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# THE CHRISTIAN HOME.

## Part 2A. Reading and Harmony.

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### CHAPTER 4: Good Reading in the Home.

#### Culture an Ally of Religion.

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

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

#### **Point 1. Value of Taste for Beauty: Why I should read.**

It is in view of this splendid teamwork that can be done by culture when yoked with religion, that I do not hesitate to advocate good reading in the home first of all for the purpose of cultivating a

taste for beauty. A man may, it is true, love God with his whole heart without appreciating the beauty of an ode by Francis Thompson, a melody by Charles Gounod, a statue by Michelangelo, or a painting by Raphael. But just as philosophy, which is a natural science, deserves to be styled the handmaid of theology; so also taste, or the ability to appreciate the beauties of nature and art, may be made subservient to religion or to the love of God. In other words, if theology is aided by philosophy because the object of both these sciences is truth, of the former supernatural, of the latter natural; then taste, whose object is natural beauty, will be a suitable ally of the love of God, whose object is divine beauty.

### **Beauty of Virtue.**

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

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

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

### **Making Duty a Pleasure.**

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

## **Refining Effect of Good Reading.**

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

## **A Splendid Recreation.**

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

## **“Movies” No Substitute for Reading.**

A more subtle objection to reading as a recreation is advanced in our day. So many literary masterpieces, we are told, may now be seen represented by moving pictures that there is no need

of reading the originals, since seeing the “movie” affords just as excellent a pastime.

Whoever holds such a view labors under a gross illusion.

Even if the literary work is only a mere novel — and hence one of the lowest forms of the literary art, — some of the very finest elements are totally lost when it is reproduced as a movie; for example: the descriptions of character, the dialogues, the beauties of diction, the various figures of speech, and above all the beautiful thoughts, sentiments, and images in which every truly literary work abounds. Take a moving picture like the great 1918 silent classic “*Fabiola*,” which cost an untold amount of labor and expense and was proclaimed to be a picture of exceptional merit. For sheer artistry, it stands infinitely below Cardinal Nicholas Wiseman’s great masterpiece from which it is taken. And as for edification, educational value, interest of narrative and charm of character, almost any three successive chapters of the book are worth more than the entire picture. And the same is true of any literary masterpiece. The moving picture most assuredly has its place in the field of education as well as recreation; but it can never fill the place occupied by literature in either of these fields.

### **Reading for Instruction.**

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

### **Deepening One’s Religious Knowledge.**

It is true that religious instruction is imparted in church and in the Catholic school; but even supposing the most thorough Catholic schooling and the attentive hearing of a weekly sermon, no average Catholic is beyond the necessity of improving his knowledge of religion by frequent reading. It stands to reason that religious knowledge acquired when the mind is still immature is capable of increase, of widening and deepening, as a person grows older. And grown-up Catholics need a far more reasoned and more perfect grasp of the truths of their religion; not only in order to strengthen their Faith amid the dangers of an ungodly world, but also in order to defend it against the attacks of non-Catholics with whom they daily come in contact. For this

reason, it is important that they be reminded of the truths of their religion not only once a week but daily; that what their pastors tell them from the pulpit be repeated to them in different form by laymen like themselves; that they learn how to apply the standard of religion and the moral standards of the Church to the changed conditions of modern life and to the new problems that are being discussed; that examples be frequently placed before their minds of sterling Catholic men and women who held Catholic principles and fearlessly put them into practice in business, in politics, as well as in their professional, social, and private life; that they be kept informed of the most noteworthy local, national and international events affecting the Church; in a word, that they be kept abreast of the times in all important Catholic matters.

### **Point 2. What to read.**

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

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

### **Drinking Filthy Water.**

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

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

### **Sugar-coated Poison.**

Nor is the danger of defiling and corrupting the mind to be found only in writings that are pronouncedly immoral or irreligious. Disease germs may prove fatal just as well when taken into

the system in wholesome food as when received alone from contact; and poison is poison whether taken straight or with a coating of sugar.

There is a vast amount of literature in our day, — books, magazines, newspapers, — that is more or less infected with the germs of moral disease and the poison of unbelief; and it is the more dangerous because the harmful matter is contained amid a deal of harmless matter, or concealed under a false show of humanitarianism, patriotism, equity, justice and the like. We must not forget that all literature, in the main, breathes the spirit of those that produce it; and as the great bulk of literature that appears daily is the product of religiously indifferent, agnostic and worldly minds, it quite naturally breathes the spirit of religious indifferentism, agnosticism and worldliness; and, say what you will, such literature is dangerous to ordinary Catholics because its spirit is contagious.

### **Source of Unchristian Views.**

Or whence is it that so many Catholics have decidedly unchristian and worldly views on certain subjects? Without doubt, from seeing these views expressed and plausibly set forth, or simply assumed as self-evident, in current non-Catholic writings and media.

