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I'm
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Now!



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By

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THE PAULIST PRESS

401 WEST 59TH STREET

NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

Imprimi Potest:

VERY REV. MAURICE RIPPENGER, O.F.M.,
Provincial, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Nihil Obstat:

ARTHUR J. SCANLAN, S.T.D.,
Censor Librorum.

Imprimatur:

✠ PATRICK CARDINAL HAYES,
Archbishop of New York.

New York, January 24, 1934.

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED IN THE U. S. A.
BY THE PAULIST PRESS, NEW YORK 19, N. Y.

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I'm Keeping Company Now !

I

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF KEEPING COMPANY

THEY say that in the Chinese language one and the same word has different meanings according to the tone and inflection of voice which are used in uttering it. The same is true, in a way, in regard to sentences spoken in any language. Thus the pronouncement used as the title of this pamphlet, "I'm Keeping Company Now," may have, when spoken by a Catholic, one of several different meanings.

In the mouth of one person it may be but a casual remark, stating something that is taken as a matter of course, without any particular significance being attached to it either by speaker or listener, perhaps because company keeping is by no means a novel experience in the life of the speaker.

From the lips of another, however, the same declaration may come with an accent of Christian sobriety, begot by the apprehension of the likely natural consequences and supervening sacred duties of the new adventure. It is in this sense, free from any tinge of frivolity and any mere quest for amorous flirtations, that we are considering the momentous declaration in the present essay.

The person says, as it were: "I am now growing serious in my contemplation of and status toward marriage. I intend to test my call to it in a practical and concrete way. I am through being variable in my love addictions, flitting freely from swain to swain or, relatively, from lassie to lassie, getting nowhere in particular on the road to matrimony. I am definitely limiting my relations to one special lover or sweetheart to learn if marriage with this person is desirable, feasible, and advisable."

In the Sacred Halls of the Seminary

For the Catholic interested party, who is fully aware of its meaning, such a statement is similar to the one made by the seminarian who, with a tone of moderate and becoming gravity, says: "I have entered upon my last year of theology now and, please God, within a year or so, I count on being ordained a priest of the Most High." His earnestness in saying this springs from his concept of the sublimity of the Sacrament of Sacred Orders he is proximately getting ready to receive, and of the tremendous obligations its reception will lay upon him in his own and others' behalf. What impresses and awes him most in the matter is the conviction, that once he becomes a priest, he will be a priest forever, for better or for worse, without any possibility of ever again becoming free from the vow by which he intends to bind himself to God and His exclusive service.

"A Great Sacrament"

In like manner the judicious Catholic who says: "I'm keeping company now" realizes that company keeping is ordinarily the proximate and immediate preparation for the reception of the sacred rite of which St. Paul says: "This is a great sacrament: but I speak in Christ and in the Church" (Ephes. v. 32). The same Apostle compares it, because of its holiness and potential results, to the divine union of Christ and the Church, saying: "The husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the Church. . . . Therefore as the Church is subject to Christ: so also let the wives be to their husbands in all things. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ also loved the Church and delivered Himself up for it" (*Ibid.*, xxiii. 25).

What impresses the candidate for marriage most vividly is the sense of the great obligations the holy contract involves and of the awful responsibilities it may eventually bring

with respect to beings that are yet unborn. Moreover the thought: "Once I marry this person, I am married to him or her until death parts us, come what will" is of a nature to lend a weight of seriousness to the brief announcement: "I'm keeping company now."

A Serious Contract

To marry someone means to decide once for all to love this particular person, to the exclusion of all others; to live with this person in the most intimate manner and closest possible human relations; to love this person as long as life lasts, whatever may betide one or the other, or both parties. It is evident to everyone, who is at all versed in human psychology, that to make such a contract requires mature deliberation and close observation and examination of oneself and the other party to the contract. Company keeping is to give the occasion for this important process.

To marriage apply the words which the prophet Simeon said to Mary in the temple as he held the divine Infant in his arms: "Behold this child is set for the fall and for the resurrection of many in Israel" (Luke ii. 34). In every case marriage is either the source of salvation or damnation to the parties contracting it, depending, respectively, on their proper or improper qualifications for and attitude towards it. Many, very many of our Catholic people become great saints, while others become great sinners, through marriage.

A Hundred Per Cent

It is said that, to make a success of marriage, one must be qualified to be a hundred per cent spouse, a hundred per cent lover, and a hundred per cent parent. Any one of these three offices requires a large amount of sterling virtues and noble character. All three of them together exact all the goodness and common sense with which ordinary mortals are or can be endowed. Nor is it sufficient if

one has all these qualities in the abstract. He or she must have and be able to use them with reference to the particular person to whom he or she is to be united in marriage. To test the relative acceptability and adaptability of both parties to the reasonable satisfaction of either party is the object and duty of company keeping.

In view of all this, since happiness for life and eternity depends very much on the wise choice of a marriage partner, no sensible candidate for marriage can escape a feeling of intense virtuous seriousness in saying: "I'm keeping company now."

II

WITH WHOM ARE YOU KEEPING COMPANY?

To keep company in a Christian way means that two persons, man and woman, meet personally at frequent intervals, with the intention of becoming better acquainted and judging whether they are fit and desirable mutual partners for a prospective marriage in Christ and in the Church.

