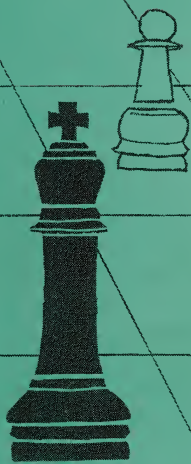


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COURTSHIP

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Strategy in Courtship

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Strategy in Courtship

THE crucial period in the life of young people is when they are in love. It is a time of *sturm und drang*—of stress and strain—when newly-kindled emotions are frequently at swords' points with reason. Youth is handicapped by his inexperience, his low horizon and his inability to envisage the later years when the emotions have cooled and life is a prosaic, matter-of-fact affair. Desperately does he stand in need of sympathetic understanding and guidance so that something of the far horizons will drift in to lessen his myopia and give him a better perspective for the wise selection of a help-mate for life and the preservation of his youthful innocence.

In his Encyclical on Christian Marriage, Pope Pius XI points out the necessity of giving to youth the guidance so sorely needed to make a wise choice of a marriage partner and to achieve lasting happiness in the home. "That they may not deplore," points out His Holiness, "for the rest of their lives the sorrows arising from an indiscreet marriage, those about to enter wedlock should carefully deliberate in choosing the person with whom henceforward they must live continually. Let them diligently pray for divine help, so that they make their choice in accordance with Christian prudence, not in-

deed led by the blind and unrestrained impulse of lust, nor by any desire of riches or other base influences, but by a true and noble love and by a sincere affection for the future partner; and then let them strive in their married life for those ends for which the state was constituted by God. Lastly, let them not omit to ask the prudent advice of their parents with regard to the partner, and let them regard this advice in no light manner.”

To provide youth with that guidance we present the counsel, the teachings, the precepts, the ideals, the practical suggestions of the Church on the all-important subjects of courtship and chastity. While the treatment is of especial interest to those who are keeping company, it will not be without interest and profit, we believe, to all who wish to keep their innocence unsullied.

The decision of supreme importance in the life of a young man or of a young woman is the choice of a helpmate for life. The consequences of that choice are momentous and far-reaching. They shoot through the whole of one's earthly life. They penetrate even into the far regions of eternity. Upon that selection hinge to a large extent the hopes of a person's happiness both here and hereafter. Since that decision is fraught with consequences of such a far-reaching character, it follows that it should be made with



the greatest care, prudence and wisdom of which one is capable.

Company keeping and courtship have their justification in so far as they assist young people in making a wise choice. They have no other reason for existence. Indeed it can be said that the whole social mingling of the sexes during adolescence has as its chief end their preparation and development so that they may choose a congenial partner in marriage.

Extensive Friendship

For that reason acquaintance and friendship between the sexes should be fairly extensive. Dances, dramatics and socials of various kinds are all designed to promote such acquaintance. Out of an abundance of such social contacts one is more likely to discover a suitable and ideal helpmate than if the contacts were narrowly restricted. Hence it is important for young people to avail them-

selves of the many opportunities which the Church and society provide for the promotion of acquaintance among wholesome and congenial persons of the opposite sex. The failure to do so often deprives them of friendships which would mean much for their future happiness. Instead of deterring them from forming such friendships, parents should assist them in every prudent way.

The whole period before courtship should be wisely employed for the widening of one's circle of acquaintances and friends. Since courtship limits one's interest to a single person, it should not be undertaken when one is not in a position seriously to consider marriage. This means that steady company keeping is out-of-place for youths of high school age. Even among those in college it is generally wiser to wait until their junior or senior year before they restrict their interest to a single person.

How often have we seen a college freshman, smitten with "love at first sight," limit her dates to a single boy, wear his fraternity pin for several years, only to have the romance fade in the senior year, leaving her high and dry? The years of one's college life provide a wide circle of friends. Out of these friendships there is more likelihood that one based upon congeniality in taste, temperament and character will emerge and ripen into conjugal love.

