

THE CHRISTIAN HOME, PART 2

CHAPTER IV: Good Reading in the Home

Culture an Ally of Religion

BECAUSE of the great emphasis that the Church incessantly lays upon the supreme importance of the supernatural goods and objects of life, a Catholic might easily be led to the conclusion that all merely natural attainments are to be despised and neglected. Such a conclusion would be unwarranted, as was pointed out to the present writer himself, when, as a small boy, he protested that there was no use in learning grammar, because one 'didn't need to know grammar to get to Heaven.' While it is quite true that the possession of sanctifying grace and of the supernatural virtues is of such tremendous importance that all other things of earth pale into insignificance by comparison; while we must admit that a rude and unlettered but upright and religious man will fare better on the day of judgment than the educated but unprincipled villain who passes in the eyes of the world for a refined gentleman; while, in fine, it is undeniable that genuine virtue can exist without the conventional graces of society, and that faultless manners do not imply interior worth; yet it is none the less certain that culture of mind as well as urbanity of speech are powerful allies of religion; that virtue will show to better advantage when coupled with good breeding; and that purely natural gifts can be supernaturalized and made the medium of the rarest Christian virtue.

For a Christian, therefore, to set at naught the natural virtues and secular learning is not only wrong but foolish as well. Even in God's own dispensation, the natural is always made the basis of the supernatural. Hence the true Christian policy is not to belittle the natural, which is also from God, but to cherish it and exploit it, and, by directing it towards higher ends, invest it with a supernatural character.

I. Value of Taste for Beauty

It is in view of this splendid teamwork that can be done by culture when yoked with religion, that I do not hesitate to advocate good reading in the home first of all for the purpose of cultivating a taste for beauty. A man may, it is true, love God with his whole heart without appreciating the beauty of an ode by Francis Thompson, a melody by Gounod, a statue by Michelangelo, or a painting by Raphael. But just as philosophy, which is a natural science, deserves to be styled the handmaid of theology; so also taste, or the ability to appreciate the beauties of nature and art, may be made subservient to religion or to the love of God. In other words, if theology is aided by philosophy because the object of both these sciences is truth, of the former supernatural, of the latter natural; then taste, whose object is natural beauty, will be a suitable ally of the love of God, whose object is divine beauty.

Beauty of Virtue

Let me illustrate this by a comparison. A human passion, such as anger, fear, love, is something indifferent, that is, in itself neither good nor bad. If anger is directed towards a proper object and kept within proper bounds, it is something good. It helps to intensify one's hatred of evil. Now a like effect is achieved by the capacity to appreciate beauty. There is nothing in man more beautiful than grace and virtue—than Charity, Faith, and Hope, than purity, humility, meekness; than fortitude in danger, forgiveness of injuries, cheerfulness amid suffering and pain. Hence, the more we have learned to appreciate what is beautiful, the more can our love of virtue be intensified; for by viewing virtue not only as something useful and obligatory but also as something beautiful, we shall have an additional reason for loving it, and we shall strive with greater eagerness to possess it.

As I shall devote this chapter not to a discussion of the beautiful arts in general but only to setting forth the reasons why Catholics should read good literature, the practical question to ask here is: How can a taste for good literature or good reading be acquired? The answer is: In the same way as any other taste is acquired. How does one acquire a taste for

oysters or olives? By eating them. The way to acquire a taste for good books is by reading them.

Making Duty a Pleasure

Once a taste for good literature has been acquired, it will be of the greatest help in forming the habit of good reading; and hence parents cannot begin too early to cultivate this taste in their children and thus lay the foundation of the reading habit. To a certain extent, reading is a duty in our day; and nothing will make the fulfilling of this duty more agreeable than the ability to appreciate good books and well-written articles. It is much the same with reading as with eating. Few people would likely eat enough to preserve their health, if they had no relish for food. And even though we eat for the honor of God, as St. Paul exhorts us to do, it is when we have an appetite that we derive the most beneficial results from eating. So, too, it is with mental food. If we take pleasure in reading, we shall peruse many a useful book and many an informing article that we should otherwise not even look at. And even when we read from a sense of duty, we profit more by it if it gives us pleasure as well.

Refining Effect of Good Reading

Closely akin to good taste or refinement of mind is refinement of character; and this, too, is furthered by good reading. The reading of good literature has the same effect on one's character as the association with good and wise companions. A writer's best thoughts, most noble emotions, and finest imagery enter into a good book or good piece of literature; and the reader's character cannot but benefit, even though unconsciously, by coming into such intimate contact with them. The good thoughts kept in the storehouse of the mind become, sometimes even long after the author is forgotten, the mainspring of good deeds; the noble feelings strike a sympathetic chord in the reader's heart and attune it to lofty aspirations; the vivid pictures leave an indelible impress on the imagination and thus help to preserve both the ideas and the sentiments. Even as a handkerchief that is kept for a time in a perfumed casket takes on a delicate fragrance, so is a man's character sweetened by the reading of good literature. Especially is this true of books that depict the lives of great and holy men and women; for in such books we have in addition to the excellent thought content the inspiring example of real human beings who were the very embodiment of the noblest ideals.

A Splendid Recreation

Nor may we overlook the great benefit that good reading offers merely as a source of recreation. The ability to derive pleasure from good reading opens up avenues of wholesome recreation that would otherwise remain forever closed. We are so constituted that we must have relaxation of some kind; yet as rational beings and above all as Christians we should beware of choosing such forms of recreation as simply kill time. It is an awful thing to waste time, each moment of which can purchase the pearl of an eternal reward. And as we shall have to render an account of every idle word, so we shall have to give an account also of the use we have made of our time. Now there is no finer intellectual pastime than reading; no more entertaining companionship than a good author. It is true that reading always implies a certain amount of exercise of the mental faculties, and hence work; but what rational recreation does not require activity of one kind or another? Most of our recreations consist essentially in a diversion; not in a change from work to idleness, but in a change from one kind of activity to another: from manual work to mental work or contrariwise; or even from one kind of physical or intellectual activity to a different kind in the same order. Thus a cobbler, who does manual labor indoors all day, finds recreation in doing a little gardening in the evening; while a bookkeeper or stenographer, or even a student, after doing brainwork all day, nevertheless often recreates himself by working out crossword puzzles or writing verses at night. Far from being an objection to reading as a means of recreation, the mental activity implied in reading should rather be an inducement, since it stamps reading as recreation of a high order.

“Movies” No Substitute for Reading

A more subtle objection to reading as a recreation is advanced in our day. So many literary masterpieces, we are told,

may now be seen represented by moving pictures that there is no need of reading the originals, since seeing the “movie” affords just as excellent a pastime. Whoever holds such a view labors under a gross illusion. Even if the literary work is only a novel—and hence one of the lowest forms of literary art,—some of the very finest elements are totally lost when it is reproduced as a movie; e.g.: the descriptions of character, the dialogues, the beauties of diction, the various figures of speech, and above all the beautiful thoughts sentiments, and images in which every truly literary work abounds. Take a moving picture like “Fabiola,” which cost an untold amount of labor and expense and was proclaimed to be a picture of exceptional merit. For sheer artistry it stands infinitely below Cardinal Wiseman’s great masterpiece from which it is taken. And as for edification, educational value, interest of narrative and charm of character, almost any three successive chapters of the book are worth more than the entire picture. And the same is true of any literary masterpiece. The moving picture most assuredly has its place in the field of education as well as recreation; but it can never fill the place occupied by literature in either of these fields.

Reading for Instruction

As far as the religious life of the home is concerned, by far the most important aim and fruit of reading is instruction. There are laymen who may claim with some justice that their tastes and characters are already formed, and that they do not need to read to improve them; but there is none that can truthfully say that he is beyond the need of instruction. When I speak of reading for the purpose of instruction, I do not mean solely for the sake of learning something new, but also for the sake of refreshing, confirming, and clarifying the knowledge we already have. The storehouse of the mind is the memory; but in our avidity to learn facts, and in our endeavor to acquire knowledge without taking pains, we often stack this storehouse with things in such disorder and confusion that we cannot find them when we want them. In other words we forget. The knowledge really exists hidden away in the recesses of the mind, but we are unable to recall it; or can do so only by dint of long and hard racking of our memory. This shows the truth of the saying that, as regards many things at least, we do not so much need to be told as to be reminded. We must be reminded again and again until the knowledge becomes readily available at our beck and call.

Deepening One’s Religious Knowledge

It is true that religious instruction is imparted in church and in the Catholic school; but even supposing the most thorough Catholic schooling and the attentive hearing of a weekly sermon, no average Catholic is beyond the necessity of improving his knowledge of religion by frequent reading. It stands to reason that religious knowledge acquired when the mind is still immature is capable of increase, of widening and deepening as a person grows older. And grown-up Catholics need a far more reasoned and more perfect grasp of the truths of their religion; not only in order to strengthen their Faith amid the dangers of an ungodly world, but also in order to defend it against the attacks of non-Catholics with whom they daily come in contact. For this reason it is important that they be reminded of the truths of their religion not only once a week but daily; that what their pastors tell them from the pulpit be repeated to them in different form by laymen like themselves; that they learn how to apply the standard of religion and the moral standards of the Church to the changed conditions of modern life and to the new problems that are being discussed; that examples be frequently placed before their minds of sterling Catholic men who held Catholic principles and fearlessly put them into practice in business, in politics, as well as in their professional, social, and private life; that they be kept informed of the most noteworthy local, national and international events affecting the Church; in a word, that they be kept abreast of the times in all important Catholic matters.

II

The good results and advantages derived from reading which I have here set forth, should prove a sufficient inducement to anyone to cultivate the reading habit, and furnish a satisfactory answer to the question why one should read. Another question, a question of more practical importance, is: What should we read? My answer will be twofold.

We should not read what is dangerous or injurious but what is wholesome and useful.

Drinking Filthy Water

If a doctor would give a lecture explaining and praising the highly beneficial effects of the frequent use of water for drinking, washing and bathing, none of his hearers surely would understand him to speak of the use of any but clean and pure water.

