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# MAY I KEEP COMPANY ?

BY

JOHN J. GOREY, C.S.S.R.

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TO

THE IMMACULATE HEART OF MARY  
VIRGIN MOST PURE, VIRGIN MOST PRUDENT

AND

MOTHER OF PERPETUAL SUCCOUR

THIS BOOK IS

HUMBLY DEDICATED.

# MAY I KEEP COMPANY ?

I.

BRENDAN.

“ If that’s the kind of stuff he’s preaching, then I’m off sermons for the future.”

Brendan hurled his challenge at a half-empty office with only Mabel and David to witness his threatened apostasy. Mabel smiled incredulously. It was not easy to visualise Brendan “ off sermons,” Brendan, who each morning knelt beside her in the chapel and each week accompanied her to the altar rails. David showed no zeal in protesting; he was half-sorry he had started the row about last night’s sermon—but really that old-fashioned missionary was to blame with his sermon on Keeping Company. He was glad when Mabel packed her attaché-case and departed. This left the field clear for single combat with Brendan.

“ Old man ” he began apologetically, “ I’m sorry I rattled you just now. But really I can’t see how you can continue doing a line with any girl after what the missionary said.”

“ You can’t see,” Brendan glared at him—“ Well if you can’t, better go to an oculist, because I don’t intend giving up Mabel. I see no harm in a fellow going with a girl. You can put whatever construction you like on the sermon. If it is possible at all to tie a fellow up in a knot, you’re sure to find a way of doing it. I’m off. Cheerio !”

And Brendan swung out of the office, leaving his friend to condemn his own tactlessness in introducing the topic at all. That night on the prom for fully twenty minutes, Brendan leaned over the railings—waiting. Mabel was behind time—

a most unusual thing for her. He was growing anxious; the delay connected itself in his mind with that day’s discussion in the office. When at last she appeared, to end the suspense, his worst fears were realised. Her response to his ‘ Hello ’ was cheerless as the cold grey stones washed by the surging sea.

Brendan did not like the weather-forecast and he braced



himself manfully to face a storm. "What's up to-night Mai? You look worried."

"Well Bren it's just that I find I can't go out with you this evening. In fact I don't think that I can go out with you any more—for the present. Sorry."

"Not go out with me any more? What do you mean?"

"Oh, I don't know; it doesn't seem right—not now. Oh, I don't want to talk about it!" Her voice broke as she turned to walk away.

"Not right Mai? Is that what you said? That is not fair to me. I think I know what's up. It's that old missionary and his ridiculous sermon. Are you going to let me down for the sake of his old-fashioned notions?"

Mabel faced round with her chin in the air. "Please don't speak of a priest like that. I told you I don't want to talk about it, and anyhow you were not at the sermon and you don't know what he said."

"A pity I wasn't there! If I were, I could tell you that you must have taken him up wrongly—you and that fellow David. A lot *he* cares about sermons, but only trying to pull my leg with his old talk to-day! You and I have been friends now for over two years, and what was ever wrong with our friendship? Then you know, when I get that rise in my salary . . . ."

But Mabel was already away from him, and, as her figure receded down the promenade, along the line of new bungalows being built on the sea-front, the alarming thought struck Brendan that it might not matter now if he never got that rise in his salary. The home he had planned in one of these bungalows, might have no Mabel for it.

There was little sleep for Brendan that night; his little world had crashed about his ears. Morning found him, haggard and depressed, plying his pen  
**"Beware of a Counselor"** fiercely in the office, seeking to banish dull care by concentrating on still duller work.

Ronnie Darcy blew in during the forenoon. "Snakes alive!" he commented, "You look a sketch! Losing your job? Or have you seen a ghost?"

Brendan did not usually make a confidant of his cousin. But this time the occasion seemed to call for the opinion of a man-about-town such as Ronnie. Both retired to the Private Office and in a few moments the tragedy was unfolded down to the grand finale on the prom. Ronnie whistled his astonishment. He had always regarded this pair as a throw-back to the Victorian era.

"It's hard luck Bren to be the victim of such deuced narrow-mindedness. But cheer up, old bean. Doesn't that chap Shakespeare say: 'The course of true love never did run smooth.' Mabel will come back to commonsense when this mission hot-air blows over. She is not likely to be influenced permanently by these over-pious exaggerations."

"Would you call them exaggerations Ronnie?" Brendan's loyalty to the Church was stirred.

"Of course I would. That dope about keeping company that you are treated to from pulpits is all out-of-date. Stone age stuff! Why can't a fellow go with girls? What sin could that be? A fellow must have girl friends. How is he ever to get spliced if he only ventures out of the house holding his mammy's hand? These priests never understand. You will find that Mabel will come all right. Take my tip and patch it up again. Then go ahead as per usual.

"Sorry, old man, but I must be shoving on. Just taking a girl for a spin. Met her at the Tennis Dance. A peach! Wish you could meet her!" And Ronnie whisked off, only to allow the clouds to settle upon Brendan again.

Ronnie's breezy optimism was but poor balm to a broken heart and his elasticity of conscience was just a little bit disconcerting. The day dragged on in utter misery for Brendan at the office. More than once he tripped in his tots and had to begin all over again. Mabel, pale and serious, plied her pen unrelentingly and sedulously avoided meeting Brendan's eyes. David, doggedly determined not to take notice of the electricity in the atmosphere, weakly attempted a joke from time to time. But the strain was intolerable. Before evening, Brendan had made up his mind to end the impossible situation. He would tackle the missionary himself.

Fr. O'Driscoll, the genial curate of the parish, ushered him



into the little presbytery sitting-room and in a moment returned with the missioner.

**Bearding the** "Fr. Oliver, may I introduce Brendan  
**Lion** Burke, my right-hand man in the parish ?"

Brendan nervously grasped the proffered hand. Somehow, he felt like the young scamp who has pulled a door-bell for a joke and is caught by the owner before he has time to make a get-away. He came near to cursing the confounded cheek which had forced this interview and he found himself wildly plunging for a means of escape.

"I am glad to meet you." Fr. Oliver's mellow baritone was a soothing melody to over-wrought nerves. "Won't you sit down and have a smoke ?"

The homely tobacco-weed is among the touches of Nature that make the whole world kin, and ere long Brendan's tongue was loosed.

"Pardon my troubling you Father."—He had himself well in hand now—"I may as well come to the point at once. About your sermon on keeping company. It has worried me a good deal."

Fr. Oliver surveyed his visitor through horn-rimmed glasses. There was a pleasing honesty about this young man's face. "And what point do you quarrel with ?"

"Well, Father, I wasn't present but a pal of mine told me you gave it hot to us young people. He reported you as saying that it was sinful to keep company and so on ?"

"One must be careful, Brendan—I am presuming to dispense with formalities—about taking second-hand reports of sermons. People often misrepresent what they have heard. You must remember too that a preacher is rather handicapped in the pulpit. Speaking to a very mixed audience, he has to confine himself to general statements and general principles. Cases differ from each other and it is not possible to deal publicly with every variety of circumstance. The preacher expects that the individual will state his own case privately in the confessional and thereby afford a chance of applying the general principles."

"Just exactly what I myself was thinking, Father, and that is why I have come to you. I want to know where I

stand. May a fellow have girl-friends or must he give up the company of girls altogether ?"

Fr. Oliver smiled. "That is a very big question, Brendan, one that cannot be answered in a monosyllable. To give a satisfactory answer, I fear I shall have to inflict a sermon on you."

"Oh ! I won't in the least object, Father. I'm not a saint but I don't want to be a bad Catholic. I shall be glad to hear the views of the Church on keeping company and have this question settled once and for all."

"Let us hope we shall settle it and part good friends." Fr. Oliver crushed his cigarette-end in the ash-tray and settled down for a chat.

"You ask me if a boy may have girl-friends. Well, true friendship is one of God's best gifts. The Holy Spirit tells us that 'A faithful friend is a strong defence

**A Bit of Bible** and he that hath found him hath found a  
**History** treasure.\* Few of us can stand alone or

afford to despise the consolation of a friend to cheer us when days are dark and lonely ; to encourage us when difficulties multiply ; to sympathise with us when clouds of sorrow are black and heavy above us. Among the grand things—the noble things—the consoling things—of life is the loyalty of a faithful friend.

"Now, I do not maintain that God intended every man to seek the blessing of love and friendship exclusively amongst his own kind. As a matter of history, the first friend given to the first man was a woman. After Adam had been living alone for some time God said : 'It is not good for man to be alone ; let us make him a help like unto himself.'† Then, when Eve had been given to Adam, God rivetted their friendship in a life-long union by establishing the state of marriage. However, it is a sad historical truth that the first woman-friend given to man proved not a help but a hindrance to him. Eve was Adam's undoing. 'The woman Thou gavest me to be my companion gave me of the tree and I did eat.'‡

"You will admit, Brendan, that history has often repeated itself since. Many a disillusioned boy has bitterly echoed

\* Ecclus. VI. 14.

† Gen. II. 18.

‡ Gen. III. 12.



Adam's refrain. A girl-friend may be an angel leading a boy to better things or a snare set for his destruction.

"Hence, before I answer your question: May a fellow have a girl-friend? I should like to put to our fellow three questions:—

1. What is his intention in keeping her company ?
2. What is his conduct when in her company ?
3. What precautions is he taking to prevent her company becoming a danger of sin ?

I want to know his intention because, as you know, it is often our intentions that brand our actions as good or bad.

If a boy has evil intentions—if his object in seeking the company of a girl-friend is to pander to his passions, then it is obvious that his friendship is contrary to the sixth commandment of God, which forbids impurity in all its forms."

"But, Father, surely the proportion of cases of this kind is relatively small."

"I might grant you this," Fr. Oliver said quietly, "Boys who are practising Catholics may not deliberately propose to themselves to descend so low. But, as the old proverb has it, 'The road to the devil is easy and plain.' A motor car, left standing on the brow of a hill, is always inclined to run down. To park it there if it had defective brakes, would be madness. Now, even the best boy resembles that motor car. Original sin, the Catechism teaches us, 'weakened the will and left in us a strong inclination to evil.' Therefore it will very often be easier to do the wrong thing rather than the right thing, to commit sin rather than to avoid it. Not only then can a boy take no risks, but he must always act where there is possible temptation, with prudence and caution.