In short, we say to young people looking wonderingly and wistfully at the horizon of marriage: Don't pull down the curtains prematurely upon the enterprise of making friends. Don't get panicky. Keep your head. Take your time and look around you. Meet many young people of good reputation and character. Mingle and talk with them in a friendly and gracious way. Explore their interests and learn something of their disposition and character. Then you will be in a better position to choose intelligently.

Remember that marriage lasts for life. If you choose with haste, you are likely to regret at leisure all the rest of your life. A marriage rushed into heedlessly often turns out to be a prison cell with iron bars no one can break. While love involves the heart and the emotions, the approval of the reason is most important. For sober common sense no adequate substitute has ever been discovered.

Steady Company

Keeping steady company has a function to fulfill. That function is legitimate and important. It is to enable a young couple to learn more about the qualities of mind and heart and character of each other, to explore the areas of congeniality in taste, culture, disposition, and character, to ascertain their fitness as partners in the most intimate and



enduring union which life offers. That is no small job. Indeed it is the most serious and important one they will ever be called upon to undertake.

Before undertaking steady courtship, however, they should be in a position where they can definitely plan to marry within a reasonable length of time. What would be the point of keeping steady company when the young man—say a medical student—sees no possibility of assuming the obligation for five or six years?

Is it fair to monopolize a young girl's time for all those precious years, with the possibility that the romance may crumble at the end? Steady courtship involves grave responsibilities which should not be undertaken lightly.

It should be preceded by wide and friendly mingling and acquaintance with others, by

the attainment of a sufficient age to understand the tremendous responsibilities of marriage, and by the approximate achievement of the financial resources to establish and maintain a home. When these antecedents are lacking, steady company keeping is unwise. Instead of aiding them in making a wise choice of a life partner, it is more likely to handicap and defeat them. Premature steady courtship is like expecting June roses to blossom before Spring has melted the snows and sleet of March. So much then for the practical suggestions about acquaintance among the sexes and the purpose of courtship.

We come now to consider the importance of the preservation of chastity during courtship, the danger which threatens it, and the means suggested by human prudence and divine wisdom for its protection.

Courtship is a time of stress and strain. New emotions, struggling for expression, are beating their almost ceaseless tattoo upon the minds, hearts, and nerves of adolescent youth. Cravings and urges, rooted deep in the biological instincts of the race, are clamoring for satisfaction. The proximity of a person of the opposite sex, a person who appeals to one's whole nature, tends—unless careful precautions are adapted—to add fuel to the flames of one's natural yearnings. Chastity will not long survive unless a cour-

ageous and determined struggle is made. God permits no compromise with the angelic virtue. Aptly does George Herbert say: *Wholly abstain or wed. Thy bounteous Lord allows thee choice of paths; take no byways.*

Discretion Outweighs Valor

We carry our precious treasure in vessels of clay. That fragile material will be shattered if we expose it needlessly to the sledgehammer blows of newly aroused passions. Prudence, discretion and the avoidance of all unnecessary risks constitute the only strategy which will lead in this warfare to victory. Here an ounce of discretion is worth a ton of valor.

Our safety lies, not in stalking the enemy but in flight. "He that loveth danger," warns *Ecclesiasticus*, "shall perish in it."¹

Later on the writer sounds the same note of warning: "He that toucheth pitch, shall be defiled with it."² He that needlessly exposes himself to the danger of unchastity will rarely, if ever, come out unscathed.

It is well for young people to remember that the law of chastity suffers neither abrogation nor curtailment during courtship. It binds the young couple in love to be pure in thought, word and deed with the same rigor with which it binds all mankind. It binds Protestants, Jews, non-church-going people, unbelievers as truly as it binds Catholics.



All, in whose minds shines the light of reason, fall under its all-embracing scope. Contrary to an impression encountered occasionally, courtship offers no moratorium upon the obligation to preserve one's innocence unsoiled. Then above all times is vigilance of the utmost importance.

Courtship on High Plane

One of the most important truths that needs to be driven home to young people is this: *Keep your courtship on a high plane.* Never allow it to degenerate to the physical. That sounds the death knell of honor and respect. With those elements gone, true friendship is impossible. Lust, squalid and ugly, has reared its serpentine head, and drives off the angels of decency and honor. "A man," says Frederick Harrison, "who cannot control his appetite is a cad. There is no real love except in marriage."

