

‘Thy Children as Olive Plants’

Ps 128:3

*‘Behold thus shall the man be blessed that
Feareth the Lord’ – Ps 127*

I am going to tell you something about children, and especially about *your children*. ‘Rather daring!’ you will say to yourself. Your first thought will be: ‘Surely we already know about our own children?’ No, that is not the case. Too often parents know very little about their own children, startling as that may sound to your ears. For very often in the first days of a child’s life false relationships are established between it and its parents – which are never afterwards rectified. It is easy for that to happen. The very helplessness of children in their early stages rends that way. They are so completely dependent on their mother; they are so much like little animals that there is the temptation to regard them as but superior little animals. Then that initial lag never catches up with the child’s developing. Parents treat their children as babies when

no longer babies, and as children when they have become quite big boys and girls – always trying to catch up and never managing it.

That is what I mean by false relationships. The position all along is that parents do not adapt themselves rapidly enough to the child's progressiveness and at no time give the child credit for what is in it. The result is that parent and child do not know each other, and hence the child does not confide in its parents. There is no real understanding, no intimacy, so that in only too many cases the children have to leave the parental home and get married before they secure that understanding and intimacy. Surely this is stark tragedy. Because where should children get all that understanding and sympathy and knowledge – which is so necessary to them – but from their own parents who brought them into the world and saw their beginnings, and in whom nature has planted a most amazing love for those children? Yet, by reason of a false start, a process of drift, and an out-and-out lack of idealism, a state of affairs can be arrived at in which parents and children have surprisingly little to do with one another outside the mechanical side of existence.

Mentally, that is to say in the important things of life, there is often very little association between parents and children. Worse than that! – how delighted children often are to leave their parent's home! Worse still is the comparative indifference with which some people view the passing away of their parents. What greater sorrow than the loss of father or mother? Yet again and again I have seen that devastating event treated quite casually. That sad finale will not be yours; for you are a section of parenthood which is above the average, and whose children are of worthy mettle. But plenty of what I touch

on *will* apply to you. Should you feel that it does, watch carefully your step. The wrong path ends dismally, and on that path it is almost impossible to retrace a step.

The Common Materialistic Outlook

What is the common outlook of parent on child? Virtually a materialistic one, wherein the worldly things are definitely put first. The dominant idea is to secure jobs for the children; or if these children are girls, to get them advantageously married. Surveying those parents, one would really think that they had not a higher thought about their children. And this applies even to good people, religious ones at that, but whose ideals in regard to their children are distressingly like those of a pagan. The bringing out of the talents and qualities of their children is only viewed from the angle of the material benefit which will accrue; not from the terrific point of view of developing a human being, and thereby a soul destined to live for ever according to the scale of that development.

Teach them this; teach them that. Why? Because it will help them to earn more money or lead on to better matches. That is materialism, though you may call it love. It is paganism, though you may array it in Christian dress. I am not contending that the child's future advancement and comfort should not receive consideration. Of course they should, but on no account should they constitute the chief objective. But ordinarily they do. How few are the parents who think above profit and the pleasant side of things for their children.

Preparing Children for Their Mission in Life

Come nearer home. Look into your own hearts, and ruthlessly analyse your ambition for your children. Is it of

that common sort; or is it the uncommon one of a mission in life? What do I mean by a mission? I mean a trusteeship to the world, a duty to make other people better, to help the nation, to build something for the Church of God. Surely it is common sense that every Christian parent should think of its child in that responsible way? But such a mission does not mean making money. Sometimes it may mean that, but only accidentally; and mostly it will not be profitable in the worldly sense to have such a mission. Usually it will entail many crosses, toils and disappointments. It may mean a mangled body. In some cases that child may have to lay down its life to save another's life. What about Father Damien who, in pursuit of his particular mission in life, became a leper? What of the pioneers of the x-ray whose flesh rotted off their bones because they did not then know how to protect themselves against its searching influence? In such directions may a mission lead, but is it therefore to be recoiled from?