From this definition of Christian company keeping it is evident above all, that when there is absolutely no prospect of marriage between them, a man and a woman, young or old, may not keep regular company. To do so is immoral. Such frequent proximity with one of the other sex is warranted only by the probable or, at least, possible marriage it should lead up to. If this probability or possibility of marriage is definitely out of the question, such a close social relation between the sexes is unjustifiable.

Hypocrisy and Duplicity

Such frivolous and unwarranted company keeping is also likely to be deceitful and grossly misleading to the innocent party. The guilty party in our supposition is fully aware and morally certain that the actual company keeping will not end in marriage. Yet often

he or she allows the partner to believe, that there is or might be some chance of the marriage taking place sooner or later. The innocent party is decoyed into wasting time, money, and what not, that could be most profitably employed towards the pursuit of a worthwhile marriage possibility, not to mention the unnamable heartaches such hypocrisy and selfish duplicity usually bring in their train. In a matter of such vast importance the golden rule of Jesus: "All things therefore whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them" (Matt. vii. 12) must be the guide of every respectable Christian person.

The Danger of Adultery

It is furthermore obvious from what has been said that one may not keep company with a person who is already married, whether divorced by the secular court or not. Such company keeping is of an adulterous savor and often leads to the detestable crime of downright adultery.

Only God knows how frequent is the sad lot of injudicious young Catholics who start a love affair with a divorced person, hoping against hope, that some way to an honorable Christian marriage with this person may be found. They defy the laws of the Church and the voice of conscience by attempting marriage outside of the Church, thereby starting fiercely on the way which almost invariably leads to apostasy from the Faith. The only way to forestall so dire a step is to fight shy of all amorous feelings towards a divorced person, and of all the occasions that might engender them not only proximately, but also remotely. The matter is too perilous to be trifled with ever so little.

To keep company with a married person, whether divorced or not, is of itself sinful, and as was stated above, of a distinctly adulterous odor. The question now arises: "Since

the Church prohibits mixed marriages, is it sinful for a Catholic to keep company with a non-married person not of the Faith?"

How About Mixed Marriages?

There are cases in which Catholics sin mortally by keeping company with a non-Catholic. I have in mind a Catholic who is already weak in the Faith. Lightly, flippantly, and rather defiantly this person keeps company with one who is not only not a member of our holy Church, but makes no secret of harboring gross prejudices and hostile sentiments against our Faith, and expresses them openly and sneeringly. By associating so closely and planning a prospective marriage with so bitter a non-Catholic, the Catholic party often sins grievously against the Faith. This sin is usually followed up, multiplied, and increased by the Catholic party's gradual or abrupt outright defection from the Faith, either before or after the marriage is contracted or attempted.

Since the Church, for certain grave reasons, tolerates a mixed marriage on given conditions, it is not always sinful for a Catholic to keep company with a non-Catholic. Yet, since the possible nuptial alliance with a non-Catholic, grand, noble, and honorable though he or she be, presents so many, and such strong and insidious dangers to the faith and happiness of the Catholic party, this person, for his or her own safety and welfare, must be careful to tell the confessor at once of the hazardous courtship. This should be done in order to obtain advice and, if necessary, be corrected before the affair proceeds to a pass, where advice and correction no longer serve a purpose, or can avert disaster.

No one can begin to count all the Catholics in our country today, who are miserable beyond words because of a mixed marriage, and the unspeakable aches resulting from it to them and their children. They would have

avoided all this misery and woe, had they but taken their confessor into their confidence before or as soon as they started to keep company with a non-Catholic. As persistently as they then tried to hide the secret of it from those who would have counselled them well and saved them from a catastrophe, so furiously they now blame themselves for their short-sighted folly and suicidal stupidity.

A Long Priestly and Missionary Experience

Without presumption I believe I can state that I know about all that can be said in favor of mixed marriages generally and individually. I am willing to allow the objective value of every such favorable argument. But my long experience of thirty-four years in the priesthood and fifteen years in missionary work has very much confirmed me in the belief that, as statistics prove, nine out of every ten Catholics who contract a mixed marriage do it to their own and their prospective children's serious detriment; that for every well-minded Catholic who, for having been and being personally fortunate in his or her mixed marriage, inveighs against the priests and missionaries who scathingly decry mixed marriages in theory, or before they are contracted, there are nine other Catholics, who are unspeakably wretched as a result of a mixed marriage, and who inveigh much more violently against the Church for tolerating mixed marriages at all and in any case; and that therefore almost every Catholic, who is prudent and hungry for peace and happiness, will be very wise by resolutely preferring the single life to any kind of a mixed marriage.

It must be admitted that many also, who are of the Faith, are very undesirable marriage mates on account of various handicaps and defects of a prohibitive and repellant character. Again, a person may be too choicy and demanding in the selection of a partner in marriage. If God Himself is satisfied to have

men, not angels, as the dispensers of His divine mysteries and the channels of salvation unto men, people contemplating marriage, who are alive to their own natural deficiencies, should not desire an angel, but be willing to put up with a mere human being, like themselves, disclosing human fallibilities, as their life's companion.

III

WHEN AND HOW LONG ARE YOU KEEPING COMPANY?

Close and mature observation and sound common sense seem to sponsor the advice that, as a rule, the best time for a young man to marry in our country is at the age of twenty-three to twenty-six years, and for a girl at the age of twenty-one to twenty-four. Ordinarily regular company keeping should not be protracted much beyond a period of about a year.