In all the long history of humanity, lust, naked and unrestrained, has never failed to deform friendship and love into an orgy of passion, whose denouncement is nausea, remorse, shame, bitterness, suffering, death. Its lethal fangs will kill the noblest friendship and poison the purest love. When allowed free scope, it will never fail to transform a Paradise of Eden in which lovers ought to dwell, into a purgatory, if not a hell, on earth.

“The sublimest virtues,” observes Dr. Krafft-Ebing, “even the sacrifice of self, may spring from sexual life which, however, on account of its sensual power, may easily degenerate into the lowest passion and basest vice. Love unbridled is a volcano that burns down and lays waste all around it; it is an abyss that devours all—honor, substance and health.”⁸

Explorers from the jungles of Africa report that one of the most dreaded dangers encountered there is a poisonous insect. It steals upon its victim, and by a fast but noiseless movement of its wings, cools the skin and thus deadens its sensitivity so that one does not feel the boring of the proboscis as it pierces the skin and shoots in its deadly weapon. It is the capacity to desensitize its victim so that he puts up no defense, that renders it so much dreaded.

So too it is with lust. It steals subtly upon

an individual, disturbs his capacity for clear discernment and calm thinking, and tends to anaesthetize the moral faculty. That is why lust is probably the most dangerous of all the foes that lie in ambush around the citadel of the human soul.

In all courtship, it is true, the physical element of sex is not lacking. But it must be kept in the background. It must not be allowed to dominate the scene, to direct the thoughts, and to dictate the conduct of the young people. God has made man, male and female. Each is possessed of a different nature. Those differences are both physical and psychological. These two natures, each incomplete in itself, find their completion in that sacred fusion which is achieved in matrimony. It is sufficient for the young couple to know this without seeking to explore the physical basis of these differences.

Subordinate Physical Element

The areas which are to be explored in courtship are those of taste, mind, temperament, disposition and character. The purpose here is to discover as large an area of congeniality as possible in all these important fields of thought, conduct and life.

These elements of congeniality will endure when passion like a bolt of lightning will largely have spent itself. Instead of growing weaker with the years, they grow in strength,

in tenacity and in expansiveness. Along with the love which has deepened with the years, they hold the couple together with tenderness but with the strength of hoops of steel.

One of the evil consequences of allowing the physical expression of sex too great license is that it impedes the intelligent exploration of elements of congeniality in other fields. It frustrates the cultivation of friendship in its deepest sense. Friendship of mind, of heart and of soul can only develop when the physical is subordinated to the spiritual.

Man is more than an animal. He is essentially a spiritual creature. It is the mind of man which constitutes his distinctive nature and his crowning glory. This then is the part of his nature which must be explored and cultivated, if friendship is to find its anchorage in an enduring element. An attraction which springs largely from the physical element of sex is an insecure foundation for enduring friendship and conjugal love.

“Hands-off” Policy

Because of the explosive character of sex, which acts like dynamite when ignited by a fuse, the importance of restraining the physical element in courting can scarcely be overstressed. The rule, basic and all-important, for all young people to remember is this: *Follow a “hands-off” policy during courtship.* This is the wisest and safest course.



Respect the person of the friend with whom you are keeping company. Don't try to set him or her and yourself as well—on fire. Why excite desires which cannot be satisfied, save at the expense of all that you both hold dear? Why torture your friend? Why make him restless and uneasy? Why inflict upon her headaches and heartaches and, almost inevitably, a disturbed, if not an accusing, conscience? Is not happiness, rather than pain, love's distinctive gift?

"Father," remarked a young college girl to me at the close of a retreat, "I've made a resolution to keep our courtship on a high plane. My parents are separated and I haven't had much Catholic training. In high school I traveled with a pretty fast set . . . we took 'necking' for granted on a date.