The views that Catholic young folk often entertain in regard to marriage and courtship evidently come from this source. Some columnist in a daily paper dispenses advice to lovers, and it is accepted and acted on even though it runs counter to the warnings of confessor and pastor. In like manner another writer devoid of Christian principles descants daily on such weighty topics as evolution, capital punishment, free will, parental authority, self-repression, education, canons of art, the fashion, science and religion; and from the very cocksureness of the author, his dicta are widely accepted just as of old the answers of an oracle.

### **Unchristian Outlook on Life.**

To keep your mind sweet and clean and to prevent the purity of your Faith from becoming gradually defiled, I would advise you not to read the popular non-Catholic fiction of the day — the short stories and serial stories that appear in the daily papers and in non-Catholic magazines, as well as most of the non-Catholic novels that have appeared in recent years.

I am far from maintaining that all this fiction is wholly bad, or that not even now and then something will appear that is wholly above criticism.

The point I am trying to make is that most of this literature reflects an unchristian outlook on life; that the characters it depicts speak and act in a manner that makes this unchristian outlook attractive; and that frequent reading of such literature, just like intimate association with unbelievers, will by and by lead even a Catholic to adopt something of that same outlook and, all unconsciously, allow it to influence his actions.

### **Bad Company in Fiction.**

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

### **Catholic Periodicals Superior.**

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

### **Unhealthy Appetites.**

The great trouble is that the relish for really good reading has to a great extent disappeared; and even many supposedly practical Catholics have got to the point where they no longer care for Catholic writings because the latter lack the sensationalism of the non-Catholic press. This is evident from the class of papers and magazines that these Catholics habitually read. It is not the high-class papers and periodicals that one finds in their homes, but such as appeal to the less noble instincts in man. Nor is it lack of literary excellence that they deplore in Catholic books and magazines.

The stock complaint is that they are too dry; that they lack "punch" or "pep" or whatever the current slang word happens to be for that peculiar kind of spiciness, which they imagine to be necessary to make a work interesting. But the fault really lies in themselves and not in Catholic

literature. It is an unhealthy appetite that is appeased only by highly seasoned food; and such Catholics as have acquired a craving for spicy literary food can set themselves right again only by denying themselves such food and earnestly striving to develop a taste for more wholesome literature.

### **Choking the Good Seed.**

Deep down in his heart, I am convinced, every sincere Catholic has a love for the better things in literature. It is an essential part of the Catholic mind. But in many cases, this love has not been developed. Like the good seed of the sower in the Gospel, it has been choked by the more abundant and superficially more attractive output of worldly literature.

If from early childhood on, parents would allow their children to have only good books and magazines, their children would develop a taste that would endure throughout their adult life.

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

### **A Parental Duty.**

As you are mainly responsible, dear fathers and mothers, for the kind of taste for reading that your children develop, let me urge upon you the duty of providing an ample supply of Catholic magazines, books and papers in your homes. You cannot be content with one Catholic paper or magazine; you should have at least three or four; something of a devotional and something of a miscellaneous character; and something, too, for every member of the family. While many Catholic periodicals have special departments for the young, there are excellent Catholic publications devoted exclusively to juvenile readers, and one of these should be taken by every family that is still blessed with youthful members.

And if the subscriptions should seem too expensive, remember that it is a false economy to starve your children’s minds while you spend more than is necessary for the feeding and clothing of their bodies.

Far better would it be to retrench somewhat on expenditures for creature comforts and fine clothes than to save a few dollars by failing to provide your children with abundant and wholesome mental food. Besides, if you discontinued taking non-Catholic papers and magazines you could easily afford to take Catholic ones.

## **Good Catholic Books.**

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

## **Not Only Story Books.**

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

## **Point 3. The Best Place for Reading.**

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

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

magazine while putting the baby to sleep? And could she not even keep the children quiet by half reading half narrating a story to them?

### **Why Mothers Should Read.**

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

### **Supervision Necessary.**

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

### **Theodore Roosevelt's Example.**

Besides exercising great vigilance to keep improper literature out of the hands of their children, fathers and mothers should also make a free but discreet use of their parental authority to induce their children to read certain books or articles that are of special importance to them and to demand an account of their perusal. A very fine practice is to have a child read a short piece, say one of *Aesop's fables*, and then give it in its own words, or to learn a few lines of poetry by heart.

The late President Theodore Roosevelt tells in one of his letters, written while he was in the White House, that, on one occasion when his wife was absent, he had to take her place, listen to the children recite a poem and award them a nickel in case they knew it well. This custom might well be imitated by Catholic parents. Even if the pecuniary award be omitted, the children will be amply rewarded by the benefit they derive from the practice. But they cannot be expected to do such things of their own accord. Play has more attraction for them than reading or learning by heart, at least until they have acquired a taste for more intellectual pastimes.

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

### **The Home Reading Circle.**

The last reason I wish to mention why reading should be done in the home, is that it serves as an additional reason for staying at home and thus fosters home life.