Frequently we find that the better the parents, the more anxious they are that their children should sip the sweet things of life. But if you want your children to fulfil the purpose for which God sends them on their momentous pilgrimage through this world, then that soft and selfish side must be subordinated. I do not suggest that it should be left out altogether. That would not be right, moreover, it would be beyond normal human nature. But at least it must be second to the spiritual consideration. You must set your heart and soul on your children having that mission in life, and to that end you must now be prepared to make the offering in your heart which they later on will have to make in their flesh.

It should be obvious that in directing your children towards high ideals there is a gain even for yourselves.

It is in your own interest that you bring out in them all that is good. For if you teach your children selfishness and give them the idea that they must get on in the world at any price, you yourselves will be the prime victims in their cold and calculating path. They may have that petty career on which you set your heart, but beware lest 'like Dead Sea fruit that tempts the eye, it turn to ashes on the lips' – as Tom Moore sings.

The Legion of Mary and Children

So from every point of view it is essential that the developing of your children be proportionate to their spiritual destiny. To that end must you lavish love and care on them, and draw out every quality and charm which may be in them. The Legion of Mary aspires to help you in that work. Its programme and yours are, or should be, identical.

It aims to expand the characters of its members, among whom are your children, and in this and every other way enable them to achieve their Christian destiny. Therefore, the Legion and yourselves must pull together as a team. My present purpose is to make that plain to you and to get you to put on the harness.

I start by saying that the Legion, or any society like it, is no spiritual luxury. There are more people than one would like to number who think that all that is expected of the Christian is that he go to Mass on Sundays and to the sacraments now and then; and accordingly that the Legion is mere idealism in the sense that it is to be admired but is not necessary. That is a mistake which deserves to be called a catastrophe. In solid fact, a society such as the Legion of Mary is essential. It forms part of what one might call the sheer bread and butter of the Christian life. Why?

– Because that Christian life requires apostleship from every person. When one is made a Christian by baptism, he is in that very act summoned to the apostolate, so that if he does not respond he will be living only half the circle of the Christian life. Throughout his whole reign, Pope Pius XI was denunciatory of the half-circle Christian. Apostleship, he insisted, is part and parcel of the Christian life. But he also emphasised another vital principle, namely that the wish to be apostolic, deprived of the practical means thereto, will in most circumstances remain sterile. Therefore a society like the Legion which almost automatically enables people to discharge that duty, is not a luxury but a paramount necessity.

Preparing Children for Apostolate

Many may freely admit all that. But they argue that its place is later on, when the children have got themselves settled in life; for the present they must devote all their time to the preparing of themselves for the getting of that job. This sounds so plausible. But what does it imply? What else but that the apostolate is a mere trimming – something that can be left over to some future time when people have leisure for the non-essentials. What does this mean but that incorrect religious standards are being set before your children in their impressionable years? Worse, that you are indelibly fixing those standards in their minds. You know what is said of the years of childhood – that they are wax to receive, marble to retain. This is only another way of putting what I said a while ago; that you cannot retrace the steps which day by day you take in respect of your children. Therefore it is imperative that adequate ideals be placed before children in their early years when they are easily moved and taught. They should then be shown, by

word and *by deed*, the full circle of Christian duty and thus apprenticed to the service of the Church.

Believing the above things, the Legion makes incessant approach to schools and colleges with the plea that they start *praesidia* among their students. Usually these excuse themselves on the score of their exacting time-tables. Sometimes they say that they would be wishful to make room for the Legion, but that the parents would one and all object to any diverting, however slight, of the children from that grim pursuit of the JOB. So between them – schools and parents – the responsibility lies. Well, here is what Pius XI has said to those schools – and through them to those parents:

'Religious of both sexes will render a signal service to Catholic Action by preparing for it from a tender age the boys and girls under their charge in schools and colleges. At first, the young people are to be sweetly attracted to an interest in the work of the apostolate, and then by constant and painstaking effort induced to become members of Catholic Action organisations. Where the latter do not already exist, those religious should themselves establish them.'