"Since coming to college I've been dating a boy who is a daily communicant. I admire and like him very much. He informed me recently that after dates with me he didn't feel free to go to Holy Communion . . . with-

out first going to confession. His conscience was disturbed. He notified me that he was going to end our friendship if he couldn't leave me with a good conscience.

"It jolted me as never before . . . more than any sermon. I'm going daily to Holy Communion to get help to keep my resolution . . . and with God's help . . . I will."

Genuine friendship does not lean upon the stimulation of the physical element of sex. It is injured and pained by such unseemly intrusions. Young people who really care for each other find untold happiness in the mere presence of the other. A world of good clean fun and enjoyment may be had together without any appeal to lust.

Mind Meets Mind

When young people keep their friendship on that high plane, the precious qualities of mind, heart and character never fail to unfold themselves like shining pearls. These scintillate and sparkle. Soon these strings of pearls will interlock. Mind meets mind, heart twines its arms around heart, and soul basks in the warm radiance of another soul.

Here is a friendship which grows from the twining of the noblest elements of their nature, like arms of love, one around the other. Such friendship will reach its natural goal in the perfect fusion of two hearts and souls in the deathless union of matrimony. Young

people who keep their friendship on this high basis tap new fountains of innocent joy and laughter. For a thousand times more satisfying and enduring than the mere contact of bodies are the joys which arise from the contact of mind with mind, of heart with heart, of personality with personality.

In the personality of the most prosaic looking individual there are hidden kingdoms of wondrous beauty. They are not discovered through superficial acquaintance. They are found only through patient exploration and continued search. Sometimes a smile in the face of defeat, a brave gesture when the chips are down, the manifestation of determination to fight on against all odds to the unseen end, a kindly word of praise when sorely needed to carry on, will act as the magic Sesame to open the doors to those hidden worlds of beauty and of tenderness. Says Allene Gregory in her poem, *Personality*:

*I am a stained glass window
Little of light comes through
Flecked by a thousand colors,
Purple and mauve and blue.
But when you praised my colors,
Only the dear Lord knew
How I longed to shatter the painted glass
And show far worlds to you.*

Sex Differences

Here a word about the differences in the sexes is in order. The physical basis of the sex instinct is more highly localized in man and may be more easily aroused. In woman the psychological elements play a larger and more important role. Actions and contacts which leave her virtually undisturbed may greatly arouse the passions of her male companion. Consequently, it is necessary for the girl to bear in mind the wisdom of discouraging any liberty which may act as a fuse setting off an explosion on the part of her friend. In a sense she must be the keeper of his conscience as well as of her own. She must be considerate of him as well as of herself.

Yet how often that protection is denied a young man, through lack of understanding of his danger. "One of the greatest dangers," points out M. A. Bigelow, "that present-day boys in the latest teens (and the twenties) must learn to face with stoical grip on their own impulsive tendencies is the almost inevitable temptation thrown before them in the whirl of social life by perfectly decent and innocent girls who by nature do not understand why and what and wherefore is the young man's problem of self-control."⁴

Not uncommonly the girl fails to realize that a familiarity, which seems to her to be

an innocent expression of romantic love, may quickly ignite the tinderbox of the boy's passion, setting off a terrific explosion. Because the physical elements of sex are usually dormant or quiescent in her nature, she does not sense that what is safe for her may be extremely perilous for her friend. If these differences were more widely understood by young people of both sexes, many dangers and temptations now unwittingly placed before young men would be avoided.

"If each understood the other's nature and impulses better," observes Dr. J. M. Cooper, "their courtship problems would not, it is true, be solved one hundred per cent, but there would be notably fewer slips, more mutual consideration and protection, less liberties, and more of ennobling and purifying love in its highest levels."⁵

A Life Preserver

The average young man wants to do right. Under the sledge-hammer blows of newly awakened sex instincts, he stands, however, desperately in need of help. Even when outwardly pleading for liberties, he is often inwardly hoping and praying that the girl will save him from himself. If she is a wise and considerate girl, she will not fail to help him in his moment of desperate need. An earnest word, a look of disapproval, a sudden change in the conversation, a quick and determined



step away, will be the life preserver thrown to him as he is sinking.