Unduly long courtships, aside from the obvious moral dangers involved, often end in no marriage or in an unhappy marriage. Their endless duration is too great a tax on the glow of idealistic romance and too much of a menace to the mellow down of tender friendship. They are an unnatural emotional alliance, commendable from no point of view whatever.

It is hardly a source of honorable pride for a young man or woman to be known as a perpetual prospective bridegroom or bride. In the way of their contemplated marriage they appear to be in the position of the unfortunate man of whom Jesus says: "Which of you, having a mind to build a tower, doth not first sit down and reckon the charges that are necessary, whether he have wherewithal to finish it: lest, after he hath laid the foundation and is not able to finish it, all that see it begin to mock him, saying: This man began to build and was not able to finish" (Luke xiv. 28-30).

The Dangerous Teen Age

From this it follows that Catholic young people must beware of starting to keep regular company too soon, say when they are but sixteen or seventeen years old. They expose themselves either to the danger of a premature marriage, with its frequent mistakes of an injudicious and ill-starred choice of a mate, as well as a reckless and ominous economic risk. They doom their marriage to an early and complete wreck. Or, if they do not marry hastily, they court the hardly lesser evil of an immoderately long regular courtship with the attendant disadvantages mentioned above.

It is said that by nature woman has more of a gambling or venturesome spirit than man. If this is so, it seems to assert itself especially in the domain of marriage, which is justly called life's biggest gamble and most hazardous venture. Woman does not appear to be nearly so deliberative, calculating, and fearful of possible results in taking the chance of a given marriage opportunity as man. Maybe it is better thus. If in this vital matter women were proportionally as careful and shy as men, there would likely be fewer marriages than now, in distinct jeopardy of nature's urge for a continuation of the human race.

A Strong Gambling Spirit

Sensible women, especially very young women of sixteen or seventeen years, in whom this gambling spirit likes to be particularly self-assertive and heedless, will therefore be on their guard against too early an enterprise of an amorous and nuptial character that bodes to them much more evil than good, much more pain than pleasure, and much more woe than joy.

Odd as it seems, there are a number of Catholic young people, notably girls, who are so eager to be married now and here, to someone and somehow, without delay, that they are willing to take a risk with one of whom they

practically know nothing. Falling in love, or imagining they are falling in love, at first sight, after one casual meeting not in a church, but in a dance hall, or road house, or at the beach, or at some other resort, or on a train, they are ready to marry the person forthwith, trusting in their luck to take care of the future. They prefer to be sorry to being certain. Marrying in haste, they nearly always repent bitterly at leisure. Even a normally happy life does not ordinarily speed along too fast. An unhappy life, rendered so through a wilfully premature and ill-fated marriage, no matter how short it is, seems never to end.

A girl who, being indisposed, would go into a drugstore, and without examination and consultation would take the first bottle of medicine that struck her fancy because of its looks or label, and swallow the contents, confiding in her good fortune to see to it that it was the medicine she needed to build her up and restore her health, would hardly be more guilty of criminal temerity against her own good, than is the girl or youth who marries a person without having made reasonable efforts to ascertain the relative acceptability of this person.

Although the period of regular courtship is intended to give the parties to it the occasion of gauging their mutual desirability or non-desirability as marriage mates, a prudent Catholic, contemplating marriage, wants to know as much as reasonably can be known of his or her prospective partner in courtship, before the courtship actually begins. It is much easier and less disagreeable not to start keeping company with a person whom one has learned beforehand from reliable sources to look upon as a non-acceptable marriage prospect, than to begin to keep company with a person, before gathering any advance information regarding this person's character and social, family and individual status, and then to withdraw from the close relations of court-

ship upon becoming aware of things that could and should have been known before the courtship had ever started.

IV

IN WHAT MANNER ARE YOU KEEPING COMPANY?

From the conduct Catholics observe in company keeping may be inferred, first, their conception of the holy Sacrament of Marriage, for the worthy and blessed reception of which company keeping is to serve as the proximate preparation; and second, how they will likely conduct themselves towards the holy Sacrament during their wedded life: in brief whether it will be to them their resurrection or their fall. This most momentous decision is really made in the period of courtship.

In a previous chapter I used a seminarian's immediate preparation for the sacred priesthood as an illustration for worthy company keeping. There is a close analogy between the Sacrament of Holy Orders and the Sacrament of Matrimony. Both are not only individual but social sacraments. Holy Orders perpetuates the spiritual generations, Matrimony continues the carnal procreations of men. Both are of supreme importance not only to the recipients, but also to society as such. Hence we must not be surprised at the analogy between them.

Rectors of seminaries often observe that what a young man is in the seminary, especially in theology, he usually is and remains all the days of his subsequent priesthood. Similarly, as was said before, what Catholics are in courtship they usually are in their entire subsequent married life.

He Aims at Three Things

The earnest seminarian who stands on the threshold of the Sacrament of Holy Orders aims at three things: at being upright with himself; upright with the Church to whom, as a priest, he will be mystically wedded; and

upright with God, for Whose glory and work he becomes a priest.

In like manner the Catholic person in courtship pursues the identical three aims. He—the same is true of a woman—is first of all true to himself. He tests himself to find out if he is really called to married life with this definite person. As soon as he realizes that this particular union does not and cannot appeal to him in any tolerable way, he at once, however gently and diplomatically, discontinues the courtship, regardless of the consequences.