Those words are strong enough. It is hard to push the on one side. Yet it will be done. It will be alleged that the local circumstances are 'special'. Superiors are constantly making this mistake of emancipating themselves from general papal injunctions by declaring them to be inapplicable to 'these children,' 'this school,' or 'this town'.

Rules of the Legion

Now for these legionary rules. They are not complex. First, there is a weekly meeting held around a little altar like

that one which faces you this evening. The members say the prayers which we have said this evening; then they discuss the work which they are doing. The second duty is that every day the members recite the singularly effective form of prayer called the Catena, consisting mainly of the Magnificat. The third requirement is the doing weekly of some apostolic work. This varies according to the branches and places, but it must represent some definite task allocated to the member. It is to be performed by that member during the week and reported upon at the next meeting.

Those are the primary rules. But rules empty of spirit are – well, let us be content with saying ‘ineffective’. It is the spirit that matters. What is the spirit of the Legion? ‘It is this: The legionary must in everyone see our dear Lord, and must in every duty serve him. Then there is the further essential note that everything must be done in closest union with our Blessed Lady; so that in all that the legionary does he tries to show forth the mothering of Jesus by Mary.

The foregoing does not represent mere imagery – picturesque and stimulating, but unreal. No, it is more real – nothing else than the detailed practice of the twin doctrines of the Mystical Body and of Our Lady’s Mediation of all Graces. Briefly, the idea of the Mystical Body is that in every baptised person, and to a lesser extent in the unbaptised, Our Lord is living a life of his own; so that what we do to that person either for better or for worse, we do to Our Lord; and on these terms we are held accountable for every act we do throughout the day and on through life.

Ponder that doctrine. In other people and in every human occupation you face Our Lord and deal with him!

And he with you. And so you will be judged. Moreover, as Mary is the Mediatrix of all Graces, it follows that no act in life is done without her help – a help which the legionary must acknowledge in his thoughts and acts with such constancy that this idea of the Motherhood of Mary becomes second nature to him.

Those holy realities form the legionary spirit. Week in, week out, by word and work, they are drilled into its members so that these cannot be so dense or so forgetful as to escape in the end from an elementary understanding of those doctrines. You will realise what a profound effect this will exercise upon your children – upon all children in their receptive years. To the extent that this be achieved it will give them a new mentality. And if the mind is the man, then you have a new man, and granted enough new men, you have the possibility of building a new world.

The formal Legion duties occupy no more than a couple of hours per week, but the Legion insists that those hours are only for the purpose of teaching. They are a school time wherein its members are taught a system of idealism, and whence they are to go forth and put that system into practice. If they confine that idealism to the legionary time, the Legion would class them as its failures. Just as the fire does not exist for the grate which holds it, but for the whole room, so the purpose of those few legionary hours is to heat all the other hours.

Now suppose the Legion is successful in lighting such a fire in your children's hearts? Where will the warmth be radiated? Here pardon me for talking in terms of A, B and C, but I must keep my ideas clear and yours too. A is school-time; B is play-time; C is home.

The Legion and School Time

First A, the hours of school and study – so vital to the modern child that if he manages to evade the education offered to him, he will be a sort of cripple in later years. Children must learn; they must drink in knowledge. And they can only drink it in the measure that they approach it. If the approach to the process of education is dull, hostile or non-receptive, the child will not get much out of it, even in a whole lot of years. Considering the billions of words which have been spoken, and the really extensive and varied fields of knowledge which have been covered, it forms a mystery how so little of it sticks in the mind of a child. Recently some governmental investigations brought out the disconcerting fact that a big proportion of children can spend all those years at school and come out knowing nearly nothing. What is responsible for this shocking anti-climax? The sweat of toiling nations is being gathered up by way of taxation, and then, so to speak, poured profitlessly down the drain of education! And still more disastrous is the fact that human intelligence is lying fallow. The universal inclination is to blame the teachers for this partial failure. But I believe that we must blame the pupils – or rather say that there is something wrong with their approach to education. In general they do not desire to learn. They may go to school willingly, but not for the purpose of learning. To this there can be but one end, namely that they assimilate only a minute fraction of the education which is tendered to them.

