

MARRIAGE

Legionary Friendships

Legionaries should be happy in each other's company. Friendships should form: man with man, girl with girl, man with girl. These friendships should be superior to common friendships, because in them there is an additional element—the spiritual. They grow in a supernatural soil instead of in a purely natural one. Very often, too, they had germinated in that soil. The effect of this alliance of the natural and the supernatural principles should be to knit soul to soul—almost to fuse them. Wherefore, every Legionary friendship should possess a special intensity and nobility. It should (as the *Handbook* insists) be like unto the love of David and Jonathan—if it be not as that of Darby and Joan!

I am going to talk about the latter type of friendship. For an interesting development in the Legion has been its marriages. Already there have been not a few of these. Many others are incubating. Evidently this is destined to be a feature of Legion life. We should be rejoiced by this manifestation, and intrigued by its possibilities to the Legion, to the world, to religion.

Legionary Marriages Desirable

Prima facie, such unions should be successful. If ever the basic ingredients of success are to be present, surely it will be in a Legionary marriage! Nature and grace combine

harmoniously to this end. In the first place, you have two right-intentioned, serious-minded, self-sacrificing, tender-hearted, self-reliant people—a real man and a real woman.

In the second place, you have these two souls entering on their life's partnership in quite a special way under the auspices of the Most Blessed Virgin. "I am all thine, My Queen, My Mother," they had often repeated with their lips and meant with their hearts. They had given their little leisure and the best that was in them in active service of her. In their future life she will be with them, no less than in the past, a regal queen and a solicitous mother. In addition, she will exercise in their regard a new influence, what I might call a matrimonial role. For in the measure that each belongs to her, so will they belong to each other. Thus, their Legionary dependence on her constitutes an additional, potent principle of oneness with them.

What, indeed, may one not suppose of such a union—quickenened, nurtured, as it is, in the bosom of the Mother of Divine Grace? Surely not less than that it be a very model of marriage?

Therefore, these marriages of Legionaries are to be welcomed. May there be more and more of them, undertaken with ever-ascending standards, and destined to draw in their train a new order.

To bring a new order to pass, two conditions must be fulfilled. The first is that the standards of those marriages must be far higher than current ones, so that they will challenge and then captivate the imagination, and in time be adopted by all the worthier elements in the community.

The second requirement is that these marriages be in large number. One swallow does not make a summer. One lone soldier does not win a war. Neither does one ideal marriage—nor even several of them—create a new model of marriage.

This second requirement is not yet being fulfilled;

therefore, the first one cannot be operative. Legionary marriages are not yet taking place in sufficient number to form a new pattern. Around, we see many minded to marry, but hesitating. Hesitating at what?

Obstacles to Early Marriage

Hesitating at an intimidatory array of obstacles. With telegraphic economy of words, a daily newspaper has stated the position: "Boss says 'No rise'; Corporation says 'No houses'; landlady says 'No babies'; grocer says 'No tick!'" Funny, but only on the surface. Undoubtedly the dice are loaded against those wishful to marry—so much so, that according to the safety-first mentality of the day most men would be mad to marry.

What is "Enough Money to Marry"?

The crucial difficulty is that of finance. No money to get married! Next year! And after that another and another year. Many next years! The years of youth are let slip away while waiting for that stage of sufficient money—for that tide which never rises high enough to let the ship away. But the ship is meant to sail—that is, marriage is meant for most men. The moral is plain—the ship must be lightened; the standards of marriage must be mended.

What is "enough money"? A girl defined it for me recently. (Let me explain that I was not proposing to her.) She put it at 1,000 pounds per annum! But that is ruling out the institution of marriage altogether. Therefore, we must set the figure lower—much lower.

How much lower? Let us proceed to the opposite extreme. What about the weekly sum which your country (whichever one it is) has fixed as its maintenance allowance for the

unemployed man with a wife. You laugh; you do not take me seriously. But people are getting married on it. Do not take me as urging that it ought to be done; but actually it is being done. Suppose we concede that it is inadequate to marry on. Then how much higher are we to go, while still keeping *far* below that absurd £1,000*?

Wrong Standards Sabotage Marriage

Here someone will object: "It is impossible to fix an arbitrary figure. Every person's level will be different. Many circumstances have to be taken into account, including that of social position." How smooth and round is this objection. It looks so reasonable and it is so wrong. It is justified to the extent that I suppose one cannot think in terms of a definite marrying figure. And no doubt the individual circumstances, including social standing, have some bearing. But so far as I can diagnose the full import of this objection, it is that every young pair are entitled to start off on the level where they would like to be, or where their parents left off. That rule would sabotage marriage. So I give you a better one: "Marry on less than what you think to be necessary." This is almost the opposite of the other. But analyse it and you will find that it is psychologically sound and in line with reality.