It is better to part as friends voluntarily in good time than to be compelled either to live together very unhappily for life, or to separate as enemies later on. After all, it is the purpose of courtship to learn this very thing: the ultimate desirability of perpetuating the contemplated union by the sacred contract of marriage. If the issue is decidedly negative to one of the parties, the other cannot take the discontinuance of the relations amiss, provided everything is done and said above board, with candor, fairness, and equity.

He Tells Her Everything

In the second place, the Catholic in courtship is honest and honorable towards his partner. He reveals himself and his family and personal status to her in sincerity and truth, in the degree in which she has the right to this revelation inasmuch as he intends, if the courtship proceeds in a satisfactory manner, to ask her some day to be his wife. He withholds from her knowledge nothing that she, as his prospective wife, has a claim to know. Of course, he will be cautious in imparting this knowledge, and he will not reveal family or personal secrets to her until he is quite sure that the marriage will take place.

There are certain things of a family or personal character he need not and must not tell her, since she has no right whatever to learn

them on the one hand, and the revelation of them would do her, and him, as well as others, much more harm than good. Of such a nature, for example, are his personal repented sins, of which there is no trace left to embarrass or discomfit her in any way. They are best left buried and forgotten to everyone, himself included.

A Wise Caution for the Girl

This caution applies particularly to the girl in courtship and also after marriage. Ordinarily she will be guilty of the greatest folly, if she manifests to her lover or husband her personal moral lapses and irregularities of a remote or recent date, which she has duly confessed, and of which not a vestige is left to harass her partner in any way. It is sufficient that these were admitted to God, and to His representative in the confessional. No one else should ever know of them or even suspect them. They must be buried in everlasting oblivion, as though they had never been.

She Has More Than One Lover

Of itself it is not unethical for a girl, who is not engaged to be married, to keep company simultaneously with more than one suitor. She may or may not apprise her suitors that there is another, or there are others, making a bid for her hand. Of course, if she is earnestly asked by one of them, whether he is her only suitor or not, especially if he is to be guided as to his continuance of the courtship by the knowledge of the facts in the case, she must impart this knowledge to him. And as soon as the girl knows that one of her competitive suitors has no prospect whatever of marrying her, she is in duty bound to discontinue receiving his attentions. After she is engaged to be married she can no longer keep company honorably with others, as long as this engagement holds. What has been said of a girl in courtship, is relatively true for the young man.

God's Love Must Be Cultivated

Above all, Catholics who keep company must be upright with God, Who is not only willing, if the courtship's course is favorable, to confer upon them "a great sacrament," but Who will likely in due time, if it so pleases Him, bless them in holy marriage, saying: "Increase and multiply" (Gen. i. 28), thus making them sharers in His own greatest power, that of creation, and in His own grandest title, that of Father, or Parent. Inspired by the mere thought of such sublime favors that are in the offing for them, their attitude is patterned on the conduct of Tobias and his bride. Of them we read:

"Tobias exhorted the virgin, and said to her: Sara, arise, and let us pray to God. . . . For we are the children of saints: and we must not be joined together like heathens that know not God. So they both arose, and prayed earnestly both together that health might be given them. And Tobias said: Lord God of our fathers, . . . Thou madest Adam of the slime of the earth, and gavest him Eve as a helper. And now, Lord, Thou knowest, that not for fleshly lust do I take my sister to wife, but only for the love of posterity, in which Thy Name may be blessed forever and ever" (Tobias viii. 4-9).



THE PSYCHOLOGY OF COURTSHIP

A secular non-Catholic speaker at a Rotary Club meeting, speaking with much good sense on courtship, said among other things that, after two persons keep company for a month, they no longer are what they were before they started seeing one another regularly. They are either much better, or much worse. If better, it is the girl's credit. If worse, it is her fault.

Every psychologist admits the first part of this contention. Company keeping, when

earnestly pursued, is a strong and conclusive test of virtue, goodness, and character, either disclosing and increasing weakness, or revealing and augmenting strength. Usually the very first month of company keeping stamps it as a courtship either of self-control or self-indulgence; of the dominion of the spirit over the flesh, or of the flesh over the spirit; of sublime spiritual and pure emotional enjoyment, or of low sensuous pleasures and illicit carnal gratifications; of a heartening and fostering of one another in the pursuit of high ideals and noble aspirations, of personal goodness and social integrity, or of a reciprocal degrading and dragging one another down into the slough of ugly sin, moral turpitude, and personal and social ignominy; of animating one another unto the grandest love of God and the complete immolation of self in His honor, or of seducing one another to defy God's holy laws at first through weakness, then with presumption, and finally with defiance, in the blind and mad worship of the idol of lust; of striving together, in a word, after an enviable place in the kingdom of heaven, to be united there in the holiest love and joy forevermore, or of following the line of least resistance, and forfeiting paradise for something much viler than a mess of pottage, and of hazarding to be cast forever "into the exterior darkness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt. viii. 12), to the final exclusion of everything that savors or is at all reminiscent of love in any manner or form.

One Standard of Morality

To the other part of the Rotary speaker's statement, however, we Catholics must take exception. We hold firm to the single standard of morality for the sexes. Man is as much bound to the observance of personal chastity as is woman. When, then, a courtship maintains a high Christian level of modesty and innocence, the man ordinarily deserves as much

credit for it as the girl; and when it degenerates into obscenity and viciousness, he usually is as much to blame as the girl.

Society at large, however, does not accept this sane and equitable view of the problem we are considering. Whenever a courtship defaults grossly against morality, the woman is usually made to pay the greater part if not all of the social penalty. In view of this quite universal and perennial custom we naturally become curious and seek for the cause of it. This cause is not hard to find.