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

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

### **Preserving Old Books.**

And let me say a word in favor of keeping old books in the family and handing them down from generation to generation. Many a one who gave away his picture books, scrap-books and nursery rhymes when he grew up, has later regretted that he no longer possessed those books for the entertainment of his own children.

So I say, let the books remain in the family, and let each one take his or her books along when the children leave their parents to found new homes. The books would sometimes need to be bound anew; but it would be an added delight for the little ones to know that their father or mother had paged the same books in their childhood; and the parents or grandparents themselves would undoubtedly find great pleasure in viewing again with the little tots the selfsame picture books and illustrated nursery tales that charmed them when they were small.

Yes, how we were charmed by beautiful stories, beautiful pictures, beautiful toys when we were small! Then the whole world seemed beautiful.

But how drab, how commonplace it appears to us now. How full of evils it is, and how deeply do we deplore our powerlessness to do away with them.

## **A Paradise of Books.**

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

### **CHAPTER 5A: Harmony in the Home.**

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

#### **The Married Couple's Destiny.**

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

#### **Superficial Harmony.**

These are questions which every serious-minded couple must be ready to answer, and on which they must be in substantial agreement, if they wish to live in peace and happiness and make a success of their wedded life. I say, if they wish to make a success of their wedded life; for they might live in harmony and attain to a certain measure of earthly happiness even without agreement on the aforementioned questions, — but only at the cost of the real success of their state of life. Thus, they might get along in harmony if they agreed to disregard entirely the question of life's destiny and of a future life. In like manner, they might get along harmoniously if, despite decided views or convictions on certain questions; for example, that of the artificial limitation of the family, one of the two would yield in all practical points to the will of the other.

That would be harmony on the surface, harmony in practice, harmony through compromise or even the abandonment of principle, but not that complete, deep-seated harmony of thought and action flowing from the acceptance of the same principles in all essentials, which should be the desire and aim of every Christian husband and wife.

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

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

### **A United Front.**

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

### **A Second Helping of Pie.**

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

A little later, taking advantage of his mother's absence in the kitchen, Johnny repeats his request to his father, who replies: "Here, you can have my piece, Johnny. I don't care for it anyhow."

By acting thus, the father definitely takes sides with the boy against his mother; weakens her authority; neglects an opportunity of training his child; and sows the seed of discord between himself and his wife. The circumstance that the father gave his own piece of pie to his boy does not change the situation. The mother did not refuse the lad's request from a desire to economize by saving a piece of pie, but from the desire to train him to habits of self-control and Christian moderation.

### **A Mutual Understanding.**

Instances of this kind that call for co-operative action on the part of the parents are of almost daily occurrence in families where there are children.

Being pleasure-loving like all human beings and as yet too young and inexperienced to value the merits of self-abnegation and restraint, children are everlastingly begging to have this or that, to go here or there, to be permitted to enjoy this or that diversion or amusement. And not only young children present this domestic problem; the problem persists as long as the children are subject to the authority of their parents, and often calls for the most cautious handling when the growing boys and girls have become adolescent sons and daughters. In every stage of the problem, the only proper policy for the parents to adopt is to present a united front wherever the children are concerned. There must be a distinct mutual understanding that one will support the other, and that all important permissions granted to the children by one parent are dependent on the consent of the other.

“We will see what mother thinks about it”;

“Did mother say you might?”;

“I must first talk it over with father”

are standing replies, which parents will ever have ready if they are bent on promoting the welfare of their children and maintaining harmony in their home.

### **Strengthening Mutual Love.**

By thus upholding each other's authority in the presence of the children, father and mother not only increase their children's respect for their parents and each other's influence with the children, but also knit still more firmly the bond of mutual love that makes husband and wife one moral personage.

For each single reference to the other's authority is a gracious acknowledgment of the other's equal rights and responsibility in the marriage partnership, and a tacit renewal of the wedding day agreement to live as two souls with but a single thought.

Nor will it suffice for the one parent to uphold the other in word while at the same time making no secret from the children that he or she would much rather side with them. It would be hardly less harmful, for example, than open hostility for the father to say:

“I'm awfully sorry; but you know how mother is. It's useless for me to say ‘Yes’ when she says ‘No’.”

## **The Chief Disciplinarian.**

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

For father and mother always to take each other into consideration, always to stand together like the two pillars of an arch, is to make family life infinitely more agreeable, to share equally its burdens and responsibilities, and in truly constructive fashion to further the training of their children.

But if the parents disagree and the children become aware, as they soon will, that they can cajole the one parent into siding with them against the other, then parental authority will be sadly weakened, and domestic harmony will soon give way to a state of tension, then to ill-concealed dissension, and at last to open strife.

## **The Head of the Family.**

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

## **Main Cause of Disharmony.**

The other kind of disharmony that calls for a special warning is disharmony or the **lack of unity in religion**. I will say more of this in my next booklet.