The same is to be understood of what I have said of the good effects of reading. The water that we drink and the food that we eat do not more truly enter into our system than what we read enters into our mind. Should we, then, not be at least as particular about what we read as about what we eat and drink? How fastidious many people are nowadays about the cleanliness of their bodies! How much time and care do they not devote to bathing; to removing blemishes; to rendering and keeping the skin soft and smooth! And what vast sums of money do they not spend on fine soaps and creams and powders and other cosmetics, only to keep that corruptible body of clay sweet and clean! And yet these same people, who would shrink with horror from drinking filthy water or from bathing in a polluted stream, do not hesitate to read things that fill the mind with sordid ideas, stain the imagination with filthy images and stir up impure emotions in the heart. The mind can be soiled just as easily as the body. As you cannot touch pitch without being defiled by it, so neither can you avoid besoiling your mind, if you allow it to tread the slippery paths of unclean literature.

Sugar-coated Poison

Nor is the danger of defiling and corrupting the mind to be found only in writings that are pronouncedly immoral or irreligious. Disease germs may prove fatal just as well when taken into the system in wholesome food as when received alone from contact; and poison is poison whether taken straight or with a coating of sugar. There is a vast amount of literature in our day,—books, magazines, newspapers,—that is more or less infected with the germs of moral disease and the poison of unbelief; and it is the more dangerous because the harmful matter is contained amid a deal of harmless matter, or concealed under a false show of humanitarianism, patriotism, equity, justice and the like. We must not forget that all literature, in the main, breathes the spirit of those that produce it; and as the great bulk of literature that appears daily is the product of religiously indifferent, agnostic and worldly minds, it quite naturally breathes the spirit of religious indifferentism, agnosticism and worldliness; and, say what you will, such literature is dangerous to ordinary Catholics because its spirit is contagious.

Source of Unchristian Views

Or whence is it that so many Catholics have decidedly unchristian and worldly views on certain subjects? Without doubt from seeing these views expressed and plausibly set forth, or simply assumed as self-evident, in current non-Catholic writings. The views that Catholic young folk often entertain in regard to marriage and courtship evidently come from this source. Some columnist in a daily paper dispenses advice to lovers, and it is accepted and acted on even though it runs counter to the warnings of confessor and pastor. In like manner another writer devoid of Christian principles descants daily on such weighty topics as evolution, capital punishment, free will, parental authority, self-repression, education, canons of art, the fashion, science and religion; and from the very cocksureness of the author, his dicta are widely accepted just as of old the answers of an oracle.

Unchristian Outlook on Life

To keep your mind sweet and clean and to prevent the purity of your Faith from becoming gradually defiled, I would advise you not to read the popular non-Catholic fiction of the day—the short stories and serial stories that appear in the daily papers and in non-Catholic magazines, as well as most of the non-Catholic novels that have appeared in recent years. I am far from maintaining that all this fiction is wholly bad, or that not even now and then something will appear that is wholly above criticism. The point I am trying to make is that most of this literature reflects an unchristian outlook on life;

that the characters it depicts speak and act in a manner that makes this unchristian outlook attractive; and that frequent reading of such literature, just like intimate association with unbelievers, will by and by lead even a Catholic to adopt something of that same outlook and, all unconsciously, allow it to influence his actions.

Bad Company in Fiction

Indeed, in some respects, the mental association with the unchristian and worldly-minded characters in the secular fiction of the day is far more dangerous, because far more intimate, than association with such characters in real life. In real life one's contact with them is usually limited to business affairs, social gatherings, or at the most to private interviews; but in the world of fiction it extends often to the characters' most secret actions and even to their most hidden thoughts. Especially in the realistic stories of our day, there is no sanctum whither the reader is not permitted to follow the characters. He not only associates with them but mentally re-lives their lives, thinks their thoughts, is imbued with their philosophy of life, stirred by their passions, and is a secret witness of all their actions. There is no getting away from the fact that frequent reading of such literature must, in the long run, have a baneful effect on the reader's mind and character. Hence whoever is in earnest about keeping his mind and heart uncontaminated, will regard the entire field of present-day non-Catholic fiction and popular magazines, as outside the range of his reading.

Catholic Periodicals Superior

I admit that this may seem unreasonable to those who have unthinkingly followed the great crowd without observing whither they have gone and whither they are tending. I am even willing to admit that it would be too much to ask you to give up the non-Catholic magazines if there were nothing to offer you in their place. But there is an abundance of Catholic periodical literature not only equally good but better. Mind, I do not say better from every point of view. There may be and no doubt are points in which some Catholic periodicals are inferior; but it is equally true that there are points in which they are decidedly superior, chief among these points being the thought-content, tone and spirit. And since these latter points certainly outweigh any slight advantage that some non-Catholic periodicals may have in point of literary finish, it may be said without hesitation that, all things considered, present-day Catholic periodicals are better than the non-Catholic ones.

Unhealthy Appetites

The great trouble is that the relish for really good reading has to a great extent disappeared; and even many supposedly practical Catholics have got to the point where they no longer care for Catholic writings because the latter lack the sensationalism of the non-Catholic press. This is evident from the class of papers and magazines that these Catholics habitually read. It is not the high-class papers and periodicals that one finds in their homes, but such as appeal to the less noble instincts in man. Nor is it lack of literary excellence that they deplore in Catholic books and magazines. The stock complaint is that they are too dry; that they lack "punch" or "pep" or whatever the current slang word happens to be for that peculiar kind of spiciness which they imagine to be necessary to make a work interesting. But the fault really lies in themselves and not in Catholic literature. It is an unhealthy appetite that is appeased only by highly seasoned food; and such Catholics as have acquired a craving for spicy literary food can set themselves right again only by denying themselves such food and earnestly striving to develop a taste for more wholesome literature.

Choking the Good Seed

Deep down in his heart, I am convinced, every sincere Catholic has a love for the better things in literature. It is an essential part of the Catholic mind. But in many cases this love has not been developed. Like the good seed of the sower in the Gospel, it has been choked by the more abundant and superficially more attractive output of worldly literature. If from early childhood on, parents would allow their children to have only good books and magazines, their children would develop a taste that would endure throughout their adult life. Instead of doing that, many parents bring such trash as the

metropolitan Sunday newspapers into their homes and themselves explain the miscalled “funnies” to their children who are unable to read. Doubtless there are many among my readers who have thus, without much fault of their own, become prejudiced against Catholic reading matter. To them I say: Give Catholic reading a fair trial. Select a number of Catholic books and periodicals and determine to read them to the exclusion of all others for one month. If you do that with a good will and an open mind, I feel sure that at the end of the trial you will be so convinced of the superior benefits derived from Catholic reading that your only regret will be that you have been so long a stranger to that wellspring of wholesome thought and noble inspiration.

A Parental Duty

As you are mainly responsible, dear fathers and mothers, for the kind of taste for reading that your children develop, let me urge upon you the duty of providing an ample supply of Catholic magazines, books and papers in your homes. You cannot be content with one Catholic paper or magazine; you should have at least three or four; something of a devotional and something of a miscellaneous character; and something, too, for every member of the family. While many Catholic periodicals have special departments for the young, there are excellent Catholic publications devoted exclusively to juvenile readers, and one of these should be taken by every family that is still blessed with youthful members. And if the subscriptions should seem too expensive, remember that it is a false economy to starve your children’s minds while you spend more than is necessary for the feeding and clothing of their bodies. Far better would it be to retrench somewhat on expenditures for creature comforts and fine clothes than to save a few dollars by failing to provide your children with abundant and wholesome mental food. Besides, if you discontinued taking non-Catholic papers and magazines you could easily afford to take Catholic ones.

Good Catholic Books

While it is highly important nowadays to read Catholic periodicals, the very best Catholic thought is ordinarily still found in books—books that are the product of years of study and labor; books that have stood the test of time and have been handed down as a precious heirloom to posterity. For a birthday or Christmas present parents cannot do better than to present their children with a good book. Start early by giving a picture book to the children who have not yet learned to read. And let them be beautiful books, well-bound so that they will last; and thoroughly wholesome and edifying, so that they will be worth preserving. If you would make it a rule to give each child one book a year, a very respectable family library would gradually be established that would be a source of pleasure as well as of instruction for many years. A great advantage of a book over a periodical is that the book can more easily be preserved and will be read again and again; and thus its contents finally become part and parcel of the reader’s mind.

Not Only Story Books

In purchasing books for the home or for their children, let parents not imagine that only books of an entertaining nature are suitable. They should occasionally make them a present also of books of a more solid character—books of instruction on the truths of our holy religion; books dealing with the moral problems of the present day; books of piety and devotion that explain how even the laity can lead a life of perfection and of closer union with Christ. There is a vast amount of such popular religious literature in existence, and it is daily growing more extensive. Nor is the cost such as would prevent any ordinary family from having a goodly supply in its home. While good Catholic story-books may also edify and indirectly also improve one’s religious knowledge, it is mainly books that deal expressly with religious and moral subjects that are the main helps which parents should avail themselves of to inculcate in their children the principles of truly Catholic conduct and solid piety.

III. The Best Place for Reading

There remains yet one more question to answer: Where should we read? I answer, in the home. While persons who

must travel far by street-car or by train to their place of work can profitably employ the time in reading, the home is usually the best place in which to do one's principal reading. To be able to read with understanding and profit and even with pleasure, a certain amount of leisure and quiet is necessary, and this can mostly be had at home. I speak from experience when I declare that the presence of children does not necessarily interfere with home reading. I was one of the three youngest children in our family, and although we were normally noisy, our parents used to read practically every evening. Sometimes we would be occupied with our school tasks; sometimes we would be playing; and as years went by we usually formed part of the reading circle ourselves. For a mother who has several small children the problem is less easy; but the children do sleep sometime, and then is the mother's opportunity. Can she not take up a book or magazine while putting the baby to sleep? And could she not even keep the children quiet by half reading half narrating a story to them?

Why Mothers Should Read

This is one of the main reasons why mothers should not neglect to read; namely, to be able to instruct and entertain their children. Stories from the life of Christ; the biographical parts of the Old Testament; the lives of the saints afford an endless source of excellent matter for the entertainment and education of the young, and it would be a pity if any mother, from failure to refresh her memory by reading, would be unable to turn this source to good account. When the children themselves are old enough to read, it is important that the parents set them a good example; for if the parents themselves do not read Catholic literature, they can hardly expect their children to do so.

