear God in them, calling His children to work? And all those people here, working, eating, drinking, sleeping—have I bothered to seek out those who do not live for God, who do not know the Gospel, who must at all costs be brought to Our Lord?

St. Paul said that a bit of leaven was sufficient to make the dough rise; a bit of yeast was sufficient to make liquid ferment. Do I act as leaven or yeast? What difference has my living here made to the district? None at all! . . . How is that, when I've had so many helps and graces given me for the purpose? Why is there no change in the state of affairs? What am I waiting for? Quick! get on with the job. Surely, among the people living in my district (whether it's town, suburb or village), there must be some now who only need the help of another to change their lives. in that street, for instance, there is a fellow who needs me.

21. MY HEART.

I must protect my heart for the girl whom God has picked out for me, in His foreknowledge and His goodness; I must enrich it for her, so as to be able at the right time to give it to her in good earnest.

Protect it. There are enemies inside me and outside me. Inside me: the allurements of passion, evil tendencies. If I feel an attraction towards a girl, I am right to keep it and let it grow, provided it is chaste. Such a feeling comes from God and is intended by Him for His purpose; but I mustn't mix it up with the unsettling desires of impure pleasure. Outside me : temptation can come from obscene or dangerous papers, from fellows already half-way to ruin or thoroughly debased, from evilly exciting films which, always show love in a shameful or purely sensual light.

Enrich it. It is the visible, outward beauty of a girl that first inspires a man to love her. But that is not the whole story. I must understand that beauty of soul is far more precious than beauty of body. The girl, who will one day be my wife and the mother of my children, must have something more to offer than a pretty face or clever make-up. I shall look for, and demand in her, sterling virtues, strength of character, habits of economy, love of work. And that I may be in a position to ask this of her in all fairness, I must see about getting those virtues for myself at once. I must enrich my heart.

Give my heart, at the right time, in good earnest. Someone wrote: "If a man would appreciate the value of his wife during the difficulties of married life, he must have learnt to respect her during the light-hearted days of courtship. If he would understand here delicacy of spirit, the richness of her heart, he must never have desired anything unworthy." That is very true. I must get my heart ready to give her, purifying it and raising it.

22. MY SENSES.

Our Lord said, "Watch." I'll keep a watch over my thoughts, my day-dreams, my imagination. I'll keep a special watch over my senses.

First, over my eyes. I know that sin lives not in "seeing" but in "looking". I must avoid every look that is careless, imprudent, obscene, or even only dangerous. It is a sin already if a fellow deliberately exposes himself to the danger of sin. Yet, I must not torment myself, nor be over-scrupulous; but I will have a proud refinement.

My ears. I must keep my ears stubbornly shut to any remarks which are against faith and morals or which tend to indecency. If I can't make a protest against such talk, I'll have to put up with it, but I can never join in. If I can object (and my age and my courage will often allow me to do so), I'll do it bravely and shut it up without mincing matters. After all, why should we have to be polite to dirt, if people aren't being polite to decency and purity? Oh, no! Change them. Run the risk.

My tongue. I should allow it none of the silly expressions, the coarse, shocking words, the stupid swearing which young people use so much, either to look big, or because they think it's funny. Never a word with a double meaning, or which could lead to evil; never a word against charity or justice; never a word against anyone's good name: on the contrary, I'll take the part of the weak, the slandered, or the absent. If I have to speak strongly about anyone or anything, I won't speak from anger, but only out of love for the truth.

23. MY HANDS

Dirty hands may still be clean. I must avoid anything that can stain their moral cleanliness. Look out! My hands and my eyes are the two things which most easily may lead me into sin.

Clean hands will be charitable hands. It is said of Our Lord in the Gospel that He went about doing good. I must be like Him. I'll give of myself and of mine. I won't count the cost. It will not always be material help that people want. There are more ways than one of giving people a lift up or a helping hand. Let people realise they can always rely on me for help.

The work which God requires of me as the duty of my state is the work of my hands. Let my workman's hand be, or learn to be, the hands of an artist: if it is only driving in a nail, let me do it as perfectly as I can; for one thing, I like a job well and truly done, with a good "finish"; and again, I'll force myself to put all I've got into every job. I'll have a horror

of “more or less” and “roughly”. I must cultivate a taste for the best. I’ll be a good artisan: I’ll become an artist.

24. MY DOORSTEP.

“If each one cleaned his own doorstep, the whole street would be clean.” (French proverb).

Two friends are discussing how to remedy the evils of the day:

A: “The world’s all wrong.”

B: “That’s what I think. Something ought to be done.”

A: “Yes, I’ve been thinking that for some time, but I can’t think of anything practical to do.” -

B: “Someone ought to work up public opinion and think out a plan which would make everybody happy.”

A: “How are you going to do that?”

B: “Goodness knows.”

While they are getting nowhere, along comes a friend of them both. He has his own ideas about enlightening them.

A: “I say; Bill, what would you do to make everyone happy?”

Bill : “So that’s what you’re talking about, is it? You want to reform the world? Fine! But tell me, have you two been to Confession? Did you make your Easter duties?”

A and B are both silent.

Bill continues “Well, begin with that. Reform yourselves first, and then you can think about reforming the world.”

A : “That’s not a bad idea!”

Bill “It’s THE Idea!”