No standards are right which would have the effect of making marriage a privileged preserve, or of narrowing it down to a smaller category than the general run of mankind. For marriage is divinely intended to be the ordinary human relation. Is not, therefore, the man who is getting common wages and yet refrains from marriage on the grounds of "not enough," setting up a standard for himself which is higher than that intended by God?

* Remember that these figures belong to a bygone day.

Unwise Waiting

Many will protest that they are only waiting till they are a little better off. But when is that going to be? You are on a fixed wage which will only go up when a strike forces it up; and that strike will itself have been forced by a rise in the cost of living, leaving no one any better off when the vicious circle has been completed.

"But no," you correct me, "a few years will find me better placed. I get an annual increment—or I am next in the line of succession for my boss's shoes." That few years may be ten. They may be more; and they are the building, vital years; so that yours may be a middle-aged marriage, one with the enthusiasm gone out of it, a "comfort marriage," perhaps a childless one.

So if you are not likely to be any better off by waiting; or if you are only going to be better off by a big stroke of luck (which does happen, but *not* to you and me!); or if you are sure to be better off only when your youth (and what is worse, your future wife's youth) has waned; then is it wise, even from the human standpoint, to wait?

Lean on God

Why not lean on God, instead of on human considerations wholly? He will work a little miracle for you—or a big one—if you but make a solid act of faith in Him; which means taking the step that is not clear to you. You desire to embark on what is popularly called the sea of matrimony, but there is no boat. So trust God to sustain you, set your feet on the waters, and walk. You must not hope for an unaided miracle.

Chorus of indignation: "A wreckless, improvident marriage! You condemn these young people to a life of hardship!"

Perhaps so, and what of it? Are not other young people

being stimulated to enter monasteries, go on the Missions, essay the heroic but unprofitable things of life for the sake of high ideal?

It is retorted: "But marriage is different. One gets married for happiness."

True, and I might add: to escape from drudgery, from the drudgery of office or counter, for independence, for improvement of position—or that of infatuation. In a word, for self and nothing else.

Marrying for God

Do people ever think of getting married for God? Is there any reality in the phrase "Vocation of marriage" so frequently heard? Or is that expression no more than lip-service? I fear so. For examine and you will find that quite a different set of ideas from true vocational ideals governs the general approach to marriage.

I do not suggest that people do not try to lead holy lives in matrimony. Of course they do. But so do the butcher, the baker, the candlestick-maker—and the Civil servant. But that does not by itself constitute those trades vocations except in the conventional sense of the word. As you objected a moment ago (but in a contrary sense), marriage is different. It is a true vocation in every sense of the word, because it is a sacramental state—like the priesthood itself. Therefore, marriage is an immense thing, elevated as far above merely occupational states as Mount Everest is reared above ground level.

But vocations and sacraments for full efficacy require co-operation; and I fear that in regard to the great sacrament of matrimony this condition is not being sufficiently satisfied. Its big moment is esteemed to be the wedding; after which there is little or no advertence to the fact of a sacramental

condition. If graces flow, it is rather because God freely gives them, than because of any effort to earn them. For in the everyday marriage the main factors are not faith, hope and charity, but pounds, shillings and pence; not holiness but worldly pursuits; not God but sheer self.

Marriage, a Sacramental State

Being a sacramental state, the graces potential in matrimony must simply be unlimited, transforming, ready to seize on every circumstance and to fill every moment of life. But without the vocational idea and the advertence, those wonder-working graces will largely be unreaped. This is the reason for all those unhappy or common-place unions—indistinguishable from the marriages of other creeds—which surround us.

Now here is my proposition to Legionaries. Why not marry in the full spirit of vocation? ... with the intention of deliberately exploiting the spiritual gold-mine of Matrimony? ... in such fashion that the ideals and devotedness of John, who gets married, are not inferior to those of his brother James, who becomes a Cistercian; or of his sister Nellie who enters Carmel.

Why should the Religious vocation think in terms of renunciation and unadorned living, whereas the marriage ambition is the opposite? In marriage we only renounce or live simply to the extent that we are constrained thereto by financial pressure. How big a house can we afford—instead of how few rooms can we manage with? How much can we put into those rooms—instead of the Religious ideal: how little can we do with?