What has this got to do with the Legion and your children? This: that the young legionary who has absorbed to some extent the legionary ideal will necessarily see schools, teachers, books, rules and study in a different light, and will accordingly get things from school which

the other child would not get. Therefore, even if the Legion did represent 'time taken from study' (this is the conventional and parrot-like objection), the net effect would not be minus but plus, not loss but incomparable gain. It would in fact be the authentic case of the sprat which catches the salmon.

The Legion and Playtime

Playtime is the second consideration. It also is a time of moulding – as much as the school hours. It is the social life of the child, when it mixes with its own young world and there forms the vital friendships which last though life. It is a time when the child usually escapes from the supervision of elders, and there lies peril. The child of weaker nature may fall under influences which will prove too much for it. Nor is the child of stronger nature (which bespeaks strong passions) any the less in danger. Whether your child is in the class of being influenced or in that of doing the influencing, it is equally in need of proper motive-power. If this is absent, those children will drift along with every current and eddy – and to what?

Unquestionably the Legion can furnish that motive-power. It gives its young members an outlook on life and on people, a code of conduct, principles of action; and thereby it removes the young legionary from the class of human driftwood. Moreover, it will ensure that the child with masterful qualities will use these for good and not for evil as is so often the case.

The Legion and the Child at Home

The third consideration is in a way the most important for you – at least it touches you the most closely. It is the child at home. Insistently harped on by the Legion to

its young members is their attitude towards their homes, their parents, brothers and sisters, and all the items of the home. It is impressed on them that the legionary idea must shape their behaviour there – and if not, that the legionary spirit is not in them, and apparent manifestations of it in other quarters are not the real article, but a mere veneer. In this programme the Legion has been fairly successful. A large proportion of parents and teachers have come to us reporting a changed demeanour in their children; an attitude of helpfulness towards those around them which was not there before. It is reasonable to suppose that a significant change must have taken place interiorly before an improvement in conduct will attract attention, and a radical change before it will form the subject of formal comment. Therefore, it may be claimed that already effects are being produced of the type which the Legion had reasoned would be forthcoming from its scheme.

And here I have to strike again the note already sounded. Those Junior legionaries, having been taught to see Christ in their neighbour (who is everybody around them), then have it dinned into their ears that the very first quarter to receive the benefit of that ideal must be their own homes and their own people. There they should seek out tasks instead of avoiding them – aye and the unpleasant ones at that! They must go out of their way to be obliging instead of merely giving in to begging and threatening. They must relieve their overburdened mothers. They must look in the legionary way on the other children, assist in the management of the younger ones, but taking an interest in all, serving all. Is not all that a gain to you?

‘Fine!’ says the cynic, ‘but ...’

‘But me no buts,’ retorts the Legion of Mary. ‘It is practicable. It is being realised, and already on a scale

sufficiently large to prove that it can be universally applied.'

I think that all, even the best circumstanced, will admit that the entry of that spirit would transform all homes. Yet thus far we have been speaking only in terms of happiness, and there is much more to it than that. There is the higher element that the child is acting out of the love of God and with the express motive of serving God. According to the motive is the grace bestowed: no motive no grace; poor motive poor grace; pure motive big grace. And therefore the transformation of the home is but a faint reflection of the transformation simultaneously effected in that child's soul.