"You will understand then why preachers speak so strongly against young people still in their teens perhaps, or at any rate without any serious intention of marriage, 'doing a line' as the phrase goes, just for pastime or amusement. The boy who indulges his sentimentality without restraint is not far from sensuality; and the boy who has no higher conception of woman than as a play-thing to be taken up or set aside as passion dictates is already—whether he admits it

or not—far advanced on the road to sensuality. He may protest that his intentions are not bad; he may assert that he wishes to be pure. But he forgets that it is possible to commit sin indirectly. If you set a match to your window-curtains, you are responsible for the burning of your house; but you are equally responsible if you carelessly throw a lighted match in the place where it is very likely to set fire to the curtains. Hence, a boy is not only blameworthy for those acts done with the intention of arousing passion but also for those acts which, of themselves, are calculated to fan the flame of passion.

"Consequently, it is most important to examine carefully a boy's intentions in fostering a friendship with a girl-friend. If his intention be the sinful gratification of passion, we must condemn his friendship; it is sinful from the foundation. We must condemn it too if, while he disclaims all bad intentions, that boy's conduct is such as must inevitably lead to the sinful gratification of passion."

"Yes Father," Brendan conceded, "I think I see your point. But, if you don't mind my saying so, I think that priests do not take into account sufficiently, modern conditions. There is not the rigid segregation of the sexes that existed in our parents' young days. Boys and girls of our day are members of the same Sports' Clubs; they study together at Technical Schools and Universities. Consequently, they are inevitably thrown into each other's company to an extent unheard of even thirty years ago. It seems to me that it would be impossible rigidly to restrict boys and girls to friendships whose basis is the prospect of marriage. We young fellows might reasonably ask: Would it be wise to do so? Often the company of a good girl keeps a boy away from undesirable male companions, or from drink; often such a friendship keeps a fellow to his religious duties; often friendship with a good girl has—if you know what I mean—an elevating effect upon a fellow's character."

"My dear Brendan," Fr. Oliver pleaded, "please do not put me down as holding that a friendship between a boy and a girl is necessarily sinful or even necessarily an occasion



of sin. Believe me, I have not such a poor opinion of our young people. I am quite prepared to judge a given case on its merits. A boy and girl may be neighbours brought up together almost as members of the same family; a boy and girl may be associated in sport and the basis of their friendship may be a common interest in athletics; a boy may find that his friendship with a good girl may be a preservative against sin rather than an occasion for it. If in such cases there is a tacit understanding that there are no marriage implications, then there are no false hopes raised on either side and the danger of disappointment is precluded. No injustice is done then. And if meetings are all above board and do not give rise to outbreaks of sentimentality, then the friendship is not in the category of an occasion of sin. Given all these conditions, there may be no case for condemnation. But perhaps there is something in the words of a well-known theologian:

"People may sometimes plead that a chain of circumstances has led to a 'brother and sister' state of things, and that there is 'nothing in it.' Well, sometimes this may be true, especially when a certain age has been safely passed. But, speaking generally, such a footing between those who are not related, or very distantly related, might pass, if the two parties had, like Our Lady, been conceived without original sin. Taking human nature on its average, no fanciful relationships are much protection against sensual passions, since even very real and near ones are, alas! not always so. The vital fact remains that the two are *not* brother and sister, and that makes all the difference."\*

"Then, even though his intentions be the most honourable, there is the question of the latitude a boy allows himself when in the company of his girl-friend. To what extent is love-making permissible to him? Love is a word that has lost caste somewhat. In the jargon of a paganised world, it is made to stand for many things best called by more harshly-sounding names. But love in its true sense is from God. 'God is Love' St. John tells us. We are made to love God first and foremost: we may love others only in Him and for Him. Apart from Him there can be no true love at all. St. Augustine has put it well: 'Too little doth he love Thee, who loves anything with Thee, which he loveth not

\* Zulueta, S.J., *Letters on Christian Doctrine*, iii, p. 85.

for Thee.\* For love, in this sense, the human heart is made as the sun to shine.

"But that human heart is made of clay and is of the earth earthy. For this reason it is prone to seek, under the guise of love what in reality is the gratification of its own selfish cravings. According to God's plan, therefore, the heart is meant to love, under the guidance and control of the mind. The heart is portion of a body of clay, the mind part of a spiritual soul. It was God's intention that the soul should be master, the body the servant. The mighty ship on the ocean is obedient to the steering wheel. At a turn of the wheel, it veers away from the rocks that threaten shipwreck; at another turn, it avoids the wind or the current that would drive it from its course. So was it to be—according to God's plan—with reason and passion, with soul and body. Reason was to be always at the wheel to check the imagination, to curb the emotions, to dominate the body. Unfortunately, original sin, not only injured that delicate steering-gear, but it left the ship with a list, so to speak.

"Hence a boy must bear in mind the fact that his heart can lead him astray. When that heart goes out in love for any human being, care must be taken that it does not go, even a hair's-breadth, beyond the limits set by God."

"And what are these limits, Father?" Brendan queried.

"Well," Fr. Oliver resumed, "God has decided that human love may reach its complete expression only in Christian marriage. Within that holy state, He has provided that not only will hearts be made one, but that, in the Scriptural words: 'They shall be two in one flesh.'† This union of the sexes God has consecrated in a Sacrament of His Church. But outside the Sacrament of marriage, God will countenance no relaxation of His Law. Hence marks and signs of affection must be restricted within well-defined limits"—

"One moment, Father, if you please. I know you are giving me the Church's teaching; I have often heard it preached and of course I accept it. But, what I have never heard, is a completely satisfying reason why the law of God should be so. I know that it *is* so, but it would be a help

\* *Confessions*, Bk. X, Chap. XXIX.

† Gen. II. 24.



to me and to people like me, if priests would try to tell us *the reason why*.

“Well, Brendan, the reason why goes deeper than the average sermon can safely follow it. As I told you already, preachers are handicapped by the uneven quality of their audience. But I think you will understand something that I shall show you in a book which I see in that

**The Reason  
Why**

book-case.”

Fr. Oliver took down a small book, opened it and handed it to Brendan. “Read it out please,” he said as he sat down again in his arm-chair. Brendan read :

“The fundamental reason behind all the laws of Christian purity is the sacred nature of married love and of all in mind and body that essentially pertains to it. Essentially connected with married love, so much so that the right to it forms the substance of the marriage contract, is the exercise of the generative function. We have to realise that this also is sacred, sacred *in itself*, but rightly or wrongly exercised according as this is done or not done in the circumstances demanded by its sacred nature.”

“Do you see the point of that, Brendan ?” interrupted Fr. Oliver.

“I’m afraid I don’t, Father : it’s rather abstract.”

“Well, read on and you’ll find something concrete in the very next line.” Brendan read on :

“The first and most essential of these circumstances is the married state. The act of intercourse is in itself a sacred thing, considered apart from circumstances, sacred therefore both in the married state and outside it, but outside the married state sinful in its performance.”

Brendan stopped abruptly. He was getting light. “I say, Father, this is interesting. I get the hang of it all now. It is just the opposite of the notion I’ve had all along about these things. I thought they were wrong, but that marriage gave a sort of licence for them, so as to have a family and so forth, and that then they were right. It was just that notion that I could not see the sense of. Why is a thing wrong to-day because I am single and right to-morrow because I am married ? I could not answer that to my own satisfaction, nor could any fellows with whom I talked it over. Now I see that what marriage changes is, not the acts, but the persons. It makes us worthy to do those sacred actions, just the same

—if I may with all respect say it—as the Sacrament of Holy Orders makes a priest worthy to do the sacred acts of his ministry.”

“Certainly you may use that comparison,” said Fr. Oliver. Just turn over the page and you’ll see that you are not the first to do so.”

Brendan turned the page and read :

“This comparison is made by the Holy Father himself : ‘Husband and wife . . . by so great a sacrament will be strengthened, sanctified and in a manner consecrated. For as St. Augustine teaches, just as by Baptism and Holy Orders a man is set apart and aided in order to perform the duties of the Christian life or of the priestly office, and is never deprived of the continued help of these sacraments, so almost in the same way, although not by a sacramental character, the faithful, once joined by marriage bonds, can never be deprived of the help of this sacrament, nor of the union which it conferred on them’.”

(*Casti Connubii*).

“So it comes to this, Father, that certain things are sacred—too sacred to be done unless one has been, as the Pope says here, ‘in a manner consecrated’ by the Sacrament of Matrimony to do them worthily ? I think that is as good an answer as I can ever expect, and it satisfies me better than any I have ever heard. But if a boy and girl love each other, they seem to have a right to do something to show their love, not of course to do what can be worthily done only in marriage, but something short of that—what we call *love-making*. And what I, and a lot of fellows like me, want to know is this : How far can love-making go without going wrong—without trespassing on the sacred precincts of marriage, if you get what I mean ?”

“That depends,” said Fr. Oliver, “on whether the love-making is the sort that tends to make people want, and do, that which is clearly the privilege of married persons, because in it alone married love finds its consummation. Such love-making is undoubtedly wrong outside of marriage. It makes people desire what they cannot rightly have, there and then, and makes them desire it in such a way that they would break the law of God in order to get it. I know, of course, that in action they do not usually go so far as that, but you know the words of Our Lord : ‘I say to you that everyone that looketh on a woman to lust after her, hath already



committed adultery with her in his heart.\* If that is true of mere looks, what about closer contact?