Supervision Necessary

This brings me to another reason why reading should be done in the family circle. It is a strict duty of parents to watch over the reading of their children, and not only of the younger ones but of all that are in the household; and such supervision cannot be exercised unless the children do their reading where their parents can see them. As in most other things, so also in the choice of reading matter, children of school age are unable to decide what will be good for them, and hence their parents must make the selection for them. But even the older children must be watched lest they borrow or buy books or magazines the reading of which would do them great harm. Many a wayward youth was started on the downward path by the reading of bad literature. Hence it would be seriously sinful negligence on the part of parents not to exercise a careful censorship over the reading of their children.

Theodore Roosevelt's Example

Besides exercising great vigilance to keep improper literature out of the hands of their children, fathers and mothers should also make a free but discreet use of their parental authority to induce their children to read certain books or articles that are of special importance to them and to demand an account of their perusal. A very fine practice is to have a child read a short piece, say one of Aesop's fables, and then give it in its own words, or to learn a few lines of poetry by heart. The late President Theodore Roosevelt tells in one of his letters, written while he was in the White House, that, on one occasion when his wife was absent, he had to take her place, listen to the children recite a poem and award them a nickel in case they knew it well. This custom might well be imitated by Catholic parents. Even if the pecuniary award be omitted, the children will be amply rewarded by the benefit they derive from the practice. But they cannot be expected to do such things of their own accord. Play has more attraction for them than reading or learning by heart, at least until they have acquired a taste for more intellectual pastimes.

Hence their parents should accustom them to devote some time every day to good reading, and they will thus acquire a habit that will be to them a source of much joy and many blessings.

The Home Reading Circle

The last reason I wish to mention why reading should be done in the home, is that it serves as an additional reason for

staying at home and thus fosters home life. Like family prayer, the family reading circle should be a cherished institution in every Christian home. How happy and easy are the hearts of those parents whose children, large and small, are gathered with them around the library lamp, each one intent on his or her own book, paper, or magazine. Knowing that what the children are reading is wholesome (for they will tolerate only such reading matter in the home) they know that they are usefully occupied; and their hearts will not be racked with anxiety, as is often the case when the children are absent from home.

For the same reason, parents should not allow their children to frequent public libraries and reading rooms. Apart from the grave danger of their reading harmful literature in such places, the practice also tends to disrupt home life. The home is the proper place for the children to read as well as for the principal reading of all the members of the family. When one member of the family is at the theatre, another at his club, a third and a fourth out joy-riding, it is quite natural that the others (if there be any) will be tempted to neglect their reading also and seek amusement elsewhere than in the home. It were well, therefore, if several evenings a week were set aside especially for the home reading circle, so that at least on these evenings each one would profit by the presence and good example of the others.

Preserving Old Books

And let me say a word in favor of keeping old books in the family and handing them down from generation to generation. Many a one who gave away his picture books, scrap-books and nursery rhymes when he grew up, has later regretted that he no longer possessed those books for the entertainment of his own children. So I say, let the books remain in the family, and let each one take his or her books along when the children leave their parents to found new homes. The books would sometimes need to be bound anew; but it would be an added delight for the little ones to know that their father or mother had paged the same books in their childhood; and the parents or grandparents themselves would undoubtedly find great pleasure in viewing again with the little tots the selfsame picture books and illustrated nursery tales that charmed them when they were small.

Yes, how we were charmed by beautiful stories, beautiful pictures, beautiful toys when we were small! Then the whole world seemed beautiful. But how drab, how commonplace it appears to us now. How full of evils it is, and how deeply do we deplore our powerlessness to do away with them.

A Paradise of Books

Yet there is a world from which we can banish all these evils—the world of books. Or rather, by cautious elimination and judicious selection from the plentiful material on hand, we can fashion for ourselves a little world, aye, a little paradise of books in our own homes. And thither we can repair daily to enjoy its pure and bracing air, its lovely change of scene and the delightful companionship of its distinguished men and women. Happy we if we have builded for ourselves such a literary garden of Eden and habituate ourselves, like our first parents, to walk therein with God. We cannot, it is true, see His face or hear the sound of His voice; yet He will oftentimes speak to us none the less distinctly through the medium of the printed page;—raising our thoughts above the petty affairs of daily life, broadening our outlook, correcting our views, calming our fears,—in a word, throwing a glow of Heaven's light and peace on the things of earth, and thus heartening us with brighter visions to take up anew the tedious tasks of this workaday world.

CHAPTER V: Harmony in the Home

WHENEVER two or more persons are engaged in an undertaking, the importance of harmony for success is universally recognized. Thus if two persons set out on a tour by boat and plan to do their own sailing or rowing, they must agree as to the management of their craft, the route to be taken and their destiny. Otherwise their projected tour will be but the occasion of endless contentions and difficulties, will get them nowhere, and perhaps even end in disaster.

The Married Couple's Destiny

Such precisely is the situation of a young married couple that has launched out on the sea of matrimony. By most solemn vows, they have bound themselves to make the journey through life together. But what is the destination of that journey? What is the nature and purpose of the marriage contract into which they have just entered? What duties devolve upon them by virtue of that contract? What attitude must they take on the question of having children? And in the event that they have children, what obligations have they towards them, and how are these obligations to be fulfilled?

Superficial Harmony

These are questions which every serious-minded couple must be ready to answer, and on which they must be in substantial agreement, if they wish to live in peace and happiness and make a success of their wedded life. I say, if they wish to make a success of their wedded life; for they might live in harmony and attain to a certain measure of earthly happiness even without agreement on the aforementioned questions,—but only at the cost of the real success of their state of life. Thus they might get along in harmony if they agreed to disregard entirely the question of life's destiny and of a future life. In like manner, they might get along harmoniously if, despite decided views or convictions on certain questions; e.g. that of the artificial limitation of the family, one of the two would yield in all practical points to the will of the other. That would be harmony on the surface, harmony in practice, harmony through compromise or even the abandonment of principle, but not that complete, deep-seated harmony of thought and action flowing from the acceptance of the same principles in all essentials, which should be the desire and aim of every Christian husband and wife.

There is no need of perfect agreement in nonessentials; and it is doubtful whether complete accord in every particular would even be desirable. For, while a similarity of tastes and talents, of aversions and hobbies might add to the harmony of wedded life, a difference of likes and dislikes in some things offers a better opportunity for the one to supplement the other.

Any couple that accepts the teachings set forth in the foregoing chapters and adopts them as a form of life will I am sure, enjoy in its home the blessing of harmony in fullest measure. Yet, as there are two kinds of disharmony fraught with very especial danger to the family, which are nevertheless quite frequently disregarded, they may well be made the subject of a most emphatic warning and a more extended instruction.

A United Front

The first of these is disharmony, or the lack of unity, in the exercise of parental authority. Children are obliged by the fourth commandment to honor and obey their parents; and parents are required by that selfsame commandment to train their children to become men and women of character and virtue. But if children are to obey, there must be an understanding between the persons who issue the commands; and if the father and mother are to train their children, they must agree as to the object and method of training to be pursued. Self-evident as this principle must appear to every thinking person, it is nevertheless a principle that is often disregarded in practice. The foundation on which the training of children must rest is parental authority; but if that authority is at odds with itself because of opposition between the persons in whom it is vested, the entire fabric reared upon it will be weak and unsteady. In their joint relations to their children, as the divinely constituted bearers of domestic authority, parents must invariably present a united front. Whatever differences of opinion, of personal likes or dislikes they may have, in their dealings with their children these differences must recede into the dark background; so that the children will not even suspect that any such disagreement exists, and in consequence will not be tempted to play one against the other or to appeal from the one to the other.

A Second Helping of Pie

To illustrate by a very common example how easily this principle can be violated, let us suppose that the family is seated at table and little Johnny asks his mother for a second piece of pie. Since he had declined to partake of some other more wholesome but less savory foods, his mother very properly answers, "No." A little later, taking advantage of his

mother's absence in the kitchen, Johnny repeats his request to his father, who replies: "Here, you can have my piece, Johnny. I don't care for it anyhow." By acting thus, the father definitely takes sides with the boy against his mother; weakens her authority; neglects an opportunity of training his child; and sows the seed of discord between himself and his wife. The circumstance that the father gave his own piece of pie to his boy does not change the situation. The mother did not refuse the lad's request from a desire to economize by saving a piece of pie, but from the desire to train him to habits of self-control and Christian moderation.

A Mutual Understanding

Instances of this kind that call for co-operative action on the part of the parents are of almost daily occurrence in families where there are children. Being pleasure-loving like all human beings and as yet too young and inexperienced to value the merits of self-abnegation and restraint, children are everlastingly begging to have this or that, to go here or there, to be permitted to enjoy this or that diversion or amusement. And not only young children present this domestic problem; the problem persists as long as the children are subject to the authority of their parents, and often calls for the most cautious handling when the growing boys and girls have become adolescent sons and daughters. In every stage of the problem, the only proper policy for the parents to adopt is to present a united front wherever the children are concerned. There must be a distinct mutual understanding that one will support the other, and that all important permissions granted to the children by one parent are dependent on the consent of the other. "We will see what mother thinks about it"; "Did mother say you might?"; "I must first talk it over with father" are standing replies which parents will ever have ready if they are bent on promoting the welfare of their children and maintaining harmony in their home.

Strengthening Mutual Love

By thus upholding each other's authority in the presence of the children, father and mother not only increase their children's respect for their parents and each other's influence with the children, but also knit still more firmly the bond of mutual love that makes husband and wife one moral personage. For each single reference to the other's authority is a gracious acknowledgment of the other's equal rights and responsibility in the marriage partnership, and a tacit renewal of the wedding day agreement to live as two souls with but a single thought.

Nor will it suffice for the one parent to uphold the other in word while at the same time making no secret from the children that he or she would much rather side with them. It would be hardly less harmful, for example, than open hostility for the father to say: "I'm awfully sorry; but you know how mother is. It's useless for me to say 'Yes' when she says 'No'."