But our cynic may be excused for casting doubt on this picture. For certainly it does not photograph the ordinary household. How loud are the complaints of parents that their children are selfish, unamenable, disobliging, quarrelsome, dodging the common tasks of the home. How often from the child is heard that cry of woe, 'You are always asking me. Why don't you ask Tommy?' The atmosphere is one of endless disputation, of forcing the children to do things which they should be eager to do out of natural love, and supernatural love; but which they don't do, and won't do. There are abusive words and tears; nerves on edge; and relations often become quite embittered between parents and children. Of course the parents place all the blame on the children; one would judge from their talk that they had brought monstrosities into the world. They forget that in their own young days they exhibited towards their parents that same spirit of which they now complain. But let me assure you that in the normal case the fault originated in the parents and not in the child. If children are taken right from the

beginning, they can be moulded very easily. You do not find too many children of ideal parents turning out badly.

Parents Must Prove Their Love

Parents express surprise that their children should be so misbehaved and so ungrateful. They exclaim, 'We care for them in every way. We have always shown them what their duty is.' Of course there is a fair percentage of truth in that. Innumerable sacrifices have been made for those children – there have to be nowadays in order to bring up a family. But surely you do not expect children to be grateful for being housed, clothed, fed and sent to school? They take all that for granted. In after years they will look back through their tears and say, 'My father and mother were very good. They put a vast amount of self-sacrifice into the rearing of our family.' But they do not see that today. They have a different set of values. Their hearts are set on things which are very often – unreasonably, they imagine – denied to them. Love, for instance! 'What!' those parents will say with shock. 'We do love our children.' And I am sure that all parents down almost to the very worst have love for their children. But in what manner is it being shown? Often-times in ways that the child does not recognise. That will not do. Your love must take forms which appeal to them and convince them that they are tenderly loved and highly valued. Do I refer to sweets, toys, and the like? Not at all! Those things at best are only symbols, and at worst can mean nothing at all. I mean real proofs. I refer to basic things: sympathy, interest and the flattering tribute of respect. Interest must be shown in the pursuits of children, in their idealism, their plans for the future. The child will not propound its theories and problems to anyone unless it feels it is on sure ground. If it fears a chill air or frosty

remarks of the 'Don't be a fool' order, it will not trot out its ideals and little schemes which seem at once to be so very bright and to be rather foolish. When a little person plots and plans in a big way, of course he or she is half-ashamed to air the product. Yet, there may be bigness there, which an improper attitude may bring to blight.

The Average Home

Are the general run of children being given those tangible evidences of love? No, I would definitely say. Parents have insufficient patience with them; do not treat them seriously; and too much fault-finding goes on. There are some mothers who make a non-stop performance of this latter. As those mothers see it, they are telling the children their duty. But for the child it is a harassing, odious and demoralising process. Repeatedly have I seen this chiding going on when there was no real fault, except that the children were children and acted as such. Watch some mothers—pushing, pulling, checking, scolding all the time. Thereby the children are goaded to chronic fretfulness and disobedience, and their natures debased. Thereby they are perfectly taught the whole science of mismanagement of children, perverted home life, which they in due course (through knowing nothing better) will reproduce towards children of their own. Each one of you will know cases where that is the everyday routine; and perhaps you may not even be seeing the worst, because an appearance may be kept up to outsiders. Parents make favourites among their children; encourage rivalries; sometimes insanely egg on child against child, thus sowing the seeds of hate between them. Why, that is worse than the behaviour of the viler type of men who set one dog against another in the street for the fun of a fight!

Many parents go in for picking out their children's weak spots – and goodness knows there is no one who can pick them out better than the parents. They rake up those weak spots when a child is not giving satisfaction, harp on them, hold the child up to ridicule before the other children and before adults.

How will this end? Firstly, in the forfeiting of the child's love. Secondly, in the warping of the child's nature. Thirdly, in the creation of an inferiority complex which will handicap the child at every difficulty in its life. It will whisper to itself, 'I am no good. I am clumsy. I am stupid.' Initiative and effort are paralysed.