"But there is more than that to it, Brendan. Just read on from where you stopped, will you?" Brendan read:

"There is no detail of Catholic teaching on purity, even the most remote, which cannot be reduced to these principles and explained by them. Thus, for example, the noblest element in the virtue of modesty is not the instinct to hide what one is ashamed of, but to keep a veil over what is sacred. From the beginning of religion every sacred thing has had its sanctuary and its veil, which the initiate could pass but seldom, the profane never. Christian modesty is the veil in the Temple of the Holy Ghost; it would have its reason even if sin had left us nothing to be ashamed of."†

"The words Temple of the Holy Ghost," explained Fr. Oliver, "refer to the phrase of St. Paul: 'Know you not that your body is the Temple of the Holy Ghost?'‡ The virtue of Christian modesty makes one respect, in oneself and in others, that body which God has made His Temple. Now this respect is particularly called for between persons of different sex who love each other, and who feel the need for showing their love by certain bodily contacts, such as kissing. St. Thomas says that this virtue of modesty specially concerns those exterior signs by which such love is manifested in order so to guide and control them that they keep within the limits of what is lawful, and especially that they do not degenerate from being signs of love into becoming instruments of selfish pleasure.§

"Here then we have, set up for us, the Christian standard for signs and demonstrations of love. Modesty is to rule the eye, the tongue, the body—the whole conduct—in all matters which can affect purity. With modesty as a protecting shield, it is possible for a good Christian to give tokens of affection without endangering purity. The mother lovingly presses her son to her bosom, the father gives his daughter the kiss of affection; brothers greet their sisters with a caress. So there is a kiss, a caress, an embrace, where respect and reverence mingle with affection, where modesty keeps guard to keep passion at bay. This is not the unrestrained kiss or embrace of unbridled passion; it is not the kiss of maudlin sentimental softness; it is not the kiss as vulgarised by the

Hollywood film-star. Clean-living manly boys are well aware of the border-line fixed by Christian modesty between lawful affection and lawless passion. They are careful not to cross it and so they are not too lavish in their displays of affection, lest human weakness should betray them.

"Then a boy—even the best boy—must realise that the tendency is downward, not upward, and hence he is convinced of the necessity of adopting those safeguards required to reduce danger to a minimum. I think the most necessary safeguard is to meet his girl-friend in those places where he is least likely to cast off restraint.

### Roaming in the Gloaming

"Poets may sing of the glamour of the moonlight meeting and the romance of the stolen moments in sylvan glade or secret dell. We may deem this a mere use of poetic licence—an inoffensive way perhaps of hinting that they are drawing on their imagination!—but we must admit that these poetic gentlemen are really testifying to a feeling in the human heart that there are intimacies of affection too sacred for the eyes of others, and that it is this innate delicacy of feeling which urges lovers to seek some privacy. Therefore, custom does not regard favourably public displays of affection. Those who indulge in them would be regarded as rather shameless and daring. So we must concede some privacy, but we have to balance the degree of privacy which is permissible, against the likelihood of its becoming a serious danger of sin. Hence it is the practice in sermons to discourage moonlight strolls and secret meetings, however the poets may sing of them or novel-writers portray their charm."

"Please excuse an interruption"—Brendan thought that now surely, Fr. Oliver was overshooting the mark—"This is a point of view, Father, with which I find it difficult to agree. I don't see any harm in walking out at night any more than in the day-time. If a fellow is honourable, it surely makes no difference where or when he meets a girl. If I may say so without offence, Father, priests seem narrow-minded on this point and show an unwillingness to trust us."

Fr. Oliver shook his head. "No, we are not narrow, except in the sense that the Gate of Heaven is narrow; neither do we refuse to trust our young people. But in courtship 'two are company,' we are told, 'while three are

\* Mt. V. 28. † *Love, Marriage and Chastity*, Mersch, S.J., pp. 51-58.

‡ I Cor. 6, 19.  
153 a. 5 ad. 3.

§ cf. *Summa Theol.* 2a 2ae, q. 151 a 4 and q.



none' and we have to take into account a third individual who dogs your steps—the devil. Your Faith obliges you to believe in him and to believe also in his constant activity. Your Faith also teaches that original sin has provided the devil with very useful allies in the form of unruly passions which may betray even the best-intentioned. Therefore, not even the most upright can afford to dispense with the safeguards of prudence. A chain is only as strong as its weakest link and a man is only as strong as his own will, weakened as it is by original sin. I leave out of the question altogether God's grace. We cannot rashly presume upon it, for it is conferred on us, St. Thomas reminds us, to lead us to be prudent, not to encourage us to be reckless.

"It stands to reason then that no risks should be taken in a matter of such danger. This principle has inspired the conventions of other lands less influenced by Protestant Liberalism than our own. The customs of good-living people in France, Spain or Italy do not sanction moonlight strolls or secret meetings. As a matter of fact such practices were frowned upon in our grandparents' days. If present-day custom is different is it not because we have allowed the standards set up by the prudence of those who went before us to be lowered by the influx of pagan ideas?"

Brendan took advantage of a pause while Fr. Oliver lighted a cigarette. "But Father, young people must be given opportunities to meet. Choosing a partner for life is a serious matter. One cannot be expected to take a leap in the dark."

"I am willing to grant all that," said Fr. Oliver quickly. "I have no desire to forbid all meetings, I am only insisting, in the name of prudence, that these meetings take place under circumstances which remove, or at least lessen, the likelihood of grievous sin.

"The ideal meeting place is of course the family circle. There is an old saying: 'Before you decide on a wife, meet her mother.' There is wisdom in the saying.

**Meet her** If I may say so, the words have a Gospel  
**Mother** flavour about them; for, has not Our Saviour said: 'A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit; neither can an evil tree bring forth good fruit.\*' Surely if pedigree determines the choice of a horse

\* Matth. VII. 18.

on which to put one's bet, it should influence in some way the choice of a wife. Then too, in the home, the girl is in her natural surroundings. There, she will behave more naturally and thereby provide a better opportunity for observing her character and disposition. We are told that it is impossible to know a person until we live with him and I believe that those reunions in the home would lessen considerably those tragic mistakes made in choosing a partner."

Brendan could not repress a smile. "Father," he said, "you do not know our parents. Many of them wouldn't hear of a young man visiting their daughter at the house. They would consider it an impertinence for him to call. Besides, going to the house is a kind of tacit notice of engagement and a fellow, not quite ready to take this step, may be unwilling to set busy tongues wagging."

Fr. Oliver's foot tapped the floor a little impatiently. "I can never understand these parents" he said testily. "They regard it as impertinence in a young man to visit their daughter at home! Apparently it is no impertinence to take her for a joy-ride in his two-seater a score of miles away from home, to take her to a dance and bring her home in the small hours or to keep her company for hours together under cover of the darkness of night. We must educate such parents if we are to save their children from moral ruin.

"As to your second objection—that you provide a topic for the gossips by inviting your girl-friend to the home—let me put this question: Why should not tongues wag more freely and more uncharitably when the story spreads—and it surely will—that Jack and Jill are to be met almost up to midnight on some less-frequented road in the parish, or strolling home from a dance just before the dawn?"

"Well, of course, Father, what you say is quite reasonable, but what provision do you make for all those who cannot meet in the home, for one reason or another?"

"Oh yes I realise that the ideal cannot always be attained and some must inevitably meet outside the home. But if they do, is it not possible to have their walk in daylight on some frequented road or, if they are only free to meet after nightfall could they not patronise some public place? Under these circumstances it is possible to have a very private tête-à-tête while all the time remaining in the public eye. At the same



time they are saved from even the shadow of adverse criticism.

"Of those who avoid the public gaze and court the darkness, it is hardly a rash judgment to assert that some at least, do so because they are bent on conduct that will not stand the light. If the good people follow their practice, are they not running the risk of being tarred with the same brush by the uncharitable? Are they not also perhaps deluding themselves as to their own strength in temptation?"

Fr. Oliver rose from his arm-chair and his keen eye scanned the book-case for a moment. "Ah yes, it is here," he said as he picked out a small volume. "I would

**A Lesson in Theology** like you to understand, Brendan, that what I have said is not a purely private view or fad. The views I have given you are formed by the study of Catholic theologians who discuss the question of keeping company just as they do every other department of human conduct. Here is a book on moral theology studied by a great many of the clergy. I'll give you a free translation of a passage on keeping company.\* Possibly it will surprise you but I can assure you that this distinguished Jesuit theologian, Fr. Noldin, is by no means considered rigid.

'Courtships' he says, 'are in themselves an occasion of sin, for the tendency of human nature, especially in the young, is of such a type that very frequent meetings between those of opposite sex arouse unchaste love. Wherefore they are not lawful in themselves unless there is a just cause to render them lawful. . . . Courtships carried on with a view to future marriage are lawful'. . .

"Here, Brendan, there is an important proviso—a rather big 'But.' *But* care should be taken lest lawful courtships become a dangerous occasion of sin, and, without due precautions, they do easily degenerate into such. The type of precaution would be:

- (1) Parental consent should be obtained as soon as possible otherwise marriage may be too long delayed or may never come off.
- (2) The young people must *never* keep lonely company. . . .
- (3) Their meetings should not be too frequent or last too long. . . . Frequency and length to be decided by prudent opinion. . . . Perhaps once or twice a week. . . .

\* Noldin, *Moral Theology*, Vol. III. 419.

- (4) They should avoid everything that could increase the danger, that is to say over-familiarity in conduct, especially in contact, in kissing, in embracing.
- (5) They should try to fortify themselves against sin by religious practices, especially by frequentation of the Sacraments.

These rules may rather surprise you; and yet this worthy Jesuit insists on their observance even by those who are actually engaged. In fact he sounds a note of warning to the effect that after engagement the danger of sin is greater. You will note that he bans the secret meetings and forbids dangerous familiarities. Not much latitude here for those whose sentimentality is very near the border line and not much concession to the Hollywood freedom of association between the sexes."

Fr. Oliver closed the book and returned it to its shelf. For a moment Brendan smoked in silence. There is a time when silence is good for the soul. At last the spell was broken. "I must admit" he said "that your general attitude to keeping company is quite reasonable. There is a danger of coming a cropper and that means taking precautions—maintaining a certain standard of decency. That is only commonsense."

"But all morality, Brendan, is just sane commonsense. It was the same God Who gave us commonsense that framed the moral law. The commandments are merely the safeguard of commonsense; they save reason from being submerged by passion."

"Well, now, Father, I have trespassed much on your valuable time. Would you allow me to state my own case in detail?"

"Yes, I would be delighted to hear it and to give my opinion. As I said in the beginning, principles are general things, they must be applied to each individual case."

"I am friendly with a girl, Father, for the last year or so. There was an understanding between us that we would be married next year when I get an increase in my salary. We meet about three or four evenings a week. I call for her at the house; sometimes we have tea there; sometimes we go to a show together or take a walk on the

#### A Case of Conscience



prom ; in summer we play tennis at the Club grounds. Our lives are lived above board ; we don't shun publicity. I like that girl and I respect her ; in fact, if I should fail in this respect she would break with me immediately. Both of us go to Confession and Communion together nearly every week. To give you an idea of how scrupulously careful she is, let me tell you that when she heard your sermon the other night she told me that she did not intend to go out with me any more. Well, Father, the loss of her companionship would be a severe blow to me. She only keeps a fellow good."