Not only do we view marriage and enter on it with incorrect standards and emptiness of ideal, but we carry on through married life in the same non-spiritual track—"with

proud eye and insatiable heart," as the Psalmist says. Nothing fills our longing. Each rung higher on the ladder of good fortune, instead of gratifying existing wants, only means a widened horizon of them. Up go our standards, so that often we are worse off than we were before. New house, new furniture, new friends, new schools, new style of living! But the same old will o' the wisp, leading us on, enticing us off the road—into debt or other morass. Where is the vocational, sacramental point of view in all this? As the Americans would say, "Search me!"

So back to the charge again I come and say: "Who among you will lend yourselves to the Lord to afford to the world a practical demonstration of true marriage, not crawling in the dust, earthy; but winged for Heaven, a sacramental state, a vocation?"

"Those who live as models for the mass," says Browning, "are singly of more value than they all."

Marriage, Normal Spiritual Formation

Marriage is God's plan for carrying on the world; which means that it is our normal spiritual formation. In the main, He intends each man (and woman) to cleave to some other woman (and man) so that they will help each other—soul and body—in the painful pilgrimage of life which it is not good for man to make alone. Furthermore, He wants them to increase and multiply, so that earth—and later Heaven—will be peopled with souls.

But present-day standards frustrate this design. They tend to put marriage out of bounds for most men and to debase it for the remainder. Necessarily, those standards are wrong, anti-social, anti-God.

How correct them? There is only the one way. It is to hold up to the eyes of the world a true model of marriage,

that is marriage undertaken in conscious co-operation with God, in the intention, spirit, and actuality of vocation. This must be a practical model, that is, not one devoted pair but many of them must exhibit it. Moreover, if it is to challenge the perverted standards, it must afford dramatic lessons of holiness, renunciation, simple living even to the degree of hardship.

Again the critics' chorus resounds: "Poverty! misery! unhappiness!" I retort: Do not so unthinkingly cry "poverty" or "misery," for thereby you seem to say that God and Mammon must be served together. And as for what you call "unhappiness," do not confound true happiness (which is found in vocation, holiness, self-sacrifice) with what is nothing but a counterfeit, namely mere pleasure-sipping and jollification. "The Creator" (says a writer in the *Catholic Digest* of May, 1940), "cares very little about human glee. He wants growth. He has an earth to people and a plan to perfect. You don't buy happiness while you are working towards ends like that. You buy trouble and rebellion, growing pains, and a whale of a beating." Colourful! but an answer to those who believe that we live but to make merry.

Faith That Frees God's Hands

Those who try to fashion this new model of marriage will need to lead sacrificial lives. But those who thus lay down their lives, shall save them—and many others with their own. Their faith shall free God's hands for munificent giving. Incidentally, He will furnish them with all that is needful to them—including the proper and priceless gift of marriage, a love that will combine two souls in one, two hearts into one heart.

He saith: "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will stand by

the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Mammon.

"Therefore I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, what you shall eat; nor yet for your body, what you shall put on. Is not the life a greater thing than food, and the body than the clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they do not sow, or reap, or gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of much more value than they? But which of you by being anxious about it can add to his stature a single cubit?

"And as for clothing, why are you anxious? See how the lilies of the field grow; they neither toil nor spin, yet I say to you that not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which to-day is alive and to-morrow is thrown into the oven, how much more you, O you of little faith!

"Therefore do not be anxious, saying, What shall we eat? or What shall we drink? or What are we to put on? (for after all these things the Gentiles seek); for your Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and his justice, and all these things shall be given you besides."—(St. Matthew vi. 24-33)

Reckless? Improvident?

Take Providence at His Word

No, you cannot say that to Providence Himself. You must take Providence at His word. Faith is taking Providence at His word. Why leave marriage out of the things that this is to be applied to?

But I am not suggesting that everyone should rush headlong into matrimony. No, that would be inconsistent in view of my own condition. Nor am I echoing those married men who (like the fox that lost its tail) want by various

means to force all single men into marriage—as if they were jealous of them.

In fact, I do not address those who do not want to get married, but only those who are anxious to, or who are thinking of it. Though here I venture on a word of warning to the others: that those who are refraining from marriage for purely selfish motives will probably find their days bleak and lonely enough when the autumn or fall of life comes on them.

In the Legion there are many who have the capacity, and the dormant will, to make this venture in faith. Each pair who do so will find imitators. Many imitators will make a new school of thought. Obviously, a new school of thought on this subject would mean a changed world.

Probably the Legion is the only organization which is circumstanced to present this true model of marriage, because it is the only mixed one with the requisite standards.

The time is over-ripe for the attempt. For even in its lower aspect as a human institution, marriage is in 'peril.