How black this indictment looks in print. Sheer exaggeration, you may be inclined to think. Yes, exaggerated in the sense that not all of it would apply to every case. And of course it is distorted in the sense that it omits the redeeming features, i.e. the love, care and self-sacrifice which would in almost every case be there, but which do not justify the presence of those disfiguring ingredients. Nor does the child average things out in the way that you are doing. His perspective is different to yours. I have said he takes for granted – that is to say he undervalues – the clothing, food and education which are given to him. Parents rest their minds too much on the material benefits which at such cost they give their children, and they hardly advert at all to the above catalogue of faults. The children see it quite the other way about, with the result that parents who are really devoted persons may in their children's eyes be tyrannical fathers and barging mothers.

Respect for Children

One has to be very tender with the peculiar material of youth. It will not do to say, 'We give it so much affection,

and then we have to give it so much discipline.' Why that is almost the same as saying that you give it so much food and then so much starvation. I am afraid that the warmth must go on all the time; but in any event do not decorate with the grand name of discipline the type of treatment which I have been reprehending. That is not discipline. It is utter lack of discipline in you, and it is cruelty to the child. The appreciation must be there all the time, so that the child can count on it. On the other hand, if the atmosphere is wrong, the child will enter into itself like a snail into its shell, and then its parents will know less than anybody else about it. It should be a bitter thought to any parents that their children were going outside for consolation, turning to others to tell their hopes and problems and to confide their secrets.

Nor does it restore the balance if, after treating the child rudely, you rush into the opposite extreme and give it great doses of emotionalism; for the latter only swings back again to the former attitude of disrespect. Disrespect! – a funny word. Yet, that is just the trouble; few there are who deem children to be subjects for respect. And yet they have a right to it. You must not place your children in the category of mere household possession. From the start you must treat them seriously as persons, respect them and even revere them.

I wish you would read a truly wonderful article which appeared in the *Legion Magazine* of September, 1938. It was written by Ethel Meagher, then an active legionary, now a Carmelite nun. It was about babies; not about the usual aspect of feeding them, clothing them and putting them to bed, but about their souls. Her contention was that in them from the very first there is a well-developed soul which has vast understanding and can be influenced,

even though it is only learning by slow degrees how to deal with its outside world. A reading of that profound article would teach parents the tremendous respect which from the first moment they must give to each newly-born being that is placed in their arms.

If you could begin thus, and continue that way, those false relationships between parent and child of which I have spoken earlier could not take root. Instead, sublime foundations would be laid, out of which would rise the perfect home.

So from the very moment of their birth treat your children as real people to whom respect is due as the primary and essential basis of association. Give them no less courtesy than you would give the lady in the bus or your colleague in the office. Listen to their questions, encourage them, and take the trouble of replying adequately to them; this can be made the better half of their education. Pay them the compliment of reasoning with them, and do not think that they will not understand and appreciate. As I look back, I can remember every time in my childhood that people treated me with genuine respect and condescended to explain things to me.

A necessary part of respect is trust. Go out of your way to trust your children. Give them little jobs of responsibility. Seek their opinion; and having done so, follow it if at all possible. Thereby you infinitely develop that child; and what is more important, you bind it to you with links tougher and more precious than gold.

Children Are Worthy of Respect

But here I must insist that this respect as a permanent feature can never proceed from a mere policy, nor from a mere feeling. Because in a minute that feeling and policy

can change to something else. It must represent a profound conviction in you and not an emotion or even reasoning. That conviction can only be based upon reality, that is on the certainty that children are worthy of respect and hence must receive it. How are you to get that conviction? In the same way in which the Legion of Mary tries to give it to its members, that is through the doctrine of the Mystical Body. You, too, must realise that in each one of those children Our Lord himself is really living; that they are sanctuaries of the Holy Spirit. In the early days of the Church there was a great man called Origen who used every day kneel down and kiss his little son's breast because the Holy Spirit lived there. If every parent acted in that spirit – though not necessarily showing it by the same action – nearly every child would be found retorting on that parent in the same spirit. Those ideal parents would have ideal children. If you appreciate the dignity of those children as temples of the Holy Spirit, in whom Our Lord is living and reproducing his own life, then as a logical sequence you will have respect for your children, and having that respect, you would treat them with respect.