The Chief Disciplinarian

Right from the beginning, therefore, there should be an agreement between the parents on all important questions that concern the management and education of the children. And when new problems arise, or when the parents disagree as to how best to apply their principles to certain practical cases they should discuss the matter out of hearing of the children; and only after coming to an agreement should they inform the children what they have to do. Usually the regulation of most disciplinary matters pertaining to the domestic circle is best left to the mother. She is with the children much more than the father and is less likely to yield to their ill-advised pleadings from selfish motives. The father, returning home from a day's work, is often just as much in a mood to enjoy his children as they are eager to enjoy him; and, unless he is guided by the mother's wishes and rules of discipline for the children, he is very apt, from sheer paternal affability, to undo all the mother's efforts in training the children, make her feel bad, and perhaps even discourage her efforts in the future. For that reason, before conceding the youngsters any privileges on his return home, he should inquire of their mother how they behaved themselves during the day; whether a ride or walk in a park or some other treat would be in order; and the like.

For father and mother always to take each other into consideration, always to stand together like the two pillars of an

arch, is to make family life infinitely more agreeable, to share equally its burdens and responsibilities, and in truly constructive fashion to further the training of their children. But if the parents disagree and the children become aware, as they soon will, that they can cajole the one parent into siding with them against the other, then parental authority will be sadly weakened, and domestic harmony will soon give way to a state of tension, then to ill-concealed dissension, and at last to open strife.

The Head of the Family

In case the parents cannot come to an agreement in private on a particular question, then it is the duty of the wife to submit to her husband, so long as no violation of moral or religious duty is involved; for St. Paul says: "Let women be subject to their husbands as to the Lord; because the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the Church" (Eph. 5, 22). Oftentimes, however, it would be wiser for the husband to yield to the wishes of his wife when there is no principle at stake; and better still perhaps, if the matter does not call for immediate settlement, to seek the advice of the pastor or of some other God-fearing and experienced friend.

Main Cause of Disharmony

The other kind of disharmony that calls for a special warning is disharmony or the lack of unity in religion. It is easy to understand how many of the difficulties of maintaining harmony in the home are removed or lessened, when husband and wife are united by the profession and practice of the true Faith. And by the same token it should be easy to understand that, apart from serious character defects or moral lapses in one of the parents, there is no more frequent cause of dissension and discord in the home than the lack of unity in religion. Yet many Catholics fail to realize this fact, and in consequence make the attempt, which nine times out of ten is doomed to failure, of rearing the stalwart structure of a truly Catholic home on the cleft foundation of a mixed marriage.

A Lawyer's Sad Experience

The following quotation from a letter published in "Our Sunday Visitor" gives the experience with mixed marriages of just one single lawyer; but it will no doubt open the eyes of many of my Catholic readers.

"As an active practicing lawyer in Chicago, handling divorce cases along with my general practice I have had considerable opportunity to make investigation as to the causes of domestic strife leading to divorce among Catholic clients where either party married a non-Catholic; and I am now forced to inquire of you what is being done, if anything, to prevent mixed marriages by Catholic men and Catholic women.

"I ask this question only after having handled approximately five hundred divorce cases and cases involving annulment and separate maintenance, wherein one of the parties was of the Catholic Faith; and wherein I have found that this difference in religious belief was fundamentally the cause of almost all of the discontent, sorrow, and trouble which led to divorce or separation; and that in ninety percent of the mixed marriage cases, the Catholic was confronted with the question of abstaining from receiving the sacraments and living with the spouse, or of separation, in order to be able to follow the teachings of our Faith on the matter of marriage duties and obligations."

A Basic Disagreement

But why does a mixed marriage almost inevitably sow the seed of discord in the home? Because the Catholic party accepts and is obliged to accept the teachings of the Church as the only true standard of moral and religious conduct in every phase of life; whereas the non-Catholic party does not accept that standard. From the very outset, then, there is a basic disagreement concerning the most important thing in life. From the very ground up there is a breach between husband and wife, which no unity of sentiment in other things will ever be able to fill. For, no matter how kind, how considerate, how loving, how free from prejudice, how magnanimous the non-Catholic partner may be, the Catholic spouse that has a truly Catholic mind must forever realize most keenly that, so long as the religious barrier exists, there

can be no complete understanding of each other, no full and perfect sympathy; because the things that mean most and are most conducive to happiness for the one mean little or nothing in the life of the other.

Complete Harmony

How much more intimate the union between husband and wife who share the same religious convictions! Arm in arm they go to church; side by side they assist at Mass; and together they seek the consolation of Confession and the spiritual nourishment of Holy Communion. In their attitude towards the question of having children, in the choice of a school, in the questions regarding prayer in the home, Catholic reading, courtship and marriage, religious vocation, and many similar matters, the Catholic couple are in complete accord, because these questions are all decided for them in advance by the teachings of Holy Mother Church.

Innumerable Dissensions

What a rift on the other hand in the life of a couple who do not share the same Faith! What one cherishes and esteems, the other perhaps abhors. What one looks upon as an act of virtue or even as a most solemn duty, the other may despise as silly superstition or a mere idle ceremony. Supposing the mother to be the Catholic party to the marriage, which is the more common case, how keenly will she not feel the lack of religious harmony if her husband insists on unnatural limitation of the family; if he objects to having their children baptized by a Catholic priest; if he insists that three or four years' training in a Catholic school is enough to fulfill his promise to have his children brought up Catholic; if he refuses all money for Catholic books, papers and periodicals; if he objects to all display (as he terms it) of religion by means of Crucifixes, pictures of the saints, or other religious articles in the home; if he discourages prayer at meals and all family devotions; if he protests against sending the children to Mass when the weather is the least bit inclement or disagreeable, or against sending them from home without breakfast when they wish to receive Communion; if he scolds about his sleep being disturbed or having to get his own breakfast when his wife goes to early Mass; if he demands meat at all meals on Fridays and all days of abstinence; if he encourages as broadening, the association of his boys and girls with the children of his own Protestant or even irreligious relatives and friends; if he refuses to call the priest or even denies him admission into the house when some member of the family is seriously ill; if—to put an end to the list—he does any of the thousand and one different things like these that other non-Catholic husbands of Catholic wives have done in the past and are still doing to-day. For these are not purely imaginary cases such as everyone must admit might happen. They are actual cases drawn from stories of mixed marriages in real life.

The Pre-nuptial Pledge

But some young lady who is contemplating a mixed marriage may say, on reading the foregoing paragraph, that she would make adequate provision against all such possible evil consequences by demanding a solemn promise of her future husband never to interfere with her or her children's practice of religion. In doing that, she would be doing only what thousands of Catholic girls have done before; for the Church requires such a promise as an indispensable condition every time she tolerates a mixed marriage. But it is notorious how lightly these pre-nuptial pledges are broken, and how sadly these thousands of Catholic wives of non-Catholic husbands have been disillusioned when the time came for the promises to be redeemed. To make a promise and to keep it are two quite different things. In many cases, too, the non-Catholic party never had any intention of keeping his promise; or, if he did, he maintained afterwards that changed circumstances gave him the right to change his mind. So it may very easily happen that not many moons have passed since the honeymoon before the wife finds obstacles placed in the way of the performance of so simple and fundamental a duty as the hearing of Mass on Sunday. And even should the wife be gifted with such exceptional strength of character and devotion to her Faith as to practice her religion in defiance of her husband, what would become of domestic harmony?

Children of Mixed Marriages

Yet even more deplorable than its effects upon domestic harmony will be the effects of a mixed marriage on the education of the children. As set forth in the first chapter of this book, the religious education of the child should begin in earliest childhood, even in infancy, by surrounding the impressionable young heart with an atmosphere of religion and instilling into its daily expanding intelligence the idea that nothing in this world matters so much as the love and service of its God and Creator. But how can a uniform and lasting impression of this kind be made on the child, when its father and mother, whose combined actions create the atmosphere of the home, are not in agreement on the importance of religion? Certainly, if the mother is not a Catholic, the child will stand little chance of receiving any religious education before it is sent to school. But even if the mother is a Catholic, the child's religious training will be one-sided; because it will lack the support of the father's good example.

Exceptions are Few

Some mixed marriages, it is true, do turn out well, apparently, despite the initial handicap to religion and domestic harmony that ordinarily attends them. But it must be admitted that those are exceptions. The preponderating testimony of experience is against mixed marriages as the cause of loss of interest in religion or of complete loss of Faith on the part of the Catholic consort or of the children.

Something Often Overlooked

But there is still another objection to mixed marriages, the explanation of which will, I trust, make my unmarried readers still more determined never to contract a marriage that would introduce disharmony into their future homes. Very many Catholics, I dare say the great majority of them, are of the opinion that a Catholic is forbidden to marry a non-Catholic in much the same fashion as he is forbidden to eat meat on Fridays, namely, merely by a positive law of the Church; and that the only practical difference between a Catholic marriage and a mixed marriage lies in the fact that the latter may not be celebrated in church nor without a dispensation. That idea is entirely wrong. The eating of meat is not wrong in itself, and the Church has never condemned the eating of meat; but she condemns mixed marriages and abhors them not only as dangerous to the Faith of the Catholic party and the children, but also because entering into such a marriage involves the participation by a Catholic and a non-Catholic in the same sacred rite.

This is a point that many Catholics do not know or entirely overlook. They know quite well that they are not allowed to take an active part in a Protestant religious service; and that to assist as bridesmaid or groomsman at a Protestant wedding is forbidden under mortal sin. Yet the degree of a bridesmaid's participation in a wedding is small compared with that of the bride herself; because, for a Catholic, marriage is a sacrament, and the bride and groom actually administer the sacrament of Matrimony to each other, the priest being only the Church's official witness. It is this intimate commingling in a religious rite by a Catholic with a heretic which is the reason why the Church does not permit a mixed marriage, except for a grave reason, even if it were certain that this or that particular mixed marriage involved no danger to the Faith of the Catholic partner or of the children.

Communication with a Heretic

It will give the reader a better idea of how the Church detests the active participation of her children in a sacramental rite with a heretic, if we observe how she legislates regarding it in other cases. Such a communication with a heretic occurs also when a Catholic receives sacramental absolution or Holy Communion from a validly ordained but heretical priest; and so averse is Mother Church to such an act that only in danger of death does she permit a Catholic to request absolution and to receive Holy Communion at the hands of such a priest. It is evident, therefore, that there must be a grave reason for permitting any religious communication of that kind with a heretic; and that holds also for participation with a heretic in the Sacrament of Matrimony.