When thus rescued, with his senses restored to him, a sentiment of boundless admiration will well up in his heart for the girl who saved him. That understanding gesture, in which were mingled sympathy and firmness, is the finest possible expression of true friendship and nobility of character. The young man, if he has any streak of decency in him, will not fail to take the cue and keep his courtship, henceforth, safely away from the danger zones.

A Paradox

A young man is a curious paradox. That paradox asserts itself in the reaction which not infrequently mystifies the girl. He has pleaded and begged for certain *liberties*. After he has obtained them, does he feel pride over his success and gratitude for the girl who yielded to his entreaties? On the contrary, he is ashamed of himself, and disillusioned with the girl.

The contempt that he feels for himself spreads over to her who was the accessory to his misdeed. Instead of the exultant joy of victory, there is the sting of humiliating defeat. Such a friendship has received a body blow. If it is to survive, a different course must be pursued by both.

The reaction of the man may appear to the girl as strange, paradoxical, contradictory. It may be all that and more. But it is as old as humanity. It is mirrored in the *Second Book of Kings*, which tells how Ammon prevailed upon Tamar, much against her will. "Do not do so," she pleaded, "do not force me: for no such thing must be done in Israel. . . . For I shall not be able to bear my shame, and thou shalt be as one of the fools in Israel." He hearkened not, however, to her earnest pleading . . . her tearful entreaty.

Did the action elicit his praise and ensure his love? Listen to the verse which immediately follows the record of the deed: "Then Ammon hated her with an exceeding great hatred; so that the hatred wherewith he hated her was greater than the love with which he had loved her before. And Ammon said to her: Arise, and get thee gone."⁶ Such was the reaction of man at the beginning of history. Such will be his reaction till the crack of doom. For the spiritual element which constitutes man's distinctive nature

will always rise in wrath and condemnation against the flesh which betrays him for a mess of pottage.

The feelings of nausea, shame, contempt, after a yielding to temptation are not, however, peculiar to the man. They are shared equally, if not to an even greater degree, by the girl. While she is not so susceptible to excitement through the physical stimuli of sex, she realizes that her maidenly modesty is her greatest treasure. From her male consort she covets, above all, respect and honor.

She is sensitive to the eloquence of restraint. She sees it in the expression of love tempered with reverence and esteem. A young man will most surely win the heart of a girl if he acts always as a gentleman and places her upon her rightful pedestal of unsullied innocence and queenly modesty.

The Quarterback

Similarly, a girl will command the respect and win the love of a boy if by words and actions she makes it transparently clear that she will tolerate no compromise with her ideals of honor and integrity. Any momentary lowering of the bars as well as any hesitancy or vacillation are quickly detected and are too readily construed as subtle and implied invitations to liberties that may prove both questionable and dangerous.

“Father,” tearfully remarked a young co-

ed to me, "I'm sorry that Joe has left without really getting to know me, that is, my better and truer self. We were pretty frivolous in our courtship . . . went out for good times and lots of fun. I never really got to show him my true character, my deeper self."

She hesitated for a moment as though it wasn't too easy to continue. Then she added: "But it's my own fault. I was the quarterback and I didn't always call the right signals. I wish I had the chance over again and I'd guide the play differently."

What a world of meaning is packed into that phrase which has stuck with me through the passing years—"I was the quarterback." Yes, the girl is the quarterback in the game of love. She calls the signals that touch off the springs of action. Her words and actions, the expression in her eyes, and the tone of her voice not less than her spoken words sound the signals which like radio waves are picked up by the sensitive antennae of the throbbing heart and listening mind of her sweetheart. Valiant, wise and blessed indeed is the girl who calls signals that square with Christ's law of honor and purity and issue in the actions of a chaste and noble love.

1 3:27.

2 13:1.

3 *Psychopathia Sexualis*; p. 2.

4 *Adolescence*, Funk and Wagnalls, N. Y., p. 60.

5 *Religion Outlines for Colleges*, Course IV, Catholic Education Press, Washington, p. 103.

6 *Kings*, 13:15.

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