You do children an injustice by thinking that they do not sense the various shading of attitude which is taken up in their regard. They do – most accurately, and they respond in like measure. Sunflower-like, they expand towards those who show them the correct sort of attention. The devotion and admiration that every child naturally has for its parents bursts into full bloom. See the instinctive reaction towards good parents? 'Whoever had a father and mother like mine?' Listen to their little boastings on the subject amongst their contemporaries. Every word that father and mother utter, everything they do, forms pattern and law for those children.

In that atmosphere the child's character unfolds like plant life in a hot-house. They seek information. They try things. They weave plans. They feel responsible. They will gain that most necessary quality, courage. In such a home the battle of life – and death – is already being won.

What an enchanting prospect! But only a mirage unless you work towards it. It cannot be imposed upon children; nor injected into them by preaching at them. You must impose and preach it in subtle ways, i.e. by your example, by co-operation with them, and by answering the swarm of questions which your sympathetic attention will germinate to those little heads. Note that questions represent a desire to learn; so that the replies will be eagerly absorbed.

The Legion Forms the Right Attitude

But once again I touch the vital spot. Whence is to be got that correct attitude towards the child? Many are the quarters that propose to teach it, for today is the age of Child Guidance. Books on the subject are many, and child clinics are springing up like mushrooms. No doubt much good is being thereby done. But most of these would-be teachers neglect the real thing, which is the soul, and lay the stress on the externals. Hence they will never produce that inner, genuine, intense reverence for the child, and the ardent striving after its complete expansion, which can only come from the conviction that we are dealing with divine and eternal things.

Here the Legion enters in to help. As simple in its ideas and structure as a pulley or a lever or other device for multiplying power, the Legion is able to make vivid the whole circle of Catholic doctrine and to turn it into motive-power for every Christian purpose. The purpose which here concerns

us is your children. They are in the Legion. The aim is to fashion them into what St Louis-Marie de Montfort calls 'a legion of valiant soldiers of Jesus and Mary, to combat the world, the flesh and corrupted nature in those more than ever perilous times which are to come'. But also there is an immediate outpouring of this power. It is into the present lives of your children. It fills school-time, play-time, home – every hour – with holy, practical idealism. In some cases that spirit is remodelling the homes, in which case it is a reversal of the natural order. What a fantastic thing it would be if the nobler side of home-building was thus left to the children! That must not be. It must proceed from all – especially from you, which brings us back to the purpose of this gathering, i.e. the mode of your co-operating with your legionary children.

It will be brief; a few sentences will serve. First, you must imbibe the legionary ideal. You can do this to some extent by studying the Legion handbook. Your child, I expect, possesses a copy. Read it carefully and get to understand the system in which your child is being shaped. Then interest yourself in the child's membership. Stimulate it.

But the best sort of stimulation is fellow-membership. Assuredly you should become an auxiliary member of the Legion. That common cause and outlook would be of immense help to your child. Then, if at all possible, go on to the perfect finish by taking up active membership. The usual objections will bob up in your minds: 'I am too busy,' or 'What good would I be?' Don't listen to those phrases, or at least to the second of them. Inferiority complex? Why should you not be as good as anybody else? The Legion has room and place for everybody; and if your children are good enough for the Legion, you may be certain that you are.

There may be more substance in that other objection about being too busy. We know how hard the mother of a family has to work, but perhaps you could spare an evening off? If you can, I would urge that you take on active membership.

If you thus take pains to understand the Legion and to co-operate with its idealism, I think that to you may be promised a wonderful home, one where the atmosphere will be conditioned by the legionary ideal of life, by the Mystical Body teaching of the relations of man with man in Christ, and by the fruitful Motherhood of Mary. In that home divine grace will rule and will be operative in strange and eminent ways – today, rich life and domestic happiness; tomorrow, when your children go out into the world, THAT MISSION.