Woman's Native Instinct for Modesty

By nature, for biological and social reasons, woman is endowed with a much stronger instinct for modesty than man. She loves, prizes, and is proud of her gift of purity and innocence as her most precious personal possession. Her native ambition is to preserve it untarnished at any price. She prefers to forfeit anything else she has, even life itself, rather than compromise her virtue and honor ever so little. If through some untoward event in a moment of weakness she loses her purity through an indiscretion with one of the other sex, she collapses entirely, is morally undone, and filled with unutterable remorse and self-detestation, and an irresistible desire to fling the ugly stain of vice from her as soon as possible, and recover her pristine luster and vigor of chastity.

Nature emphasizes and protects woman's natural dowry of modesty by instilling in her a general shyness, timidity, and reserve in regard to all men. Not that she suspects any one particular man of entertaining questionable designs upon her, or of being all in all viciously inclined; but instinctively she feels safer when she is not alone with or too close to a man. Nature bids her, in all her associations with men, to follow and firmly, although graciously, to enforce the wise canon

of virtue and good sense expressed by the words: "Hands off!" and "Touch me not!"

Finally the instinct of modesty renders woman naturally revelatory respecting her personal love life with one of the other sex. As long as a girl is unspoiled she wants to tell her mother everything that transpires in her courtship between herself and her lover. And if she is a Catholic, she tells her confessor from the start everything that somehow threatens to weaken or mar in her the virtue of purity. As long as she yields freely, yet reasonably, to this inclination, she is safe, and her modesty is in no serious danger. But once she becomes furtive and secretive in reference to these vital matters of personal rectitude, there is reason to fear lest her purity has fled or is slipping from her.

A Girl's Saddest Moments

It is one of the saddest moments in a girl's life when, in her courtship, for the first time, as she kneels for her night prayers before the crucifix or the picture of the Most Sacred Heart of Jesus over her bed, she does not dare to look our divine Lord in the face. She feels terribly abashed, emotionally crushed, and completely unworthy to be prostrate before our Saviour's image at all. Something horrid, in the way of a sinful erotic indulgence with her suitor, had entered forever the history of her life that dreadful night. The stain of it wiped out by one fatal sweep all the previous beauty and glamour of her virtue. She feels she will never be her former self again, and the lovely relations she nursed with her divine Redeemer in the days of her purity and innocence will never more be restored to their previous tenderness and deliciousness. The vicious deed was like the angry thrust of a mailed fist into a precious and very artistic mirror that dashed it by one ferocious blow into a thousand sorry looking pieces.

Another moment of immense sadness, sec-

and only to the one we have just considered, occurs in a girl's life the following morning when, because of the same dastardly lapse, she has not the heart to meet her mother's loving glance by looking her fondly in the eye, and heartily returning her morning greeting, as she had been wont to do. Before this sorrowful event she felt she was always starting the day right if, after saying her morning prayers, she tendered her sentiments of love and gratitude to her dear mother. But on this particular morning she dreads to meet her mother at all. She casts her eyes down slinkingly and, as it were, self-accusingly. She appears to feel that her good mother is aware of everything that happened that terrible night in her home, or in the automobile, or elsewhere, and that, pure as her mother is, she intuitively sees her daughter's conscience and realizes the glowering cloud of sin and God's anger hanging over it. In the girl's eyes her mother is a replica of the Blessed Mother herself, so immaculately chaste and pure: by contrast, she feels painfully unworthy to be in her presence.

When Unhappiness Is Complete

The unhappiness of the unfortunate girl is complete, if the gloomy and self-denunciatory expression on her face is rooted not only in a sense of personal guilt, but also in a fear of possible consequences that menace her and her family with untold infamy and shame, thus verifying the words of the Apostle: "The wages of sin is death" (Rom. vi. 23): death of the soul through the loss of sanctifying grace; death of the peace of conscience through the crushing remorse for sin; death of the delighted consciousness of the possession of unsoiled purity and untarnished chastity; death of the high plane and ideal standard attained and maintained by their previous courtship; death of the lofty esteem and sacred reverence they formerly had for one

another, because of their virtue and self-control, practiced for the love of God. And—O horror of all horrors—sometimes the hideous sin of mutual incontinency leads to the crime of the murder of the illegitimate, unborn child: the most gruesome homicide imaginable. Indeed, “the wages of sin is death.”

After the murder of his brother, “the Lord set a mark upon Cain” (Gen. iv. 15). What decent girl can tolerate the idea of ever being similarly marked by God because of the murder of an unborn child? The best way to forestall so horrid an eventuality, is to steer clear of every leniency in the scrupulous observance of the Christian proprieties of sacred courtship.

Although, as was said above, the woman pays most, if not all of this burden of sin in as far as it is inflicted by society, the man in the case is fully as guilty and as deserving of punishment in the eyes of God. Nor will he escape this punishment, for “it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Heb. x. 31).