Permitted Only for a Grave Reason

This is another point that is commonly overlooked or not understood. A Catholic must have a grave reason for entering a marriage with a non-Catholic and a dispensation for such a marriage may be granted only for a grave reason. It is not enough that the couple want to get married and are willing to sign the pre-nuptial pledges. By no means. The first requisite is that there must be some weighty reason for permitting an exception to the general law of the Church forbidding mixed marriages. Only when serious ground for making such an exception exists, may a dispensation be granted,—and even then only on the further condition that the usual promises regarding the practice of religion be given in writing.

The Church Not Too Severe

From the foregoing explanation, it should be abundantly clear to any Catholic that the Church is by no means unreasonable or too severe in her opposition to mixed marriages. To adopt any other attitude would be for her to underrate the sanctity of Christian matrimony, which Christ raised to the dignity of a sacrament, and to underestimate the preciousness of the Faith, which it is her duty to preserve and propagate. And as all those who are so fortunate as to be blessed with the priceless gift of the true Faith are obliged to take the same attitude as the Church on all questions of Faith and morals, the attitude of the Church towards mixed marriages must be the attitude also of all her loyal children.

No Lofty Idealism

It follows, therefore, that in asking you, dear reader, to accept the Church's position on mixed marriages as your own, I am not making an appeal for anything extraordinary or heroic. There is no lofty idealism, far beyond the reach of ordinary mortals, in taking such a stand. It is nothing but plain Catholicism. Any other attitude is unchristian and opposed to the teaching of our holy Faith. That a Catholic should woo and wed only a Catholic is not a sublime ideal, which the Church expects to see realized only in her most perfect children. The marriage of a Catholic with a Catholic is the general rule for all, the only truly Catholic union; the only union the Church positively sanctions and approves.

Every other conjugal union that a Catholic enters into, no matter how securely braced with excuses, cautions, and dispensations, is at best only tolerated,—tolerated as a lesser evil, either to right some wrong already done or to avert some impending greater evil.

The Chief Occasion of Mixed Marriages

I trust that every young man and every young woman who reads what I have here written, will be so deeply impressed by the undesirableness of mixed marriages as to resolve not only never to contract a mixed marriage but also to avoid the chief occasion that leads to such a marriage; namely, the companionship of non-Catholics. To mingle freely in a social way with non-Catholics and to say that one is earnestly determined never to marry a non-Catholic is like paddling down the rapids of Niagara with the determination not to strike a rock. The Catholic youth or maiden, therefore, that is in earnest about avoiding a mixed marriage will make no dates with a non-Catholic and accept no invitations to non-Catholic social affairs.

Falling in Love Not Inevitable

But what if a Catholic falls in love with a non-Catholic? A Catholic should not fall in love with a non-Catholic! There are persons, it is true, who maintain that falling in love is something that simply happens and is entirely beyond a person's control; but such an idea of love is opposed to reason and to common sense. Human love is not merely a passion that bursts forth spontaneously upon the perception of a suitable object. It is also a voluntary activity of the will; and hence it is subject to the control of the will, which can check and even extinguish a passion for a person whom one's reason declares to be an undesirable or even impossible partner in marriage the poor hired man from falling in love with the daughter of his rich master? Is it not the consideration of the impossibility of a marriage that prevents many a one (not all, alas!) from falling in love with a person already married or bound by the vow of virginity or celibacy? Why, then, should

the consideration of the evils of a mixed marriage not suffice with the grace of God to prevent a Catholic from falling in love with a non-Catholic? No, even though the human heart is a strange and willful creature, it is not so intractable that, with due precautions, it cannot be restrained from desiring forbidden fruit. Hence the Catholic boy or girl who starts out with the correct Catholic attitude that mixed marriages are forbidden fruit, and who does not court danger by mixing socially with non-Catholics, will keep from falling in love with a non-Catholic without extraordinary difficulty.

Conversion of the Non-Catholic Partner

And now a word also to those of my readers who have contracted a mixed marriage and who are still living with a non-Catholic partner. No matter how unpleasant the reading of this chapter may have been for you, you must not be disheartened. You cannot, it is true, alter the past; but you can do a great deal to mend matters for the future. Whether your marriage has been one of those exceptional ones that have turned out well despite the lack of harmony in religion; or whether it has further corroborated the wisdom of the Church in condemning such unions, your duty is the same: you must endeavor to bring about the conversion of your partner to the true Faith. It was with the understanding that you would fulfill this duty that the dispensation for your marriage was granted. But even if Canon Law did not stress this obligation, you should nevertheless be solicitous for your Consort's conversion for his, or her, own sake, no less than for the sake of religious harmony in the home.

Prayer Alone Not Sufficient

But how can this most desired event be brought about? By earnest and persevering prayer; by the constant force of your own good example; by occasional invitations to read Catholic literature and to attend Catholic services and sermons; and—not to be forgotten!—also by prudently intimating, on opportune occasions, your own great desire that your non-Catholic partner embrace the true Faith. You must not expect Almighty God to do everything. In dispensing His graces and especially the blessing of the true Faith, He makes use also of human means and human agents. And the most natural as well as the most suitable agent He could employ to convert your partner in marriage is yourself. Why, then, this timid reticence on the subject of religion? If you persist in depending exclusively on prayer, you may be held responsible for your consort's long delayed conversion and for his or her loss of innumerable priceless graces. Such was the woman who on the day of her husband's conversion exclaimed to him: "This is the happiest day of my life. I have been longing and praying for this day for many years." To which her husband replied: "That is strange. Then why did you never intimate to me that you longed for me to become a Catholic?"

Enthronement of the Sacred Heart

Among the supernatural means of obtaining the conversion of a wife or husband, one that I would recommend most strongly is devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus; and in particular that form of this devotion known as the Enthronement of the Sacred Heart in the home. This consists in setting up an image of the Sacred Heart with appropriate solemnities in the home, and in consecrating the family to the Sacred Heart in permanent recognition of His Kingship over the home. The fruits of the Enthronement have been simply marvelous in all parts of the world. Men who had never gone to Confession in their lives, high-degree Freemasons, have humbly made their Confession after the Enthronement had been performed in their home at the request of a wife or daughter.

To all, therefore, whose home life is marred by the lack of unity in religion or by any other kind of disharmony, as well as to those who wish to preserve the harmony that has hitherto prevailed, I say: Invite a priest to perform the act of Enthronement in your home. Consecrate your family to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Renew that consecration from time to time, especially on the first Friday of each month; and in the spirit of that consecration regard the Sacred Heart as the King and intimate Friend of your family. Make Him the confidant of your joys as well as of your sorrows, your failures as well as your successes. Let Him be your support in trial, your comfort in sorrow, your refuge in distress. Let His principles govern your family life as well as your private and public life; and then you, too, most assuredly, will realize

the truth of those loving promises which the Sacred Heart of Jesus revealed to St. Margaret Mary Alacoque:

“I will bless the houses wherein the image of my Heart shall be exposed and honored.

“I will give peace to their families

“I will give them all the graces necessary for their state.

“I will shed abundant blessings on all their undertakings.

“I will comfort them in all their trials.”

CHAPTER VI: Necessity of Home Life

THE enemies of religion and in particular of the Catholic Church often maintain that the Church has failed in her mission to make men virtuous, because even among Catholics there are many that lead immoral lives. And some go even so far as to see in this a proof that religion is incapable of making men moral. The fallacy of such reasoning lies, of course, in ascribing to religion those moral failures who disregard her precepts and who neglect to use the means of practicing virtue that she enjoins. The same fallacious reasoning is used in regard to the home. The home has failed, it is said, to take care of its members during their leisure hours; it does not offer recreational facilities enough, especially for young people. And as our young people will seek diversion and amusement in improper places if we do not provide wholesome entertainment for them, we must have Catholic clubs and social centers where they can recreate themselves in a harmless manner.

A Matter of Training

Those of our social workers and sociologists who reason thus evidently overlook the fact that there is an endless variety of not only innocent but also beneficial amusements that may be had in the home; and furthermore that it is just as possible, by proper and timely education, to educate people to seek their recreation mainly at home, because of the priceless advantages that home life offers, as it is to induce them to patronize Catholic community centers in preference to the more alluring public places of amusement.

Such, then, is the purpose of this chapter—to ripen the conviction in the reader that home life should be cultivated on principle by every member of the family; since home life is an indispensable means of obtaining in full measure the blessings of religion in the home and the true happiness and welfare of the entire family.

I. A Plain Duty

In every perfect society, it is the duty of the members to further the purpose of the society. Now the family is a perfect society, whose object is to promote the temporal and above all the eternal welfare of its members. Hence it is the duty of each member of the family to do his share towards the attainment of that end, even at the cost of some sacrifice or of some inconvenience to himself. No member of the family has a right to shirk his duty toward the rest. No member of the family stands alone and is simply free to live his own life without any regard for the others. But the proper fulfillment of each one's respective duty towards the other members of the family necessarily demands the spending of a certain amount of time at home in the family circle.

The Parents' Part

Upon the father, as head of the family, naturally devolves the first duty of fostering home life by his example as well as by providing reasonable recreational facilities, and, if need be, also by using his authority to prevent unreasonable or excessive gadding abroad. Yet, though the father has the greater authority to safeguard home life, the mother, as the mistress of the home, has the greater opportunities; and hers, therefore, should also be the chief care in fostering a deep-seated love of the home and binding all members of the family by invisible ties to the paternal hearth. Indeed, the mother is the real center of attraction, the very heart of the Christian home. Because the care of the children and the superintending, if not always the actual performance, of the household tasks requires her presence, the home is the

mother's natural abode, and, with but rare exceptions, her ordinary sphere of action.