"But I have not yet mentioned separation," Fr. Oliver retorted with a smile. "I have nothing to say against marriage ; why should I when Our Saviour thought so much of it as to make it one of His Sacraments ? I can have nothing to say either, against getting to know a girl before marriage. Choosing a life-partner is rather a serious matter. Hence all Catholic theologians are willing to grant a young man ample opportunity for meeting likely partners and so judge of their suitability. We don't aim at prohibiting all companionship between the sexes. We do try to fix limits, because of the young people themselves. We want to secure that a firm and lasting affection will develop between a young couple, unspoilt by passion and worthy to be blessed by God at the altar on the marriage day. Our ministry only too often brings us in contact with the loveless marriage, the long agony of lives that are a misfit because in the days of courtship passion blinded reason.

"So I would say to you, having heard your case, that if you continue along the lines you have indicated to me you may certainly continue your friendship with that girl. Of course I cannot omit the word of warning. Even St. Paul admonishes us : 'He that thinketh himself to stand let him take heed lest he fall.\*' But if you follow the principles I have laid down for you, not only will danger of sin be reduced to a minimum but your friendship will be of great spiritual profit to both of you.

"If you wish, perhaps I could have a chat with your girls friend and say a few words in explanation of that portion of

\* I Cor. X. 12.

my sermon which she seems to have interpreted too rigidly. Very often it is the people to whom they least apply, that take most to heart the strong words of a preacher, meant for those who are probably stopping their ears lest they should hear."

The sun was beginning to shine again for Brendan. "Really, Father," he said warmly, "this has been a wonderful talk for me. I see now that you do not make impossible demands of any fellow and I think we should all be better and happier if we followed your advice. I, at any rate, will guarantee to follow that advice to the letter with God's help. I have taken up a great deal of your time and I cannot tell you how grateful I am for your patience. I shall send my girl-friend, Mabel Browne to you. She doesn't need a sermon ; she is one of the best. But if I could ask a favour, there is a cousin of mine, Ronnie Darcy, to whom I would like you to speak. He knocks about a good deal with girls ; a talk with you might save him."

"Of course," Fr. Oliver agreed smilingly. "You make all the arrangements. I am glad you came to me ; it is the best thing to do when you are in doubt or difficulty. The priest is meant to be a 'Soul-friend' for you and it is a very real pleasure for him to be able to help you in any way. I will now say good-bye and God be with you, always."

The presbytery door closed and Brendan passed out into the street. A passer-by might have wondered what occasioned his cheerful mien and buoyant step as he walked rapidly along.

## II.

### RONNIE.

It was a shy and nervous Ronnie who tapped at the sacristy door next night after the devotions. "My name is Darcy,

Father," he said rather sullenly, "Ronnie Nicodemus by Darcy. My cousin Brendan Burke told me you wished to speak to me."

"Well, of course," said Father Oliver, smiling as he held out his hand, "That is presuming that you are willing to listen to what I have to say."

"Oh ! I'm quite willing," Ronnie was trying to be brave. "Priests were such meddlers you know ! " Brendan thought



I needed some advice about going with girls. Well I admit it. I am knocking about with them. I see no harm in it. All my pals have girl-friends; they would think me queer if I began to do the woman-hater. A fellow too must have some pastime; besides, how is he to get married if he does not knock around a bit?"

Ronnie felt he was making a good case for himself. However, Fr. Oliver did not seem to be impressed. "If you care to come along with me, we can take a walk together before I return to the presbytery," he said quietly.

"O.K. Father," Ronnie agreed and resigned himself to a lecture.

"I must take up these statements of yours in detail," Fr. Oliver began. "First of all you plead fashion as your excuse for what I had better call flirtation. This argument should not weigh with any sincere Catholic. He must find out whether a thing is lawful, or unlawful, not whether 'it is done' or not.

#### Moving with the times

"The cinema and the sex-novel of to-day insinuate into a boy's mind that the normal thing for him is to have girl-friends. They propose as the natural relaxation and recreation for a boy, sentimental flirtations with all their usual accompaniment of sensuous fondling and passionate love-making. Ninety per cent of the films you see and the novels you read have flirtation as their theme. They show you hero and heroine in love-scenes reeking with sensuality—with sex-appeal. Faces, attitudes, conduct, and even language, reflect sensuality open and unabashed. Many young men, I fear, are influenced by this Hollywood code of morality and regard as a normal boyish pastime, sentimental flirtations and promiscuous love-making. But we Catholics cannot argue that 'what is, is right.' We cannot allow our young people to model their conduct on that of amoral film-stars. We cannot allow them to make a pastime of flirtation with its usual accompaniment of sensual fondling, passionate caressing and sensuous embracing. Our attitude towards this may not be changed by fashion or custom. It is fixed by God Our Creator Himself Who, in the sixth of His ten commandments, has forbidden impurity in all its forms. Any act then, of boy or girl—be it kiss or caress or embrace

—accompanied by sexual pleasure deliberately consented to, is sinful. And—take note of this—every act of such a kind is a mortal sin—a sin that could close the Gate of Heaven against one. There are small sins against other virtues. For example, to steal a halfpenny from a rich man is merely a venial sin of injustice. But impurity can never be a small sin. When a boy understands what he is doing and gives full consent of his will to sexual pleasure he is always guilty of mortal sin.

"The Jews of Our Saviour's day, influenced by contact with pagan neighbours and their lower ideals, had narrowed down the interpretation of the sixth commandment to a prohibition of the grosser and more shameful sins. But Our Saviour made no compromise, no concession to the prevailing fashion. He held out for the strict interpretation: 'It was said to them of old: thou shalt not commit adultery, but I say to you that whosoever shall look on a woman to lust after her, hath already committed adultery with her in his heart.\*' This is Christ's verdict upon the easy-going morality of two thousand years ago; it would be His verdict upon that popularised by film and novel to-day and so slavishly copied by many Catholics who ought to know better. 'My Word,' said Jesus 'shall not pass away.'

"Therefore Catholic teaching can countenance no standards but those set by Christ, whatever be the fashion of the hour."

"But Father, pardon me," Ronnie was becoming restive, "does it not seem rather too optimistic to expect the world of our day to view things from the Gospel

#### An Unsolicited

#### Testimonial

standpoint?" "Perhaps," agreed Fr. Oliver drily, "And I might remind you of St. James' comment: 'Whosoever will be a friend to his world becometh an enemy of God.†' But it is remarkable how the uncompromising Catholic attitude is shared by upright people outside the Fold. I jotted down just a few days ago in my diary the views of an American non-Catholic writer—a striking testimonial to the sterling decency and commonsense of Catholic teaching: 'We cannot find language sufficiently emphatic to express proper condemnation of one of the most popular forms of amusement indulged in at the present time

\* Matth. V. 28.

† Jas. IV. 4.



in this country (America) under the guise of innocent association of the sexes. By the majority of people, flirtation is looked upon as harmless, some even considering it useful, claiming that the experience gained by such associations is valuable to young persons, by making them familiar with the customs of society and the ways of the world. We have not the slightest hesitation in pronouncing flirtation pernicious in the extreme. It exerts a malign influence alike upon the mental, the moral and the physical condition of those who indulge in it. It may be true and undoubtedly is the case that by far the greater share of the guilt of flirtation lies at the door of the female sex ; but there do exist such detestable creatures as male flirts. In general, the male flirt is a much less worthy character than the young lady who makes a pastime of flirtation. He is something more than a flirt. In nine cases out of ten he is a rake as well. His object in flirting is to gratify a mean propensity at the expense of those who are pure and unsophisticated. Slowly he winds his coils about his victim, and before she is aware of his real character, she has lost her own. The male flirt is a monster. Every man and woman ought to despise him'."

"That is rather strong language, Father."

"Well, it comes from one uninfluenced by Catholic teaching. Doesn't it come strikingly near other words from the lips of the Founder of Catholicity: 'Woe to him through whom scandals come, it were better for him that a mill-stone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should scandalize one of these little ones.'\*"

"But aren't you taking the whole thing too seriously, Father?" Ronnie questioned. "In keeping company we fellows are just out for a bit of fun, no more."

**Just a Bit  
of Fun**

"A bit of fun," Fr. Oliver seemed a trifle sarcastic. "You say that you keep company for pastime—for amusement or pleasure, in other words. I don't think you realise the import of your statement. Surely you do not wish me to understand that you choose sensuality as your pastime. This would be a confession that with you the sixth commandment had ceased to count."

\* Luke XVII. 1.

"Pardon Father," Ronnie interjected hotly, "I resent that imputation. I consider myself as good a Catholic as the next. I think I can truthfully say that my intentions are not quite so base. If you will pardon my saying so, Father, it seems to us chaps that sometimes priests read motives into our conduct which are very far from our minds."

"Perhaps," Fr. Oliver pleaded with a smile, "But perhaps too, the priest knows you better than you know yourselves. There is a principle, which everybody admits, to the effect that 'No man is a judge in his own case.'

"However, we'll accept for the moment your profession of vigorous Catholicity, although—to tell the truth—the principles you enunciated in the beginning seemed to be far from Catholic. We'll take it that—consciously at any rate—you do not intend in your flirtations any gross violation of the sixth commandment. But will you face facts squarely and ask yourself how you can possibly avoid such violations? You are bound to believe in original sin; you are bound to believe that every man is subject to its pernicious effects, that it has left the human heart an easy victim to passion. You may seek to lull the voice of conscience by saying to yourself: I know where to stop. But the question is: Can you stop when you wish?"

"The swimmer laughs at the warning placard as he poises for his dive; with his powerful stroke he can breast every wave. He plunges confidently into the tide, and strikes out for a good swim. But **Danger Ahead!** he has not reckoned with the strength of the current. He swings round to return.

In vain does he try the strokes which carried off the trophies at swimming galas. Crawl and breast-stroke and over-hand—all fail him. He is swept out like a cork on the waters and in a few moments all is over. Another young life has been lost.