The Spirit of Christian Gallantry and Chivalry

The same instinct nature gives woman for the scrupulous preservation of her modesty she gives man for the maintenance of manly honor, gallantry, and chivalry. She prompts him to earn the respect, attachment, and love of a pure woman by the exhibition of genuine honor in her eyes, urging him to achieve the greatest and most glorious possible conquest, namely the conquest of himself, and the subjection of his inferior to his higher self. Nature, moreover, inclined him to manifest himself to the girl he loves as the gallant and chivalrous protector of her virtue and honor, challenging all her enemies with intrepidity, and willing to suffer any hardship and make any sacrifice in order to keep her innocence from every harm and every appearance of harm. When, instead of protecting the

maiden's virtue against others, he himself turns traitor and, in order to satisfy his low carnal desires, does what he can to wreck it, regardless of the sad and tragic consequences that may and often do ensue, he disgraces his manhood, plays false to his title as a Christian, and renders himself an object of deserved scorn, shame and disgust to the girl he seduces.

When "Gentleman Friend" Is a Misnomer

Few expressions have a more ironical, sarcastic and satanic sound in the ears of one who understands than the admission of a girl, saying: "I have been guilty of indiscretions with my gentleman friend." Who is less entitled to the honorable name of a gentleman than he, who has misled an erstwhile pure and innocent virgin to forfeit her most priceless possession for the shameful indulgence in carnal pleasures, the memory of which will be bitter as wormwood to her all the days of her life? Did it take a gentleman to detour her, for the first time in her experience, from the path of virginal righteousness and happiness into the slimy abyss of lechery and disgrace? Is it the part of the gentleman to degrade and ruin, instead of elevating and ennobling the girl who has confided her goodness and honor to him?

What claim has he to the title of friend who, under the cover and with the hypocritical pretense of sacred love, deprives a girl forever of her greatest treasure? He is much more the girl's deadly enemy than would be the robber, who held a gun in her face on the public highway, and despoiled her of all her money and jewels. Money and jewels can eventually be replaced: the record of untarnished virtue and unsullied innocence, never.

Yea, the meanest criminal and rapist would not be able to harm the girl in question as she has been harmed by her so-called friend, who has taken undue personal liberties with her.

The rapist might overpower her by force. Yet, because of her positive and utmost aversion to the unmentionable outrage, her purity and innocence, far from suffering the least harm, would merely be greatly increased in merit and luster through the formidable misadventure.

But her so-called friend, somehow, on the pretext of love, has urged and swayed her to surrender voluntarily the glory of personal chastity, that she has spent all her previous years in accumulating by dint of heroic self-conquest, and that has made her as like to the angels of God as it is possible for a sojourner on this earth to become. Oh, the "abomination of desolation in the temple" (Dan. ix. 27), just recently inhabited by God Who, because of its appealing splendor exclaimed respecting it: "This is My beloved daughter, in whom I am well pleased!" (Cf. Matt. iii. 17.) At the sight of the ghoulish fiend who desecrated and devastated it, and demon-like seduced the girl herself to yield to and endorse its desecration and devastation, we can hardly refrain from crying out: "What a gentleman! And what a friend!"

In truth, "a man's enemies shall be they of his own household" (Matt. xi. 36). In like manner a girl's worst enemy is often her misnamed gentleman friend. To him, then, our Lord's words apply with peculiar force when He says to the girl: "She that loveth her friend more than Me, is not worthy of Me" (Cf. Matt. x. 37).

Very wisely the victimized girl will draw the rational inference, in case her lover persists in importuning her to permit him to indulge in mutual improprieties in courtship, that if he cannot master himself in the period immediately preparatory to marriage, when this mastery is comparatively easy, she cannot expect him to control himself later on after marriage, when control is likely to be more difficult. And what chance would she have for salvation in a marriage in which her

partner would be a constant proximate occasion of sin to her?

While making these timely, albeit most disagreeable, observations, we are not by any means losing sight of the fact, that when there is moral irregularity in courtship, ordinarily neither party is entirely to blame, but both are equally at fault. Hence the young man is often as much as, or more justified than the girl in making the aforesaid deduction regarding the danger of marriage with an incontinent partner.

VI

THE AUTOMOBILE A VEHICLE OF SPIRITUAL DESTRUCTION

For reasons that need not be discussed here, perhaps nowhere so much so as by the automobile are loving couples decoyed into gross improprieties and lascivious liberties with one another. It may safely be asserted, that if a couple rises above this danger, and practices unswerving self-control against every lure of transgression offered them by and through the automobile, their company keeping is high and pure throughout: "A spectacle to the world and to angels and to men" (1 Cor. iv. 9).

Sad statistics report that in our country about thirty thousand people are killed outright, and about a million persons are more or less seriously injured each year through the automobile. Staggering as these figures are, the havoc they indicate is as nothing when compared with the infinitely more deplorable ravages of a moral character consummated by the automobile in our country every year. Alas, we have every reason to fear, that in our nation, which uses more automobiles than all other nations together, many more than thirty thousand souls a year lose their innocence and grace, and die spiritually and morally, possibly forever, while countless others compromise themselves in a greater or lesser degree, in detriment of their prior high ideals

and lofty sentiments, through the unguarded and frivolous use of the automobile. The best way to avoid such dire results in a given case is the precaution of having reliable chaperonage on every automobile tour that because of its duration or other possibly seductive circumstances is or threatens to be a moral menace.