A Mother's First Care

It is true, the practice of many women and mothers of our day seems to indicate that women have a much wider field of action than that circumscribed by the limits of the household. Yet that does not alter the fact that woman's natural place is the home, and that, ordinarily, she should not engage in any work, not even of a social or political nature, incompatible with the performance of her duties to her family. (See Pope Pius XI's quote on Mothers Who Work Away from Home.) As the great Jesuit authority on moral philosophy, Victor Cathrein, says: "To give her children a good education and to maintain a well regulated household, must always be woman's first care." And lest it be thought that this is an outworn doctrine that must be rejected because of changed conditions, and that woman must needs adapt herself to the times, he continues: "Far from estranging her more and more from this mission, as it must be regretted has hitherto been done in consequence of modern industry and modern ideas, one should aim to regain for her in its entirety the place that she occupied in former times. The foundation of domestic happiness is a virtuous, pious, diligent woman, who loves order, and who possesses the gift of making her husband attached to his family and of educating her children to be good citizens and good Christians" ("Moral Philosophy," Book II, p. 384-5).

Exceptional Cases

It cannot be denied that there may be circumstances in which individual women may very properly widen the field of their activities, either for their own advantage, the advancement of women's interests, or for the welfare of the public in general. But these will be, for the most part, women without families, or such whose children no longer need a mother's care; and with women thus circumstanced I am not here concerned.

But if woman's chief concern is the proper education of her children and the care of domestic affairs her presence in the home is indispensable. Or how can a mother fulfill her sacred duties towards her young children if she is rarely with them? If she is frequently absent from home or if she leaves the children almost entirely in the care of a nurse or maid, how can she guide their childish steps aright, mould their tender hearts to virtue, and administer the necessary admonitions, reproofs, and punishment? For the words of Holy Writ are still as true as they were of old: "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but the child that is left to his own will bringeth his mother to shame" (Prov. 29, 15).

Big Brothers and Sisters

In as far, too, as the assistance of the older children may be helpful or necessary in the care of domestic affairs, the mother not only may but should require it. The training of the children is indeed the mother's duty; but just because it is her duty, she has the right to demand the assistance of the elder children in order that that duty may be properly performed. She has the right to demand that they remain at home to help her take care of the younger children, to aid them with their tasks, or merely to keep them company and entertain them so that they will be content to remain at home. Why is it that sometimes even the very young children are anxious to get away from home, except that most of the other members of the family are out and the children are deprived of the companionship they crave? It is above all at nighttime, and in particular for the adolescent boys and girls, that the home is truly a haven of safety to shield them at least for a time from the dangers of the outside world; and parents may become guilty of grievous sin, if they are grossly negligent in keeping their children at home at night to shield them from evil companions and other occasions of sin.

But even for the elder children, home life is a necessity for the proper development and safeguarding of their spiritual life; and this all the more if they are old enough to be obliged to work and are in consequence exposed to the evil influences of the outside world. Or, indeed, how can they benefit by the practice of family prayer, if they do not take regularly even one meal a day with the entire family when grace is said in common, and if they are never at home in the evening to join in the recitation of the litany or rosary? How will they devote any time to Catholic reading, and how can they be beneficially affected by the Catholic atmosphere of the home, if almost the only time they spend there is spent in

bed?

Weakening the Family Circle

But the frequent absence of the elder children from the family circle not only deprives them of the benefits of family prayer, good reading, and a Catholic atmosphere, but deprives also the other members of the family of the benefit of their company and their good example. By absenting themselves from home, they weaken the family circle and make it harder for the rest to profit by the advantages of the Catholic home. If the older children would stay at home, it would be easier for the rest to stay and devote a little time to family prayer and Catholic reading. Their very presence, their interest, and their example would make home life more agreeable, and all would become more and more permeated with the wholesome influence of a Catholic atmosphere. But if one brother or sister goes out, another will want to go, too; if the elder brothers and sisters are gone, the children will not wish to remain at home; and thus the family is broken up and instead of a place to live in the home becomes merely a lodging and boarding house—a place where one sleeps and perhaps takes one or the other meal.

Modern Conditions No Excuse

No matter how common this state of things is at present or how well satisfied people may be with it, it is greatly to be deplored; and parents as well as children should do their utmost to restore the home life of the family to its pristine and normal condition. Every member of the family should be prompted to foster home life for his own advantage, because it is for his own good to spend the greater part of his time at home. He should be further impelled by regard for his brothers and sisters, whom he is bound to love more than others not so closely related, and whom he should be willing to help by his company and good example. And lastly he should be induced by love and gratitude towards his parents, when they desire him to remain at home; and even by obedience, if they direct him to stay at home to take care of the children, to help them with their tasks, or merely to entertain them.

The parents themselves are in duty bound to foster home life, because it is an almost indispensable means for the proper Catholic rearing of their children. It is the presence of the parents, and especially of the mother; it is their example, their authority, their interest, and above all their love that must knit the family together, ward off the dangers that threaten it from without, breathe into it the true Catholic mind and Christian spirit, and guide it to its eternal destiny.

It is the Home That Counts

This old-fashioned doctrine has recently found champions in unexpected quarters—the camp of the psychiatrists—as may be seen from an article entitled “Home Still in Fashion,” in “The Literary Digest” for October 10, 1931. Commenting on an address to 2000 school principals in New York by Dr. Leon W. Goldrich, director of New York City’s newly established Bureau of Child Guidance of the Board of Education, the New York Times says that it has been demonstrated that any home, even one of contention and unkindness, is better for the child than no home at all. “It is a doctrine which until recently demanded exceptional courage to maintain. An age devoted to self-expression and freedom preferred to think of the harm done by taboos and fixations, and to overlook the good done by fathers who provided food and shelter and mothers who provided care.” We are now emerging from this revolt against the home, continues The Times. “People are beginning to say generally in print what the social workers and the officials of the juvenile courts have been saying all the time.... It is the home that counts. Scientists are beginning to emphasize the importance of loving care—the very thing recently abominated as the source of so many complexes.”

It is almost needless to say that I do not advocate spending all one’s leisure time at home, nor maintain that one must never go away except for very urgent reasons. There may even be homes in which the moral conditions are so bad that it would be more advisable to spend the majority of one’s evenings away from home. But apart from such very exceptional cases, one may safely say that home life is not fostered as it should be by those persons who, without sufficient excuse, spend the majority of their evenings away from home.

III. The Causes of the Trouble

If people are to be interested in the great social work of making the home circle flourish once more, it is necessary for them to understand the causes of its disruption. One of these, the expansion of industry, has already been alluded to; but as the purpose of this book is to bring about an improvement of the Christian home even before the reform of our present industrial system may be hoped for, it will be more to the purpose to expatiate on other causes; and chief among these, without doubt, is the inordinate quest of earthly pleasure.

Joy versus Pleasure

In that charming little book, "More Joy," by Bishop Paul Wilhelm Keppeler, the author points out the important distinction between joy and pleasure. There are too many pleasures, he says, and too little joy. Which is only another way of saying that too many people seek happiness in things that are not conducive to true happiness; and consequently, though they give themselves up to amusements, to the enjoyment of sensual pleasures, they do not find true joy but merely a temporary forgetfulness of life's burdens and sorrows. True joy consists in contentment, in peace of heart, in the testimony of a good conscience, in the control of one's animal instincts by reason, in the subjection of the passions. Man being a rational and moral being, albeit an animal, cannot find real joy in pleasures that conflict with reason and the moral law. And that is why those people are most joyous who are content, for the most part, to find the needed recreation in the simpler joys of the family circle. For these joys are consistent with a good conscience, whereas the pleasures that are the usual offering of public places of amusement can frequently not be indulged in without either searing one's conscience or at least exposing oneself to grave moral danger.

The Lure of the Gang

If I should be asked to state in particular what pleasures tempt different members of the family to spend their evenings away from home, I should say that in the case of young men, and especially those still in their "teens," it is mainly the pleasures found in the company of the "gang." By the gang I do not mean a number of boys who are usually found together in their outings, nor the boys of a neighborhood who are regular playmates in their daily games. Such gangs hardly interfere with, and oftentimes practically coalesce with the family circle. No, the gang that seems to me to be a menace to home life and to the proper training of young men, is a group of boys who usually spend every evening and the entire evening together at some place away from their homes; and I do not hesitate to call the desire of a boy always to be with "the gang" an inordinate desire for pleasure and a dangerous occasion of sin. For what is the chief attraction of such company? The absence of all restraint. They want to be alone with youths of their own age, unobserved by their parents or teachers. They want to enjoy liberty, independence; and this liberty consists in freedom from all restraint—from the restraint of cultured society, the restraint of politeness, the restraint of gentlemanly deportment, the restraint often even of Christian virtue and common decency.

Bad Influence of the Gang

But freedom from such restraint cannot but have evil consequences for undeveloped characters, as experience proves only too well. Where is it that vulgar words and expressions are most commonly heard? In the company of the gang. Where is it that indelicate stories are unblushingly told? In the company of the gang. Where is it that obscene hints are given, suggestive remarks made, improper songs sung? Where is it that gambling is learnt, drinking taught, disobedience, untruthfulness and dishonesty towards parents and teachers approved and applauded? In the company of the gang. It is the almost uninterrupted daily association with such company in such circumstances that roughens the character and degrades the morals of our young men. And the most natural and most effective means of withdrawing them, at least to a great extent, from the debasing influence of such company, is to have them spend the majority of their evenings at home in the company of their mothers and sisters. The naturally more gentle and more refined nature and manners of mothers and sisters are a splendid means of leavening, of tempering, and of toning down the coarser and wilder nature of the young

man and the growing boy. And happy the boy and the young man who submits to the influence of such companionship! That companionship, coupled with the entire influence of a good Christian home, will go far towards saving him from the evils of the “gang.”

Girls’ Sets and Parents’ Clubs

No less disastrous than the gang in disrupting the family circle is the girls’ set as well as father’s and mother’s clubs. The objections to be made against the girls’ set, unless its gatherings are far less frequent and properly chaperoned, are the same as those I have made against the boys’ gang. It opens the door to unrestrained liberty and contempt of time-honored conventions for which the less respectable element among our modern young womanhood is so justly condemned. As to the clubs to which the parents and especially the mothers belong, nothing craves more wary walking than these. Many a child is a stranger to parental care and to all the blessings of home life because of its mother’s insane devotion to her club, or to what she dignifies by the name of “social duties.” There are wives and mothers who imagine themselves bound to be busy almost everywhere except in their own homes. One afternoon or evening they must be at their club; another afternoon, at a card party; another day, they must attend an afternoon tea or a lecture; and still another day, a reading or sewing circle. And thus, what with their social calls and social duties, they are mostly absent from their homes and their own children are neglected.