"How like the story of the young man who sees in flirtation only a harmless pastime. He is just the jolly good fellow, out to kill the monotony of life with the company of a girl friend; he has no bad intentions, whatever; he does not want the grosser forms of self-indulgence; in a word he knows where to draw the line, as he says. The warnings of priest or parent are despised—probably resented. Older people, to his mind, are narrow-minded, old-fashioned, over-suspicious. There



is no fear for him; he is a strong character; he is able to mind himself; he knows the world. Ah yes, but he miscalculates the danger. The current of passion is strong, so strong that human effort may be discouraged. He is swept along and, almost before he realises it, he is engulfed in the depths of sexual sin. Each plunge into the whirl-pool calls for another until, in the end, self-respect, shame, even common decency disappears.

"It is with a view to guarding us against such catastrophes that God has issued the warning: 'He that loveth danger shall perish in it'."\*

### God's Warning

"Excuse me, Father, I often wondered whether preachers weren't reading too much into these words. Have we in the

Bible a definite command to avoid the danger of sin?"

"Undoubtedly," Fr. Oliver affirmed. "A definite and clear command is given us in the words of the Saviour of the world Himself: 'If thy right eye scandalize thee, pluck it out and cast it from thee. . . . And if thy right hand scandalize thee, cut it off and cast it from thee. For it is expedient for thee that one of thy members should perish, rather than that thy whole body go into hell.'† These words take for granted the difficult situations in which the sad consequences of original sin may place us. Things as intimate, as necessary for us, as much part of life, as the right eye or the right hand may be a cause of grievous sin. But if we find ourselves in this dilemma there is only one way out—that indicated by our Divine Saviour. There are times when the gash of the surgeon's knife is the only thing to save the life of the body; and there are times when spiritual surgery is the only hope for the soul. Our Saviour does not propose a compromise—closing the eye that it may not see, binding up the hand that it may not offend. No. His words are definite: 'Pluck it out,' 'Cut it off.' Amputation is the only remedy; the danger must be avoided. This course may cause heart-burnings, but no matter; the penalty for compromise is the everlasting fire of hell.

"There are many otherwise good Catholics who seem to overlook the doctrine taught in those words of Our Saviour.

\* Ecclus. III. 27.

† Matth. V. 29.

That doctrine is that we are bound under pain of mortal sin to avoid putting ourselves in grave danger of mortal sin."

"Father, if you don't mind my saying so, this seems rather a sweeping statement. As a personal opinion, no doubt you have good grounds for holding it but may I ask if there is any authoritative teaching of the Church to back it up?"

Fr. Oliver slackened his pace a little. "The Church gave us her opinion on this officially, as far back as 250 years ago. There were some even then, who wanted to make things easy for the one who wished to live dangerously and they taught that there was no obligation to avoid a grave danger of sin when some advantage was to be gained from it. They would even allow one to risk such grave danger if some spiritual or temporal good accrued to oneself or the neighbour. These teachings were solemnly condemned by the Pope of the day as scandalous and pernicious and it was forbidden under pain of excommunication to teach them.\* That condemnation has never been revoked; it is printed in most modern theology books lest priest or penitent might be inclined to compromise on the point.

"No, Ronnie, there can be no compromise. Recklessly to place oneself in circumstances where mortal sin would be inevitable is undoubtedly a mortal sin. Hence the one who does so, deliberately empties his heart of God's grace and withdraws it from God's protecting influence. Thus, like a man weakened to death from lack of food, or a soldier without arms called upon to fight for dear life, he is called upon to resist the overwhelming urge of passion, to overcome that strong inclination to evil which is our heritage from Adam's sin. Will he succeed in this? Certainly not; we have the word of Jesus Christ for it: 'Without Me you can do nothing.'† And this is the reason for the Bible warning: 'He that loveth danger shall perish in it'."

The flow of Fr. Oliver's eloquence ceased. Both walked on in silence. Ronnie was slow to end it; his defences had collapsed one by one. But still he owed it to his reputation to make a last stand. To accept the principles enunciated by this missionary would not only make courtship difficult, it would make marriage impossible.

\* Propositions 62 and 63, condemned by Innocent XI, 2 March, 1679.

† John XV 5.



"Am I to understand from you, Father, that you want a fellow to give up girls altogether? Or give up the prospect of making a good match?"

**Is it "Goodbye to All That?"** "No," said Fr. Oliver decidedly, "certainly not. That is more than God asks of the average boy. But I do ask of the boy, still in his teens, not to spoil the best years of his life by sentimental friendships and sensual flirtations. These will only degrade his mind by the thoughts and desires which they will conjure up; they will sap his manliness; they will weaken his character and, inevitably, they will push him down the slippery slope which ends in the slough of impurity. These are my reasons for warning our young fellows against youthful follies in the line of flirtations."

"But Father," Ronnie saw a chance of scoring. "I am no longer in the ranks of youth. I will never see twenty-five again."

**Arrested Development** "My dear man, don't you see that this only makes things worse? A man who is flirting with this, that, and the other girl in his late twenties, is just a case of arrested development. He ought long ago to have found some girl worth loving and to have loved her and either married her, or, at least, have become engaged to her and have kept away from others for her sake, if marriage is, for the time being, impossible."

"What do you mean, Father? 'Arrested development'? I can't see myself a case of that kind."

"What I mean is that, as a certain Jesuit has recently put it, there is some excuse for what he calls 'promiscuous amativeness' in the puppy stage of a boy's existence; if a boy shows tenderness, now to one, now to another girl, as they come his way, in the general hope of finding the one on whom his full affection can be expended, 'such conduct, though it looks like flirtation, is,' he holds, 'quite natural and cannot be blamed.' It is the result of 'that general disposition of the young to nibble at love with all and sundry so far as opportunity allows simply because their new-born instincts drive them in this direction. To debar the young from all indulgence in this tendency until they have sat down and deliberately decided to search for a wife, would not only be asking too much from human nature, it would be thwarting,

stunting and atrophying the healthy instincts of nature and standing in the way of their proper development.' But he distinguishes this innocent type of flirtation sharply from the flirtation indulged in merely as an amusement—or as you have described it, 'just for a bit of fun' when a boy sets out to play on a girl's feelings without the least intention of loving her, but only to get what pleasure he can out of her until he gets tired of her and wants to start the same thing with some other girl."\*

"Well, Father, I haven't agreed with much that you said so far, but what that Jesuit said has scored a bull's eye on me. I'm afraid that is just where I made my big mistake. I started flirting with girls in my teens, just for fun and I'm still at it and I suppose I shall remain at it. If only I had met the girl that I could really love and met her in time, things would have been different, I believe."

"It isn't too late, Ronnie," said Fr. Oliver very earnestly. "You'll meet the right girl yet, if only you give up knocking around with the wrong sort. Don't you see how that leaves you no time or opportunity for meeting the sort of girl that you would like to marry? You may not fall in love with her at first sight—you're a bit too tough for that now, maybe—but never mind. Like the man on the 'Brookland Road' what you need is a girl to make you see what you missed. Do you know the poem?"

"No, Father, I didn't read a poem since I was at school."

"Here's one then which hits you off pretty well:

*I was very well pleased with what I knowed,  
I reckoned myself no fool—  
Till I met a maid on the Brookland Road,  
That turned me back to school.*

"That's you, Ronnie, 'very well pleased with what you knowed,' but that is because you don't know what you missed. I have tried to give you some idea of it, but mere talk is not much help in learning that particular lesson. You won't learn it, I expect, until you meet a girl who will be able to make you love her in such a way as to forget your own

\* *Love, Courtship and Marriage.* Fr. Hull, S.J., p. 118-121.



selfish interests and pleasures for her sake. That is really love, for love is always unselfish: it comes easy to the young in the idealism of their teens but not so easy to those who have passed into the disillusionments of later years and whose only ideal is to have as good a time as they can. By a good time most of them mean selfish pleasure of one sort or another. Of all pleasures, the most selfish is that of impurity, because it turns the very means of showing love into an instrument of self-gratification. One who indulges in it habitually, spoils his capacity for real love and therefore for happiness in marriage. If you want to meet the right girl to marry, I suggest to you that you ought first to try to make friends with some nice girl, on a basis of mere companionship without any love-making whatsoever. You have got into such a bad habit of love-making just for fun, that is for selfish pleasure, that you could not make love now without taking the wrong turning in it very quickly. The result of that would be that any good girl would drop you like a hot potato. But if you can manage to retain a good girl's friendship for a year or two then you will find yourself feeling a new respect for girls and for her especially. Like the maid on the Brookland Road, she will have turned you back to school, to learn what you should have learned in your teens. She may, or may not, inspire you with the sort of romantic love that you may have day-dreamed about in your teens, but, believe me if the genuine friendship of a good girl is all that you gain by it, you will have gained something that gold cannot buy. Marriage even on such a basis alone, may turn out very well.

"The novelist may enlarge upon the romance of love-at-first-sight, but many a marriage resulting from love-at-first-sight has ended in tragedy. If marriage

**Love at First Sight** is to prove a success for both parties, it must have more than romance to sustain it. Marriage involves a companionship of the most intimate kind, a companionship which must be life-long. Consequently, it is of the highest importance that the parties suit each other in character and disposition. At least they must have complementary qualities. If mutual understanding and compatibility of temperament be lacking, then life together would be a nightmare. Here is where the

danger of love at first sight comes in, it may expose a young man to making a mistake which is not merely tragic but irreparable. Infatuation will blind a man to the faults and deficiencies of the woman he marries and then the revelation after marriage may embitter their relations for a lifetime. Infatuation is something founded upon physical charms—of which, it is notorious, men quickly tire—and if there be no genuine love or friendship to supplement it, a man will be left some day with nothing save the ashes of a passion which has burnt itself out. Hence a well-known medical practitioner and writer has remarked: 'Unless the basis of marriage is friendship, it is not likely to be a lasting success. The basis of happy married life should be 75% companionship and 25% physical attraction.\*'

"So then even the man of marriageable age must be on his guard against the infatuation which is the mushroom growth from thoughtless love-affairs. It may well prove to be the ruin of his life's happiness."

"So, Father, your policy is not to make marriage more difficult for us chaps."