The Deadly Moral Effects of Alcoholic Beverages

Next to the automobile perhaps the most formidable factor of immorality in courtship is the use of intoxicating liquors. There was a strong foundation both in psychology and experience that induced the ancient pagans in their wild orgies to associate the cult of Bacchus with that of Venus, as the one almost invariably brings on and very much fosters the other. The first serious mutual transgression of lovers against Christian decency is in most cases directly or indirectly reducible to indulgence in alcoholic beverages, which are known to stimulate evil desires, in the same proportion, in which they befog the mind in its appraisal of the beauty of virtue and the hideousness of vice, and weaken the will's attachment to what is creditable and its repugnance to what is ignominious. The wisest procedure to avoid the vile dissipation and foul debauchery that seem to follow in the wake of a free indulgence in spiritous drinks—there are no words in the language capable of expressing all the woe that can be and often is caused to young couples sooner or later by this indulgence—is for both parties to refrain religiously, if not from every moderate, at least from every immoderate use of intoxicating beverages. There are not many better ways than this to render their forthcoming marriage happy.

What About Kisses in Courtship?

According to the teaching of theologians modest and moderate demonstrations and ex-

changes of affection, esteem, and love on the part of lovers are of themselves not sinful. Among these legitimate tokens of love is included the modest kiss.

A modest kiss is inspired and accompanied by a feeling of genuine reverence, tender devotion, and respectful attachment. It is and remains completely foreign to any quest or enjoyment of a sexual adventure or a lustful sensation of any kind. Such is the kiss, for instance, a dutiful son gives his mother whom he venerates with all his heart, or a fond brother gives his sister of whose virtue he is supremely proud. If a lover kisses his beloved in the same manner, no sin or approach to sin need be feared.

Yet, as human nature is actually constituted, particularly in reference to sex life and the urge for procreation, what is sinless and honorable between devoted and ardent lovers, if it is not conscientiously guarded and duly controlled, easily and swiftly passes over to what is sinful and dishonorable. Owing to the intimacy of its very nature, this is especially true of the kiss between persons who are in love with one another. It clamors for repetition and a continuous increase in its frequency as well as of its ardor. When this clamor is not ignored, the end is often disastrous and fatal, usually much more for the girl than for the man.

A virtuous and sensible girl, therefore, from her instinct of modesty and her practical knowledge of the psychology of love, is never easy and promiscuous in giving and receiving kisses. She is minded to reserve all her kisses for the man God designed to be her husband some day. In fact, she demurs kissing even her lover before she is engaged to be married to him.

In the period of engagement, while she appreciates and reciprocates a modest welcome or goodbye kiss, she fights shy, for the sake of her virtue, peace of mind, and general personal well-being, of much and fervent kissing

between herself and her prospective husband. She wants never to be guilty of and bound to confess passionate or lustful kisses, which are declared by theologians to be a twofold mortal sin, since they violate not only holy purity, but also the virtue of charity, because of the grievous scandal they involve.

It is fatuous beyond words for a momentary emotional gratification of a shady and disreputable character to become an enemy of God and to forfeit His grace and love and the right to heaven; to invite self-detestation and remorse of conscience; to incur, perhaps, forever, the loss of the respect of the very lover whom the kiss was planned to gratify; and to expose oneself to the danger of ruining the courtship entirely, or of bringing on the much worse evils of which mention has been made on a preceding page.

The best way for God-loving fiancés to insure unto themselves the prospect of a sacred, entrancing, and permanent mutual love in marriage is to abstain carefully from all questionable, harmful, and rueful love before marriage.

When Marriages Are Delayed

One reason many marriages are delayed so long a time that they threaten to end in non-marriages is the economic depression. Another frequent reason of this deplorable delay is the folly of couples who under the screen of courtship, more or less honorably affected, usurp the privileges of married life without assuming the burdens of it. Often, in consequence of their mutual looseness and lewdness, they separate definitely without ever contracting a legitimate marriage. Had they abstained from illicit love-making in their courtship, God would have blessed them with the sacred and lasting love of the Sacrament of Matrimony and its subsequent inestimable blessings.

Or, if they marry, their marriage, because

of the sinful and sacrilegious way in which they entered into it—they either did not sincerely confess their gross moral defections or, if they confessed them, they were not truly sorry for them—is not blessed but cursed by God. Since they loved in an unholy way before they married, God consigns them to a loveless life after their marriage. Whereas by their insatiable carnal propensities and vicious indulgences they drained their bodies of much of their God-given vigor and vitality before they married, in marriage they not infrequently bemoan in vain the nuptial fruitlessness visited upon them for their delinquencies in courtship.

Nature has its fixed purposes, limits, and measures. Once these are wilfully perverted, wantonly ignored, or ruthlessly exhausted by immoral dissipation, no bitterness of regret, no cry of despair, and no promise of betterment will ever restore the body's forces or the mind's resources to their native verve and productive power.

We must not suspect individuals. Many childless couples spent their courtship in a way highly pleasing to God. Their being and remaining childless is not a punishment but a trial sent them by God. But in a number of other instances childlessness of couples has been brought on by their being conscienceless and loose in courtship. "Be not deceived: God is not mocked. For what things a man shall sow, those also shall he reap. For he that soweth in his flesh, of the flesh also shall reap corruption. But he that soweth in the spirit, of the spirit shall reap life everlasting" (Gal. vi. 7, 8).

A Rash and Unwarranted Inference

From what has been said above it would be rash to infer that we take it for granted that in the majority of cases courtships, also among Catholics, sooner or later deteriorate and degenerate into a greater or lesser state

of profligacy. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Among practicing Catholics salacious and godless courtships are, thanks be to God, a rare exception, not the rule.

Most of our Catholic couples prepare for the worthy reception of the great Sacrament of Marriage by a courtship that is characterized from beginning to end by a high mutual esteem and respect, ideal love and devotion, angelic purity and unfailing self-restraint, begotten by the fear of the Lord and a tender, reverential regard for one another.