Charity Begins at Home

If such mothers would only devote themselves conscientiously to the God-given task of bringing up and training their own children instead of attending, or even giving, lectures on the uplift of society, society would be in a far better way than it is at present. It may be that some of these women are at heart well-meaning and sincere, and that, blinded by the glamour of altruistic activities, they do not realize their mistake. But the truth of the matter is that the performance of welfare work is often an excuse for neglecting the more confining and more tedious household duties. No matter how good and praiseworthy it is to practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, our Lord certainly would not countenance a woman’s practicing them to the neglect of her own family. A woman’s first social duty is to her own family. Let that duty be properly attended to first, and then she may think of extending her charitable activities abroad. Charity should begin at home.

Value of “Monies” Overestimated

A second attraction that draws not only the young men and the young women, but even their younger brothers and sisters away from the home at night, is the theatre, and especially the moving picture theatre. A great deal may be said in favor of the “movie,” not only on account of its recreational but also on account of its educational value; yet it is my opinion that this value is greatly overrated, and that, as far as children are concerned, whatever amount of education may be obtained by attendance at moving pictures can be equally well obtained by other means. In other words, I firmly believe that a child that never attended a “movie” can, and in most cases will be, just as well educated as one that attended “movies.” It would be possible to show that whatever good is accomplished by the “movies” (and I am speaking only of the good ones), is discounted by the harm that they indirectly do even to the cause of education. But as I am speaking now of the “movie” only in its relation to the home, I wish to emphasize here merely this harmful result of attendance at the “movies,” that it withdraws the members of the family from the sanctuary of the home, and by developing the “movie” habit, makes it impossible for them properly to share in the beneficial influence of Christian home life. In view of the fact that children lose nothing worth while by rarely attending moving pictures, and that frequent attendance almost inevitably withdraws them from one of the best of all educational influences, that of a good Catholic home life, it is hard to understand how thoughtful parents can be so imprudent as to take their young children regularly to such amusements even before the latter are old enough to attend school. But such parents usually reap the fruit of their folly. If children become accustomed from early childhood to frequent public places of amusement, it is not surprising that in their adolescence they

can hardly be restrained from roaming about at night.

Excessive Joy-Riding

The third great enemy, and no doubt the greatest enemy, of home life in our day is the automobile. As long as practically the whole family goes riding, and as long as the outings are not too frequent, there is no objection to this means of recreation, in particular for those families who are thereby enabled to benefit by the advantages of a more healthy atmosphere and a more agreeable environment. Yet it cannot be denied that the thing is overdone. In many families the car is in constant use. The children want to be out at every possible opportunity, and the far more valuable means of recreation to be had at home are neglected. In other families the car is used in turn by different members of the family. One evening it is one of the boys who has it; another evening, one, or perhaps two, of the girls; a third evening the parents, and thus the family circle is always incomplete and it is impossible to enjoy the benefits of real home life. It is imperative, therefore, that parents who aim to promote the true welfare and happiness of their children put a stop to this excessive automobile-riding.

A Snare to Virtue

Though I am speaking here of the automobile only in as far as its use affects home life, it may be useful to add a word of warning to parents against permitting their son or daughter to go riding unchaperoned with a companion of the opposite sex. Not only Catholic priests but also non-Catholic judges and social workers deplore such rides as the occasion of the moral downfall of countless young men and young women. If the boy and girl are honorable and sensible, they will welcome a third person to their party both as a means of warding off suspicion and as a guardian of their virtue. And in order that their adolescent boys and girls may take this sensible view of the matter, parents should instruct and train them betimes to follow Christian and not pagan standards of propriety in their relations with persons of the opposite sex. Unless they do this, their children will almost inevitably take their cue from what they read in secular papers, from what they see on stage and screen, and from what they witness in actual life; and this to their own great moral detriment, to the disedification of their acquaintances, and oftentimes to the tragic grief of the very parents who refused to be so old-fashioned as to curb their children's liberty.

III. Homes Must Be Made Attractive

What a world of evils would disappear at one happy stroke, and what a world of good would be accomplished, if people would only stay at home and be occupied in the family circle! The great question is, then, how shall we induce people to stay at home? If it is the desire for amusement, for recreation, for companionship, that leads them abroad, how shall this desire, which is certainly legitimate, be satisfied at home? In advocating home life, nothing is farther from my thoughts than the desire to deprive anyone of legitimate pleasure. Indeed, to put more real joy into men's lives, while at the same time furthering their spiritual interests, is the very purpose and object of this book. If I thought that it would not help to achieve this purpose, I would cast it into the fire.

Cleanliness the First Requisite

By all means, then, the home must be made attractive. The attractions that lure one elsewhere must be offset by counter attractions in the home. The strongest tie that binds one to one's home is love of home—a quality that can be developed just the same as the habit of frequenting public amusements is developed. Therefore, the first requisite for attracting one to one's home is that the home the abode itself, be pleasant and inviting. Even the humblest home can meet this requirement, at least in the interior; for poverty does not imply squalor slovenliness or disorder. Let only cleanliness prevail, let only the rule be observed, "A place for everything, and everything in its place," and the resultant neatness and tidiness will lend a simple dignity and attractiveness to even the poorest interior. It is by no means always the luxurious or palatial homes that are the most charming. Coziness, like hospitality, is more often found in the workingman's bungalow than in the rich

man's palace. One cannot imagine the Holy Family of Nazareth living in a splendid home. They were poor, and their abode undoubtedly reflected their poverty. Yet, however scanty their resources and however stinted their use of earthly goods, one cannot but believe that their home was a model of cleanliness, orderliness, and good taste. For cleanliness is not only next to godliness, as the proverb says, but actually pertains to godliness when practiced from supernatural motives, as it certainly was by the Holy Family; and as it easily can be by anyone when practiced for sweet charity's sake. If God will reward a drink of cold water given in His name, and will regard what we do to the least of His brethren as done to Himself; then surely He will look with approval on the pains we take to make our home attractive to those with whom He wishes us to share it.

Ownership of One's Home

It will be readily understood that the married couple that owns its home will be more likely to be attached to it and more inclined to make it attractive. For this reason all young couples should endeavor to own a home of their own as soon as possible. The very fact that their dwelling place is their own will give them a feeling of security and independence that they can never have in a rented home. And when they own the soil beneath their feet; when they need consult no landlord on making improvements; when they have no fear of being forced by the sale of their home to seek another dwelling place, their love for their home will strike firmer roots and quite naturally give birth to the desire to make it harmonize ever more and more with the home of their dreams. Ownership of one's home, too, is the best guarantee against a life spent in restless and ill-advised wandering from place to place. In fine, it is the only surety one can have of enjoying the blessings of a fixed abode, chief among which are a firm anchorage amid the vicissitudes of life, a circle of true and tried friends, lifelong associations, and that peculiar charm which in all civilized nations is associated with the word home. Like the lowly cottage overgrown with ivy, a home may be very plain and prosaic itself; yet to him for whom it was the center of childhood's joys, youth's aspirations, and manhood's struggles and achievements, it will always be beautiful with the clinging ivy of fond recollections.

Effect of Mutual Love

The strongest means, without doubt, of holding the family circle together is the practice of mutual love between all members of the family. The scriptural saying that charity covers a multitude of sins may be fitly applied to the home whose poverty and consequent lack of material attractions is more than compensated for by the unselfish love that pervades it. Just as warm-hearted kindness can light up and lend charm to even a homely countenance, so it can also brighten a home and by its almost magic influence transform a hovel into an abode of delight. This often explains why many a child finds the far more humble home of a neighboring family more attractive than its own.

Feeding the Fire of Affection

Only too often this congenial atmosphere is wanting in the home, not because the inmates do not love one another truly, but because they do not manifest their love sufficiently. There is a lack of the little courtesies and amenities that are so powerful a means of fostering affection. Even the most sincere and deep-seated affection must be fed, if it is not to wither and fade. It is like the cozy hearth fire which must have fresh fuel now and then, if it is not to burn low or go out altogether. Failure to heap the coals of kindness and sociableness upon the fire of family affection is sometimes due to a naturally sullen disposition. More often it can be traced to lack of training in that point; the parents failed to foster sociableness among their children. Quite commonly it is the result of preoccupation with other affairs—business, social or private interests. At times, too, it is due merely to oversight. Attention was never directed to the propriety and advantage of cultivating habits of mutual kindness, cheerfulness, and good will; and in consequence there may be a touch of chilliness and gloom about the home where an atmosphere of genial warmth and sunshine should prevail. But, whatever the cause of deficient sociableness in any members of the family, it can and it should be removed.

Effect of Kind Words

The story is told by the author of "The Man Who Was Nobody" of a man who never thought of saving a friendly word to his wife and family. A friend called his attention to the fact. He made it clear to him just how he was acting and what an effect it was having on his dear ones, even though they never complained. He listened to what his friend had to say and agreed that he was right. He promised to begin to do better that very day. That evening he went home a changed man. He greeted his wife and children; he said nothing about business and the worries of the day; at the dinner table he led the conversation. In every way he was most considerate. After the meal was over he went so far as to put on an apron to help dry the dishes. When his wife saw that, she broke down. "What's the matter?" he exclaimed. "Oh, everything has gone wrong today," she replied, "and to cap the climax you come home drunk." His conduct was so affable, so different from what it had been, that there seemed to be only one plausible explanation; namely, that he was drunk.

Politeness the Robe of Charity

If any of my readers should be obliged to admit that their past conduct has resembled that of the man in this story, they, too, no doubt will decide to reform. For it needs only that it be pointed out for one to realize that little attentions, little compliments, little words of appreciation, encouragement, comfort, and cheer are dispensed with as much propriety within as without the home. To mention but one instance, should we not have a cheery good morning, a kind good-bye, a pleasant word or smile of welcome, and a cordial good-night for the members of our family just as well as for our friends and acquaintances? It is quite true that politeness is not of the essence of charity. As practiced by worldly people it is a purely natural virtue, and it is sometimes used as a cloak for a very uncharitable disposition. But it can be supernaturalized, and the fact that it is sometimes misused by evil men is no reason why the good should disdain it. Because of its exterior resemblance, politeness might well be styled the garment of charity. And so well does this vesture become the queen of all virtues, that charity never appears more gracious, never shows to better advantage, than when arrayed in the charming robe of Christian politeness.