"Certainly not, Ronnie. I am not **Marriages Made in Heaven** barring the path for anyone who wishes to marry. On the contrary, I am pointing out the path that leads to happy marriage; that path is the strict observance of God's law. You have often heard that 'Marriages are made in heaven.' That is certainly true of happy marriages. 'House and riches,' the Holy Scripture reminds us, 'are given by parents but a prudent wife is properly from the Lord.†'

"Incidentally mere flirtation will only mar a man's chance of making a successful marriage. A boy who makes girl-friends easily and gives them up just as easily, is making himself absolutely unreliable as a life-partner. How can any sensible girl credit his professions of love and loyalty after he has had a dozen or more hectic love-affairs, during which he swore everlasting fidelity to the one who happened to be the recipient of his affections that particular week? If the best girls cannot rely on him, will he not be obliged to

\* Sutherland, *Laws of Life*, p. 6.

† Proverbs XIX. 14.



choose his future wife from amongst second-rate or third-rate specimens?

"Promiscuity then is no sure avenue to a happy marriage. In fact competent observers trace the notable decrease in our marriage-rate not only to economic causes, but to the prevalence of flirtation. When a boy can satisfy his sexual cravings almost at will, outside of marriage, he will be very loth to tie himself down to one companion in marriage. So if we had less flirtation we should have more and happier marriages."

Ronnie was beginning to regret his haste in labelling Fr. Oliver as narrow-minded and reactionary. This missionary, for whom marriage was banned, had thought and studied more about it than men of the world. He seemed to understand too its problems and pitfalls. Resentment against one whose advice was inspired by no motives of selfishness was impossible. Ronnie warmed to this man.

"Father," he said, "forgive my hasty judgment of your doctrine and for condemning you unheard. I should have been a sport and refrained from passing any verdict until I had heard your side of the story. I admit now that you are reasonable and that in the doctrine you preach you have in view only our good and our happiness. It is unfortunate that we fellows do not appreciate this.

"You have put a high standard before me. It is one I must admire and long to reach. But, Father, it is so hard. The world to-day makes it hard for a fellow to adopt that attitude towards girls which you and all priests wish him to adopt. May I say that it seems to be impossible?"

"Well"—Fr. Oliver was ready with an answer—"there is something in what you say, but does not Our Saviour console us by saying: 'Things that are impossible with men are possible with God.'\* A young man can come through the world unscathed if he has God's grace; and the means of obtaining this are within easy reach of all—namely prayer and the Sacraments. The battle for chastity may be fierce in the new paganism: St. Augustine in the days of the old paganism pronounced it to be the fiercest that a Christian is called upon to face. But a man will receive strength and

\* Luke XVII. 27.

courage if he asks for them in prayer to God and His Immaculate Mother Mary. Then he has the Sacraments to help him. St. Liguori calls confession the curb of passion and says that without frequent confession, a sinner will be saved only by a miracle. So, frequent confession can be a great check on a man's conduct and a great help at the same time."

"Excuse an interruption, Father, but the mention of confession brings up a point that has always caused me some difficulty. There seems to be such a difference of practice among priests regarding this question of keeping company. Some seem to adopt a very strict attitude, others a more lenient one."

**The Cross and Easy Priest**

"Yes," Fr. Oliver replied, "that is a difficulty. But you must always remember this: the confessor has to take people at their face-value, so to speak. He has to judge the case by the evidence put before him in confession. So his verdict will depend on the accuracy of the penitent in putting the case before him. If the penitent omits essential details; if his narration is even slightly coloured, not to say downright untruthful, the confessor may be misled and he may give a verdict according to the evidence put before him but absolutely unjustifiable according to the actual facts. The doctor diagnoses your state of health from the symptoms you describe for him. If your description is inaccurate he may give a wrong diagnosis. It is just the same with the priest in confession. His decision will be affected by what the penitent tells him or hides from him.

"Then take the chap who never goes to the same priest twice. Is it surprising that the advice he receives is not always exactly uniform? 'Doctors differ,' it is said, 'and patients die.' The health of many is seriously impaired because they run around from doctor to doctor and change their medicines accordingly. The spiritual health of many suffers because they do not keep going to that confessor who understands their case. Young people who keep fairly regularly to the same confessor and put all their cards on the table will be sure of clear direction.

"These considerations may explain the apparent difference of practice in dealing with those who are keeping company.



the priest in confession is thoroughly aware of his serious responsibility before God for the decision he gives. Leniency on his part may be fraught with serious consequences both for the penitent and for himself. One Saint describes lenient confessors as 'mercilessly merciful' and another admonishes priests: 'Where there is danger of formal sin, especially of sins against purity, the stricter the confessor is with the penitent, the better for that penitent's salvation; on the contrary, the more lenient he is *in allowing him to remain in the danger, or to go into it*, the more heartless the confessor shows himself.\*' These and other pronouncements of Saints do not encourage confessors to ambition the reputation of being 'an easy man.' They should convince penitents too that confessors must at times be cruel to be kind. Easiness in some cases might amount to a criminal injury to the souls of their penitents and incidentally to their own."

Ronnie took advantage of a momentary pause to interject a question: "I have heard of one or two cases, Father, who were actually sent away by the priest without absolution. Does not this seem entirely foreign to the merciful conduct of Our Saviour towards sinners?"

**Absolution  
Refused**

"Only on the surface"—Fr. Oliver was emphatic. "Our Saviour never had a hard word for the sinner who was truly sorry for sin and had every intention of giving it up. But He had many hard things to say of the Pharisees who were leading a double life—keeping up the external show of religion while they were—as He said—full of all corruption within. He flared up in anger and even lashed with a whip those who were compromising between religion and worldliness by money-making in the very Temple precincts. So we see that the Merciful Saviour could be very hard with sinners who were not repentant or determined to amend. There may be occasions when the priest in confession has to follow this headline. The salvation of his penitents may demand it, the salvation of another party, or the common good of the community.

"If the priest in the confessional is convinced that the penitent has no contrition, no matter what his own inclina-

\*St. Alphonsus, Prax. Conf. 75.

tions or wishes are, he cannot absolve him. A priest who discovers a dying baby may desire to baptise it, but if there is no water to be had there can be no baptism, no matter how heart-broken the priest may be to omit it. A holy priest may long to offer Holy Mass, but if bread or wine be wanting, he must give up hope of celebrating. Water in one case, and bread and wine in the other are essential; without them there can be no sacrament at all. Now, what water is to Baptism and bread and wine to the Mass, contrition is to the sacrament of Penance. There can be no sacrament without it. Hence the impossibility for the priest to give absolution where he is certain there is no sorrow."

"But how is a priest to judge, Father? When a sinner confesses a sin and makes the usual act of contrition, a confessor must surely take his word and pronounce the formula of absolution."

"Undoubtedly," Fr. Oliver agreed, "If the confessor is convinced that the contrition is sincere. But if, on enquiry, the confessor finds that this is no isolated case of sin but just another of a long series committed without the slightest struggle against them, must he not suspect the professions or sorrow? And if the confessor can trace all these sins to a set of circumstances which the penitent is unwilling to avoid, how can he put faith in words of sorrow, or in promises of amendment? I wonder would any doctor believe you if you said, 'Doctor, I do not wish to catch fever but my pal is down with it and I want to spend as much time as I can spare at his bedside'? I fear you would be taxing the credulity of the doctor a little too much. How then can you expect a priest to accept professions of sorrow when amendment is put beyond the bounds of possibility by continuance in those very circumstances which were the cause or occasion of the sin? And if he cannot accept such professions, what course is open to him but to decide that the penitent has no sorrow at all and therefore cannot be absolved until he reaches a better frame of mind? I quoted already some views on avoiding the danger of sin which have fallen under the condemnation of the Church. Side by side with them in the same list of errors condemned is the opinion that a penitent may be absolved who professes sorrow with his lips but shows no sign of giving



up his sinful life or even exposes himself deliberately to serious danger of committing sin.\*

"Hence if you do meet someone who has been refused absolution, you may be certain that the fault is not the priest's but the penitent's. The priest is in the confessional to give absolution to sinners but only to give it when sinners make it possible, not when they make it impossible."

The presbytery was now in sight and Ronnie became apologetic. "Father," he said, "it is unfair of me to have claimed so much of your attention. But let me say that your labour is not lost. You have saved another soul to-night. I have been one of those who have tried playing with fire in spite of an occasional bad singing. To-night will mark the end of that performance. To-morrow I will come to you in another place where I shall, please God, do most of the talking and you will, I know, be patient enough to listen to a life-story that would be much different had I met you years ago."

It was a friendly handshake that Fr. Oliver received this time, and Ronnie wended his way homewards feeling that now he knew himself a little better.

### III.

#### MABEL.

It was a few days before Fr. Oliver had an opportunity of meeting Mabel Browne. "I am sorry," he began, "that my sermon should have caused you so much worry. But don't you think you were rather quick to jump to conclusions? That is a mistake girls sometimes make, you know."

The ghost of a smile flickered around the corners of Mabel's lips. "Perhaps you are right Father, but I really got the impression that your attitude towards keeping company was uncompromising—that you would be disposed to rule it out altogether."

"By no means," Fr. Oliver replied quickly, "like every preacher who deals with the subject, I must condemn certain kinds of company—company which is mortally sinful or puts

\* Propositions condemned by Pope Innocent XI, March 2nd, 1679.

one in grave danger of committing mortal sin. But I make no indiscriminate condemnation. I do not maintain that every friendship between a girl and boy is mortally sinful or even a grave danger of mortal sin. Saints have met and loved and married without sin and it should not be beyond the power of the average boy and girl to imitate them in this. There is a type of friendship which is worthy of consecration by God at the altar in the Sacrament of Marriage. Far be it from me to say a word condemning what Christ has willed to sanctify.

"But the very sanctity of marriage demands that young people prepare well to receive it, and that is why preachers endeavour to keep before them the ideals of self-discipline and self-control which are the best preparation for a happy marriage. Young people are not always sufficiently alive to the inherent weakness of human nature. 'To will,' St Paul sadly laments, 'is present with me but to accomplish that which is good I find not. For the good which I will, I do not; but the evil which I will not, that I do.'\* If a saint has to make such a humble confession, you will not deny that there is reason for an occasional word of warning to those who do not claim to be saints."

"Oh! certainly not, Father," Mabel eagerly granted. "The poet was pretty hard on us when he said: 'Frailty, thy name is woman.' But still, we must admit that there was something in what he said."