The Secret of Their Signal Success

They maintain this high standard throughout by using the means of grace, especially prayer and the frequent worthy reception of the Sacraments, by carefully avoiding the occasions of sin, and employing the safeguards of virtue. They are as rarely and as little as possible alone, either at the girl's home, or on automobile rides, or in other places. They believe in the adage, that there is safety—also of a moral kind—in numbers.

The young man does not visit in the girl's home too frequently. Nor does he protract his visits far into midnight or early morning, to the discomfiture of the girl's family, and to the detriment of his and his fiancée's health, virtue, and reputation. He does not want relatives, neighbors, and the community in general to suspect that he and his lady love, as seems to be apparent from their actions, are already secretly married, or are trying out a so-called companionate marriage.

He is also aware that in marriage, especially the first years of it, the couple's physical condition is of paramount importance for its happiness and success. Turning night into day three or four times a week in courtship is not a good recipe for the preservation and increase of health and corporal fitness in general; particularly not, if the long nocturnal vigils are aligned with an emotional strain

and a temperamental enlistment of a high and sustained degree, and with other excesses that like to enter into immoderately prolonged nightly diversions.

When they are together, wise and conscientious lovers carefully follow the sensible caution of "Touch me not!" and "Hands off!" They know that it is easier to start something that is dangerous than it is to quit it; and that it is the part of discretion, as the old Romans said, not to awaken the slumbering lion: the lion of concupiscence. Nothing so quickly awakens and so forcibly stirs this dangerous moral lion as the wanton and uninhibited indulgence in the sense of touch.

They do not extend their courtship unduly but, as soon as they have finally resolved to accept one another as mates, and no insurmountable hindrance is in the way, they set the date for their marriage, after having consulted their pastor's pleasure in the matter. They have the banns of marriage published according to form. They derive a certain satisfaction from this publication, proud and fond as they are of one another, and glad as they are that in the announcement of their marriage they have nothing to be ashamed of. They arrange for a devotional and inspiring church wedding, and aim at making it a beautiful, soothing, and heartening memory for life.

To Cultivate Virtuous Practices Means to Forestall Blamable Pursuits

They evaluate properly and employ wisely the psychological axiom, that the best way to avoid maudlin diversions and dangerous occupations in courtship is by engrossment in healthy, honorable and worthwhile hobbies and pastimes which they find or learn to find mutually delightful, and in which they can indulge to their heart's content without fearing any diminution of their reciprocal esteem, or of their virtue and good name. They like

sensible radio offerings and enjoy nice music. They pursue and discuss the reading of good literature, the attendance at respectable dances and social pastimes, preferably such as are given under Catholic auspices and with due supervision, the frequentation of unobjectionable shows on the stage or on the screen. They go on hikes with other young people and take an active interest in various wholesome sports. They are personally interested in the activities of their parish church, and feel privileged and honored in being able to contribute by their presence and co-operation towards their success. Couples contemplating marriage, who are possessed by these and kindred interests, are usually too busy and too healthy-minded to be much tempted to transgress seriously through morbid reciprocal sentimentality and reprehensible emotionalism.

They pay close attention to the instruction on marriage and its ethics, given them before marriage by the priest in order to avoid serious mistakes after they are wedded. It is not unprofitable for them, shortly before they are married, to read a pertinent popular and practical treatise on this "great Sacrament." A reference to my book, *Plain Talks on Marriage* (30 cents postpaid: St. Francis Book Shop, 1615 Republic Street, Cincinnati, Ohio) may not be inappropriate here. Father Scott's book, *Marriage*, published by The Paulist Press, should be read.

The couple we are considering have always been very frank in the sacred tribunal of penance, particularly during their courtship. In their confession preceding marriage they are more so than ever. Unless they have been advised against it by their confessor, they like to make a general confession before entering the holy state of marriage, even as the young levite, preparing to receive Holy Orders, cleanses his soul by making a life's confession. Penance is a second baptism. It gratifies a Catholic candidate for Matrimony to

know that he or she is beginning married life with a soul entirely free from every stain of sin, and as immaculate as it was the moment it was baptized. To enter marriage in holiness is the best way to render it an enduring spring of sanctity and well-being.

A Salutary Caution

Here the remark may be added, that if persons have seriously and habitually compromised themselves in their relations in courtship, and have been receiving the Sacraments unworthily in consequence, they must not fail to straighten out their conscience by making a sincere and contrite general confession before marriage, to avoid receiving Matrimony sacrilegiously and thus being bereft of all its graces, of which they will be very much in need when they are married.

As long as they are determined now and henceforth to love God and to quit sin, this general confession, whatever their life before and in courtship has been, will be easy. If they need help, the confessor will be glad to assist them. Then, instead of starting and continuing, who knows how long, married life with the course of God and in alienation from God, they will begin and progress in their marriage with God's special blessing and continued love and protection, that will not fail to render their marriage, whatever else may betide them, a source of holiness and a medium of terrestrial and celestial happiness.

May all the couples who are keeping company, and who are reading or have read this booklet, experience in their forthcoming marriage the wholesome effect of these words of the Bible:

"Blessed are all they that fear the Lord; that walk in His ways. . . . Thy wife as a fruitful vine, on the sides of thy house. Thy children as olive plants, round about thy table. And mayest thou see thy children's children. . . . Peace upon Israel" (Ps. cxxvii.).