Need of Occupations at Home

Despite the attraction of pleasant surroundings and congenial companionship, the urge to leave home during leisure hours may still be very strong if there is nothing to do at home to occupy one's leisure. Here, then, is another point that calls for attention in making the home attractive; and among the various occupations conducive to that end I would assign first place to the performance of certain tasks or the care of certain things. Let parents begin early to develop in their children an active interest in their home by assigning to each the care of a certain thing and by teaching them to take pride in doing their part well. Thus one could have the bookshelves to keep in order, or the library table; another the dining room table; a third some pot flowers to water, and so on; each one having the care of his own toys, shoes, and other personal belongings. Outdoors, to one could be assigned the care of the lawn or a part of it; to another a flower bed; to a third the walks or the porch; and each garden to cultivate or at least a tiny patch to weed and water. The keeping of a few chickens or other domestic fowl would offer another interesting as well as useful occupation. And to keep the children from growing one-sided as well as to revive their interest, they could also take turns in the performance of certain tasks, either every day or every week or every month, whichever way might be thought best.

Pet Animals

Then there are the pets—dogs, cats, rabbits, singing birds, parrots, anything that will enlist the interest of the children and serve as another tie binding them to their home. Interest in such things can be developed to such an extent that children will sometimes rather forego some other pleasure than leave home and neglect the things committed to their care. To foster this interest, the parents themselves must show a keen interest in their children's efforts, and always have a kind word of encouragement, appreciation or praise for their achievements, no matter how trivial and childish the latter may be.

Games and Toys

And finally, though most of the occupations I have spoken of really constitute excellent recreation if properly directed and not overdone, there must needs be also sheer amusements— pleasurable pastimes, undisguised enjoyments, and care-free indulgence in interesting games. In these days of the player piano, the phonograph, and the radio, not to speak of the numerous playthings that electricity and other modern discoveries and inventions have produced, this phase of the problem of home life is not hard to solve. But even in those families that may be too poor to afford such luxuries, there need be no lack of amusement; for the old-fashioned games of lotto, dominoes, checkers, mill, cards, authors, and parchesi, all of which may be had for a few cents each, can still hold the interest of old and young alike. By one who has a little skill, many of these games can be fabricated at home with hardly any expense; and the fact that they are homemade often makes them the more enjoyable. Indeed, it is a quite common experience that few games are enjoyed more by children than those that are entirely their own invention.

Not Too Many Inhibitions

There is just one more bit of advice that I think should be given in this chapter and that is: Let there not be too many inhibitions in the home! Those who must guard against excess in this point are the mothers and the elder sisters. It goes without saying that even the members of the family will not enjoy staying at home, if they are not made to feel at home; and no one can really feel at home, if he is hampered at every turn by instructions and reminders not to do this and to avoid that. Discipline and order there should be, of course; but it need not be the discipline and order of the church or schoolroom. The very proximity of the walls and ceiling impose a certain amount of restraint that is absent out of doors; but it need not be the restraint demanded by the presence of strangers. Yes, mother dear, and dear elder sister, train your dear ones in orderliness and neatness and well-bred deportment; but let it be done with the sweet reasonableness of a mother and sister, and not with the tyrannical imperiousness of a Xantippe. If undue restraint is placed on them at home, your growing boys and girls will soon find an opportunity of escaping to more congenial places of amusement; and then, instead of spending your evenings in the midst of a joyful, if perhaps a little too noisy family, you will be left to keep late and lonely vigils worrying over your wandering boys and girls and perhaps over the head of the house himself.

Make Everyone Feel at Home

By all means, then, let the home folks be made to feel at home. Let the father of the house occupy the finest easy chair, even if he is not arrayed in his Sunday clothes. Let the grown-up sons smoke in the sitting room or in the parlor, even if the smoke does stain the curtains or the wall paper. Let there be music and song and games at the time for recreation, even if they are somewhat noisy. Let the children have their own theatricals, if they like to; let there be an abundance of clean wholesome reading matter, picture books, puzzles, and toys; let the parents themselves join in or at least show an interest in the amusements of their children, and the home will become so attractive that there will rarely be any temptation to seek recreation elsewhere.

“Keep the home fires burning” is the slogan I would suggest to all who are laboring for the reform of society. Instead of nightly faring forth to the club, the theatre, the “movie” or some other place of amusement, let the members of the family once more gather round the hearth, whether to work, to study, to read, to amuse themselves or to pray. Better far one such night spent in the bosom of the family and in the atmosphere of a truly Catholic home than a dozen nights spent at the club or the “movie,” no matter how unobjectionable, educational and inspiring.

A Voice in the Wilderness

Think not, kind reader, that I do not realize (and oh, how poignantly!) that, in making this plea, I shall be looked upon by the great majority as hopelessly behind the times, and as making a futile effort to turn the current of our modern age. But was there ever a more glorious battle fought for a principle, or was there ever a more heroic stand made in defense of the right than when the defender was faced by overwhelming odds? If, like St. John the Baptist, I am but the voice of one

crying in the wilderness, at least I have the consolation of being in good company. And if, like the early Christian apologists who raised their voices in protest against the persecuting emperors, I may seem to be trying to stave off the inevitable, I again find comfort in the fact that the Church that the apologists defended still exists and exerts her benign influence, while the all-powerful empire that persecuted her is long since a heap of ruins.

God's Grace Still Powerful

It is true, the Church is the work of God, and its preservation, its spread, and its conquests have been accomplished more by the power of God than by the wisdom and power of man. But so, too, is the family, and especially the Christian family, the work of God; and if it is to accomplish its God-given mission in the Christian home, it has less need of human means than of divine. And therein precisely lies my hope. God's grace is still active and still powerful; and it is solely through it and not "by the persuasive words of human wisdom," that I hope to accomplish any good through these pages. There are still well-meaning souls in this wicked world; souls who want to do the best they can; naturally Christian souls who long for something better, higher, nobler. It is to these especially, and, more particularly still, to young wives and mothers that I address myself in the hope that, as they read these instructions and counsels, the grace of God will inspire them anew with a strong desire and an earnest determination to make their homes models of what a Christian home should be. Let them establish their homes on the rock bottom of religion; let them cultivate prayer, foster good reading, preserve a Catholic atmosphere in their homes and promote home life, and, by the blessing of God their homes will become veritable strongholds of the Faith, schools of virtue, abodes of peace and happiness and love, which the angels of God will delight to visit, and which God Himself will look down upon with pleasure and bless with a foretaste of the joys of Heaven.

CONCLUSION

IT is with a feeling of deep satisfaction that I bring this little book on the home to a close. God grant that it may be the humble instrument of accomplishing at least a small amount of the good for which it was undertaken. To that end I can only beg the kind reader who has had the patience to peruse the foregoing pages, not to put the book aside for good after the first reading, but to pick it up again and again until the lessons it contains become deeply engraven on his heart. The substance of those lessons is this: that since society, which should help the individual to lead a God-fearing life, has become a means of leading him astray, to counteract this evil influence, the family, which is the unit of society, must be reformed by being again imbued with the spirit of Christianity. When religion once more directs, controls, and permeates the family life, not only will the individual have an effective safeguard against the evils of society, but society itself will be reformed.

The means to accomplish this end are the simple but efficacious ones that I have pointed out. Think not lightly of them, dear reader, on account of their simplicity, and despise them not for that they are old. Parents above all, fathers and mothers, see to it that these old-fashioned manifestations of Catholic life once more come into honor in your homes. You cannot have religion without religious exercises, as little as you can have fire without fuel. Nor can you make of your religion a purely church affair, because it is something that touches life at every point.

To children, and especially to those young men and young women who will soon be looking forward to establishing homes of their own, I say: If you hope to have a truly Christian home when you marry, you must lay the foundation for it now. Be faithful to the practice of daily prayer and frequent Communion in the years of young manhood and young womanhood; be chaste during the time of courtship, and you may justly expect God to bless your future home. But if you neglect your religion and incur the wrath of God by your liberties in keeping company, you run great risk of building your Christian home upon sand. Avoid the occasions of sin, therefore; for he that loveth danger shall perish in it. Let me warn you especially against following that custom, as pernicious as it is widespread, which accords young unmarried couples the privilege of almost as complete privacy and seclusion as if they were already married. The proper place for keeping company is in the presence of the father and mother or some other member of the family. These nightly tete-a-tetes and

long drawn out private interviews between two young persons of opposite sex are occasions of sin and a source of many other evils, not the least among which are hurried and unhappy marriages. It is during the time of courtship, I repeat, that the foundation is laid for the future home. Let it be made of religion and virtue, my dear young men and young ladies, and then you can securely build up thereon that beautiful edifice, that bulwark of religion, that fortress of morality, that pillar of society, that citadel of peace and happiness—the model Christian home.

Home, sweet home! What a multitude of tender thoughts and feelings are associated with the utterance of that sweet word! What a host of happy memories it conjures up of the innocent days of childhood, of the carefree days of youth, of the toilsome days of maturer age. The home is, indeed, the center of the sweetest and purest of all earthly joys, the starting point of all that is best and greatest in human history. Our Divine Savior Himself gave the home a special consecration by gracing the humble home of Nazareth with His presence during thirty long years; and He thereby gave us also the first and the supreme model of the truly Christian home. Yes, so sacred is the word home that it is commonly used to designate even that eternal dwelling place that God has prepared for those that love Him.

Love your home, then, dear reader, and try to make it worthy of that sacred name. You can adopt no surer means than to establish religion in your home by enthroning the Sacred Heart as its King and by conforming it as closely as possible to the home of the Holy Family. If the father seeks to imitate St. Joseph; if the mother emulates the loving care of Mary; if the children are docile and diligent after the example of the Child Jesus; and if all seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice,—be it ever so humble, yours will be a happy home. What, then, if those foes of your salvation, the devil and the wicked world, storm and rage without,—you and yours will be safe within the walls of your Christian home. For, built as it is on the rock of Faith, we may truly say of it what Our Blessed Savior said of those who hear His words and do them: “And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew; and they beat upon that house, and it fell not; for it was founded on a rock” (Mt. 7, 25).

Nihil Obstat

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