**Frailty,  
Thy Name is  
Woman "**

"That is a generous attitude of mind," Fr. Oliver confessed, "and it makes discussion an easy matter. When one is aware of a weakness it is possible to bring home the necessity of taking precautions against it. St. Thomas draws attention to the fact that for the making of the first woman God took a rib from the body of Adam. The Saint points out that it was not from the brain of man, the seat of Adam's reason, that Eve was moulded but from the bone nearest his heart; from which the Saint deduces that God's Providence has decreed that woman should be distinguished by the intuitions which are of the heart rather than by the logic which is of the head. But in this

\* Rom. VII. 18.



lies woman's principal danger. First impressions, external show, the satisfaction of being sought-after—these have a way of warping her judgment. External attractiveness of person or manner may blind her to the lack of fundamental moral endowments. Over-trustfulness in good intentions convincingly expressed may divert her attention from their non-fulfilment. Her own heroicity in self-sacrifice may render her incapable of plumbing the depths of another's selfishness. A French proverb reminds us that we must pay the price of our good qualities, and so the very generosity, trustfulness and nobility of a woman's heart constitute her greatest danger in choosing her friends. This is particularly so where there is question of a boy-friend.

"You will see my reasons then for the warnings I gave in that famous sermon of mine. I urged girls still in their teens to avoid wasting their God-given treasures of pure affection on chance acquaintances who are most probably unworthy of them. I appealed to girls even of marriageable age not to take at their face-value the professions of every boy who forces his attentions upon them."

"But Father, my friend Brendan is well-known to me. He is a decent, good-living boy and I have never known him to do anything dishonourable."

"Yes, I can quite believe that," Fr. Oliver quietly replied, "no doubt he is all that you say. Besides, he has told me of his intentions with regard to you. Your keeping company is not of the frivolous kind; there is a prospect of a happy ending to it within a reasonable time. Then, from what I have learned from both of you, I think it is safe to say that you are adopting the safeguards which human prudence suggests as a precaution against the treachery of human weakness. Therefore, I would allow you to continue as you were and to put away anxiety on the score of a too literal interpretation of my sermon. If I may presume to offer you this little pamphlet"—Fr. Oliver dived into a capacious pocket—"May I Keep Company" will give you the Catholic standpoint. A quiet reading of it will obviate the necessity of my preaching you another sermon now."

"I cannot say how grateful I am Father, I can see that I was indeed too hasty in jumping to conclusions after that sermon. But the mistake on my part has brought its com-

pensations for it has made me do some thinking these last few days. I now appreciate better than ever the blessings of a good boy's friendship; I think I understand that priests in their preaching only want to guard us against marring its lustre by too much sentimentality, or else to warn us against the counterfeit article; and I realise a girl's responsibility for helping her boy-friend to keep on the level all the time."

Mabel had a favour to ask. "I wonder would it be too much to ask Father, that you meet a school-companion of mine. We did not meet since our school-days until recently. She confides a good deal in me. She is in great trouble at home in the first place, and I think from all she says that she has not been exactly a good girl for some time past."

"I shall be delighted," Fr. Oliver was radiant, "if I can be of any help to her soul. Our Divine Master had a welcome even for the Magdalene. You can send her to me whenever it is convenient."

Fr. Oliver stood up and extended his hand. As Mabel descended the steps he thought: if all were like her how easy would the task of a priest be.

## IV.

## LINDA.

Linda Carney sat in the presbytery waiting-room, not too satisfied with herself. Her hand-bag was open on her knee while in the looking-glass inside the flap she watched herself fiercely dabbing a powder-puff here and there over a strained and agitated face. A footstep in the hall warned her to bring the making-up to an end, so she snapped the bag to and looked somewhat defiantly at the door.

**The Glamour Girl**

"Good evening," said Fr. Oliver as he closed the door behind him, "you wished to see me?"

"Well yes," Linda conceded. "At least my mother insisted on my coming here and I came just to stave off a row. My name is Linda Carney."

"So you are not getting on well with your mother. May I ask the reason for the disagreement?"

"Well Father, to tell the truth she is very narrow and old-fashioned. It's impossible to put up with her." Linda flushed a little with angry remembrance.



"Narrow and old-fashioned," Fr. Oliver echoed, "how does she manifest these exasperating qualities?"

"It is like this," Linda was determined to put up a strong defence of herself, "if I go to a dance she's complaining, and if I stay out a bit she's fighting. Then people bring her stories about my going with boys."

"Perhaps some of the stories might be true"—Fr. Oliver smiled.

Linda decided to brazen it out. "Well, I am going with boys. I don't see any harm in it."

The clock on the mantle-piece struck five. There was a moment of silence which to Linda seemed tense.

"May I ask," Fr. Oliver began, if your mother, who apparently objects to your going with boys, ever gave you any reason as to why it might be wrong to go with boys?"

"No, not that I can think of. She says it is wrong of course, but I don't remember that she went into any reasons."

"And you don't think it is wrong? Do you mean that there never could be anything wrong in it—never under any circumstances?"

"Well, of course . . . ." Linda faltered somewhat.

"Yes, I see," said Fr. Oliver. "So you do know then some reasons why it might be wrong in certain circumstances for a girl to go with boys. May I ask how you found out these reasons?"

"Oh, talking to other girls, I suppose. . . ."

"And having gone with certain boys, perhaps . . . .?" cut in Fr. Oliver. Linda was glad she had powdered her face before he came. She hoped the make-up would hide the blush that was getting uncomfortably warm.

"Forgive me for having put it so straight to you, my child, I do not blame you for it half so much as I blame your mother."

Linda looked at the priest in surprise. Was he going to take her part against her mother?

"Yes," continued Fr. Oliver steadily, "Your mother left you with no choice but to find out from the wrong people and in the wrong way, what you ought to have learned from the right people and in the right way. The Pope recently appealed to the mothers of Italy, and expressly stated in doing so that his appeal was to all the mothers of the

**Mother's  
Fault**

stated in doing so that his appeal was to all the mothers of the

world likewise. He urged them to 'give a prudent, true, and Christian answer' to those unspoken questions which occur to the minds and trouble the senses of their growing-up children, and not to leave them to learn the answers, as he puts it, from some unpleasant shock, from secret conversations, from information received from over-sophisticated companions, or from clandestine reading.\* But apparently some of our people imagine that they know better than the Pope, or that, when he lays down a rule for the Church, our country can, for some mysterious reason, be an exception to it. Of course if a girl wants to be bad, she will be bad, no matter what she is told. But I don't think that you wanted to be bad, Linda?"

"No, Father, honestly I did not. But I heard girls talking about the fun it was to flirt, and I wanted to see what it was like. Then I suppose when I got a taste for it, I couldn't give it up."

"Some of it was what the Pope called an 'unpleasant shock' to you, I think?" Again Linda felt the blush beneath her powder.

"Please Father! You must not think me a bad girl altogether. When I found a boy of that sort, I usually kept away from him afterwards."

"You *usually* did. Not always then?" Linda was silent.

"I am really and truly sorry for you, child," said Fr. Oliver very gently. "I believe you when you say that you did not want to be bad. Probably, like a lot of other girls, you thought that you only wanted the 'thrill,' as they call it, of being kissed and petted by a boy. But you found that a boy usually wants something more than that, and seems to think that a girl who lets him kiss and pet her, wants more than that also. You may blame a boy for thinking like that. He will answer: 'Boys are built that way.' Take the case of a boy whom a girl allows to embrace her closely. In nine cases out of ten, it will cause him strong feelings of bodily pleasure and if he wilfully enjoys those feelings, it is a mortal sin. Those feelings do not depend on love: a boy gets them just the same with a girl he does not care for at all. They

\* *The Pope Speaks to Mothers.* English C.T.S., pp. 11, 12.



are merely the result of close contact, nothing else. But a girl feels quite differently about it. She does not usually want a boy to embrace her unless she likes him, and then the pleasure she gets from it is more in the heart than in the body. The boy does not understand this: he thinks that she feels the same as he does—in plain words that she is getting impure pleasure and enjoying it and wanting more of it. No wonder that such girls get 'unpleasant shocks': they have been simply asking for them."

"And is it a sin for the girl too, Father?"

"Perhaps not at first, because she does not then understand the harm of it. She imagines the boy only feels as she does, and she does not see anything wrong in that. But sooner or later she gets good reason to know, or at least to suspect, that the close embrace is the cause of sin to the boy. So it is, and because she is co-operating in his sin she is as guilty of sin as he is, once she knows."

"I never looked at it in that way before, Father. I had the idea that as long as I did nothing wrong myself, I mean of my own accord, I couldn't commit a mortal sin."

"Wasn't that a rather selfish way to look at it? Didn't you care at all about the harm you were doing to the soul of another, a soul redeemed by the Precious Blood of Our Lord?"

"No, that wasn't likely to occur to my mind. I knew that most of the fellows who go on like that with girls, would do the same with any girl. If it wasn't with me, it would be with someone else."

"But it was with *you*: for that much *you* were responsible. Don't you know what Our Lord said: 'It must needs be that scandals come, but woe to the one by whom scandal cometh.' Those words apply to everyone who is the cause of sin to another and not only to the unfortunate ones whose sins become public."

Linda decided that comment was uncalled for. She was thinking hard. Fr. Oliver returned to the charge.

"Are you going with any particular boy now?"

**A Youth Problem** "Oh! there's nobody in particular, but I happen to meet boys here and there at dances."

"And may I ask what age are you now?"

"Seventeen years."

The eyebrows of the good priest arched almost imperceptibly. "So here we have a girl of seventeen with no idea of marriage in her head, running about with one young man after another."

"Well, the first thought which would strike an observer is this: what will any boy think of your sincerity and trustworthiness? Suppose any man had to engage a maid for his house. He makes inquiries and finds that in four years she has been in about twenty different jobs and has left one after other. Do you think he would consider such a one sufficiently reliable and trustworthy? Do you think he would engage her?"

"I suppose not." Linda tossed her head a little. She disliked lectures.

"Very well, then, take a decent young man who is going to marry. Naturally, he will be anxious for a wife he can trust. He meets a girl of twenty-one, say, and thinks that possibly she is the good girl of his dreams. But his pals are able to tell him that for four years this girl has been knocking about with a score of different boys—hiking with some, accompanied from dances by others, joy-riding in cars with others. Do you mean to tell me that our young man will trust such a girl sufficiently to make her his wife? Will he be content to take the leavings of a dozen others?"