But how do I stand spiritually? How long ago was my last sin? Take yesterday for instance:

How did I fulfil my duties as a Christian? Did I keep my baptismal vows? Talk about reforming others! I must begin with myself! —

25. TO HAVE LIVED.

“When a young man has done a number of idiotic things in his life, they say he has lived a full life. It would be more correct to say that he had lived a full death.” (E. Hello).

When a man gives himself up wholly to his passions, a certain class of literature, by a queer reversal of values, calls it being a man. When a man behaves like a man and resists the evil tendencies within himself, it refers to him as an old woman. In the same way, when a man commits one mortal sin after another, particularly those which ruin body as well as soul, they say “he has lived a full life.” What rubbish! The truth is, he is guilty of repeated suicide.

I shouldn’t allow myself to be taken in by the hypocrisy of certain popular catch-words. The rake will talk about his “conquests” in order to make people believe he’s tough, and will look down on a decent, steady, faithful lad. Which of them is the weaker? Which of them has the better right to despise the other? Actually, we shouldn’t despise anyone, the Gospel forbids it, but we should rather be sorry and stand fast ourselves. When we come across a fellow who has given himself up entirely to vice, we should try to help him out of the spiritual mess which he has let himself fall into. He’s nothing better than a slave. We want true freedom! We will always treasure it, and be a good advertisement for it.

26. MY WALLET

Perhaps it is nothing more than my workman’s insurance card, with which I keep papers and other important things; may be, it’s a worn note-book; or again, it may be a real wallet. It doesn’t matter, it’s the contents that matter, not what contains them.

When men were killed in the war, the Chaplains used to glance through their pocket books. This wasn’t vulgar curiosity, but a deliberate search to see if anything ought to be taken out, before they sent them back to the relatives. There might have been a compromising paper, a letter which no mother or wife would want to read, a photograph there could be no mistaking. This grim search was a most painful job for the Chaplain. It used to throw light on the real natures of the

men: they stood in constant danger. Some of them were well-known for their uprightness, others you would have thought to be perfect, yet the inside view showed many to be sad victims of sin, and most to be weak by nature and pitiable slaves.

The pocket book is the man. Tell me what is in yours, and I will tell you what you are. I'll never slip anything dubious into mine. I'm not a hypocrite, but nothing in my life should be concealed from the light of day.

27. A MISTAKE IN THE POINTS.

Writing of the faults of the growing boy and the young man, a well-known novelist went so far as to say: There is no such thing as a childish prank. They say that the faults and impressions of boys at twelve, thirteen, and fourteen mean nothing, but they actually affect the grown man. It is like switching the points in a signal-box. The movement of the signal-man is slight, but it's certainly not nothing. . . It changes the direction of the whole journey.

In another way and from a point of view closer to the Catholic one: "No one on earth knows what glory can be given to God by a single act of fidelity to grace. On the contrary, no one knows what resisting or even neglecting grace can do to hinder good or bring about disaster."

When a man is gravely tempted, he might be inclined to say: "Just once won't matter; it won't have much effect." But "once" does matter always, and it always has some effect. God grant that these effects do not involve the loss of my soul, or, if it is a question of bad example, the loss of another's soul.

28. MY FUTURE.

The future will be what God will make it, and to a large extent what I shall make it.

Obviously, some things are beyond my foresight and control: I haven't the faintest idea whether my life will be long or short, whether I shall be an invalid or bursting with health. I must be ready for anything. I must leave myself with full trust in God's hands and make everything that happens a proof of my love of Him and a means of becoming a better Christian.

But a great deal of the future depends on me. I shall become what I have made myself. From the work angle, I'll become prominent in my job, only if I work hard now. The same thing from the apostolate angle; I can hardly expect to be a leading Catholic one day, if I am only a second-rate Catholic now. It is the same thing as regards my spiritual life. If I don't try hard now to get virtues, I shall deceive myself into thinking that later on I shall have enough and to spare. Tomorrow is bound up in today. The future will only reflect this present moment.

Yet what am I in this present moment? How did I say my prayers this morning? How did I deal with that temptation just now? Did I welcome that chance of self-denial? The whole of the future lies in each fleeting moment of the present.

29. "AT DEATH ALL IS FINISHED."

So speak those for whom life has no object beyond this present world, for whom neither God nor a future life exists. Existence for them means only a space of years between two voids. Before this life there is nothing; after this life there is nothing. Hence in between, they seize all possible pleasures at whatever the cost.

A Russian writer gave a good description of the state of mind of these poor people. They are like a traveller who was attacked by a tiger in the desert and jumped into a dry well for safety. He climbed down, finding foot-holes in the wall, but he was horrified to see at the bottom a snake rearing its head to strike. So the poor chap didn't dare to get down to the bottom of the well, lest the snake attacked him; and he didn't dare climb up, lest the tiger got him. So he hung on to the branch of a wild bush, growing in a hole in the wall, and clung to it like grim death. But his grip began to weaken and he felt he would soon have to let go; but he kept on clinging. . . . His blood ran cold when he noticed two mice starting to crawl on the branch to which he clung and to gnaw at it. When in horror he turned his head away from this sight, he noticed on the leaves of the bush some drops of honey left by wild bees, and with a sigh he stretched forward, put out his tongue, and slowly licked the honey.

As for myself, I know that before my life there is God, from Whom I came and from Whom everything comes. After

this life, there is God still, to Whom I am going and Who has granted me this period on earth, not to snap up greedily any and every pleasure, but to prepare for endless happiness in Heaven by practising some self-denial here. Not to believe is a terrible thing . . . it drives people inevitably into rebelling. Help these unfortunate people to believe.