Linda twisted the handle of her bag. There was no suitable answer offering itself.

### The Popular Girl

"So you see, my child, in getting your name up with one young man after another, you are not smoothing the path to happy marriage. No young man who stops to think, will choose as life-partner a girl who has had as many love-affairs as she has years. Should there be one so infatuated that he does not stop to think—well, in the calm moments that will follow the glamour of the wedding day he may very easily discover that, having married in haste, he has now to repent at leisure. The popular girl of the dance-hall, the tennis club, the hiking parties may prove to have few or none of the qualities which makes a good wife or mother."



Linda had found her tongue at last. "But Father, you make too much of the whole thing. Boys and girls don't look at things so seriously."

"What a pity they don't! If they did, there would be fewer mistakes made in marrying and fewer sins before marrying."

"Then according to you, Father, a girl should never go with boys?"

"No, I'm not making any such sweeping statement. A good boy and a good girl may keep company under certain conditions." Fr. Oliver ticked them off on three fingers: "First, when there is a justifying cause, secondly when their conduct in company is above reproach, and thirdly, when they keep company in such circumstances that the danger of grave sin is reduced to a minimum."

"Now a girl of seventeen, with no idea of marriage at all in her head, and certainly no prospect of it for four or five years, who is keeping company for mere amusement, can hardly be said to have any justifying cause for keeping company with any boy. Then if she goes for spins alone in his car, hikes with him, walks home with him in the small hours from dances, there is likely to be love-making."

"But it isn't a sin to kiss." Linda was surprised at her own daring.

Fr. Oliver was stern. "Catholic teaching cannot accept that statement unreservedly. A kiss may be the sign of the highest reverence and love. On Good Friday you show your respect for the image of the Crucified by kissing its feet. You kiss your father or brother in reverent love. Catholic theology has always insisted upon the dignity of the kiss as a mark of lawful affection. It condemns the misuse of it in mere sport or sentimentality.\*"

"Now your experience of the pictures will show you how the kiss can be further debased till it becomes a mere exhibition of sensual passion. And from what we know of the young men brought up on such fare, we may well fear that the one who takes up the first girl he meets at a dance, or seizes the first opportunity for a flirtation, will demand as the price of his condescension, passionate kisses, sensuous caresses, close

embraces and even wider liberties contrary to the sixth commandment of God."

"But what can a girl do?" Linda queried. "If she's a stay-at-home she will meet nobody, and if she shows herself straight-laced and old-fashioned in company she will find very few to go with her a second time. So in the end she will find herself like 'the last rose of summer

left blooming alone'."

Fr. Oliver laughed. "She might not consider that prospect a very rosy one! But, seriously, I think that she is making a very fatal mistake. Teresa of Spain—a saint and no mean authority on human nature—has well said: 'I believe that men will always have a deeper regard for the woman whom they know to be virtuous. For a woman, virtue is the surest means of acquiring influence and of ruling hearts.'\*

"What a pity so many girls fail to realise this! In strengthening the ramparts of modesty around their virtue, they increase their attractiveness; in weakening them, they decrease it. If a girl wishes to inspire love of the genuine kind, she must first aim at inspiring respect. From respect will develop admiration and from admiration lasting love. On the other hand, sentimentality and sensuality are like those berries, attractive in colour but in taste disgusting and perhaps even poisonous. Hence a girl will secure genuine love only if she maintains her self-respect. If girls, who have free and easy notions of modesty, could only hear some of their 'captures' discussing them with boon companions, their cheeks would burn with shame. It would seem but a poor exchange for the virtue so freely surrendered, to find that they are labelled locally as 'damaged goods' which should be given a wide berth by a marrying man."

"The love that is won by the surrender of decency, modesty and honour, does not last. In fact, it does not deserve the name of love. It is mere passion, and passion indulged has a way of leaving a bitter taste which may easily lead to a rupture of companionship before marriage, or a cat-and-dog life after marriage. The boy who is quickest to take advantage of easy virtue, realises in his heart that where he succeeded others will not be repulsed. Hence, he may quite under-

\* Autobiography.

\* Compare p. 14.



standably hesitate to believe that his wedding ring will confer the gift of inviolable fidelity on the companion of his flirtations. So a boy may flirt with the loosest but he will not marry her. Even the wildest and fastest of boys hopes to find a pure and good girl for his wife.

"Listening recently to a Radio programme of old-time popular songs, I heard one which contains sound wisdom which some girls never seem to learn. Perhaps it describes yourself !

*You're just a girl that men forget,  
Just a toy to enjoy for a while.  
For when men settle down they always get  
An old-fashioned girl with an old-fashioned smile.  
And you'll soon realise you're not so wise  
When the years bring the tears of regret.  
When they play ' Here comes the bride '  
You'll stand aside  
Just a girl that men forget."*

Linda looked steadily at the pattern on the carpet. "But then one must take risks, I suppose; getting a boy is a gamble to a certain extent."

**Capturing a Husband** Fr. Oliver started. "Surely you don't mean what you say! Would you go into a chemist's shop and drink the first bottle that comes to your hand? I hardly think you would risk poisoning yourself. Would you ask a chance acquaintance, met a few times at dances, to keep your money safe for you? Will you then agree to a walk in the darkness, or a spin in a car, or an appointment in a lonely place with a casual acquaintance picked up at a dance hall or at a party? Will you take as the partner of your life one known only a few months and of whose origins you are completely ignorant? It is incredible that girls should be so foolish.

"Marriage, after all, is a very serious matter. When you marry, there is question of living a lifetime with the companion you have chosen. If he should prove uncongenial by reason of character, disposition, or temperament; if he should prove to be a gambler, drunkard or loose-liver, what a hell would his wife's existence be! Surely then a girl should be most careful in making such a momentous choice. To be guided merely by love at first sight, by passion, by personal

appearance or charm of manner, would be a fatal mistake for any woman.

"It is a mistake too which cannot be corrected. You know that the marriage-bond is indissoluble. When you marry a man you take him 'till death do us part.'  
**'Till Death Do Us Part'** So there is wisdom in the Russian proverb: 'Are you going to war? Pray once. Are you going to sea? Pray twice. Are you going to marry? Pray three times'."

There was silence in the waiting-room. For Linda tears would have been a welcome relief for taut nerves.

"Father," she faltered, "I am grateful for your advice. I need to think over what you have said. Somehow, I never looked at things in that light before."

"I believe you," Fr. Oliver interposed. "It is want of thought and reflection rather than viciousness which is responsible for the destruction of so many girls. Haste to pick up a boy or fear of being left high and dry, blinds them to the risks they run. In reality a girl who strives to be modest and pure will not fail to meet a suitable partner. The Little Flower's mother in her girlhood days did not keep company. She kept to her home and earnestly prayed God to give her a husband according to His Own Heart. One morning when returning from her daily Mass and Communion, she met on the street a young man who impressed her most favourably. She did not know him but an inner voice told her, 'this is he who is destined for you.' The young man was equally impressed by the girl who passed him. They became acquainted, married, and were the parents of a canonized Saint."

"That is all right for holy people, Father, but not for one like me, I fear."

"Well," said Fr. Oliver, "I don't suggest that the average girl should stay at home and pray till a husband drops from heaven on the doorstep. The point I wanted to bring out was that a girl can't afford to leave God and God's will out of her reckoning, if she wants to be happy even in this present life. You said that getting a husband was a gamble, that one must take risks. There are risks, I agree, but the risks that you mean are not risks at all: they are plain certainties of failure and of sin. A girl may miss her chance of a good husband by



being too much of a stay-at-home: she is certain to miss it by being too much of a gadabout. You have been on the wrong tack, and the only thing for you to do is to pull out of it before it is too late. Drop the crowd you have been going with, the girls in it as well as the boys; ask your friend Mabel Browne to introduce you to some girl-friends of her own. They are sure to be the right sort, judging from what I have seen of Mabel."

"If that means I'm not to have any boy-friends, I can't promise it, Father."

"It means that you are not to have any of the kind you've been going with. To tell you the plain truth, no decent boys would want to be friends with girls who had been keeping the company you have been keeping. Your only hope of getting a good boy-friend, and eventually of getting a

**Turning Over  
a New Leaf** good husband, is to take a very long rest from all boys' company, for the present, and to make friends with girls who are not boy-crazy, who can think and talk about something else besides boys. Then, let us hope, people will gradually realise that you have turned over a new leaf; boys will no longer be able to boast about the 'good time' they had with Linda Carney after such and such a dance, and so on. They do, you know, and though half of it may be lies, no self-respecting boy wants to have his name coupled with that of a girl about whom the other half may be true."

"Oh, Father, I hope things are not as bad as that with my character."

"I should like to hope so too, but that is the risk you have been taking with your character. If you continue, it can only end that way. If you make a complete break with it all, and make that break now, later on, please God, some good boy will make friends with you and love you and marry you."

"But, Father, how can I meet him if I am only to be with girl-friends?"

"Why can't you? I take it that Mabel Browne's girl-friends meet boys socially for other purposes than flirting. Girls nowadays have plenty of opportunities for meeting boys at work and play. That's how Mabel met the boy she is now engaged to. Why not you? But you must begin, as she did, with being just comrades and no more. There should be no

love-making whatever, not even kissing, until you have made sure that the boy who wants to kiss you is not merely playing with you but really respects you. No girl should let a boy kiss her the first time they meet—no, nor the second, nor the third—if she wants him to respect her and set any value on her affection. The average boy who tries to kiss a girl at the first opportunity, is merely, as they say themselves, *trying it on*. He wants to see how far he can go with her. If he is not a bad boy, he will despise her for the liberty she so easily allows, and will mark her down as one to be avoided. If he is a bad boy, he will despise her too, but he will come back again—you know what for. Is it worth it, child?"

"No, Father: looked at that way, of course it isn't. The trouble with me is that I didn't look at it that way before I got the habit of it. So it isn't easy for me now to see it your way. You must pray for me, Father."

"I will, but you must pray for yourself—as you never prayed before. So much depends, for this life and the next, on what you decide now."

The church bell rang for the devotions and Fr. Oliver looked at his watch. Linda Carney arose from the chair. Both moved towards the door.

It was a sadder and a wiser Linda who faltered: "Thanks very much, Father" to Fr. Oliver's "God bless you my child."

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