

## 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 to 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, in 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 and additional potent principle of oneness between them.

What indeed may one suppose of such a union – quickened, 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**

They are hesitating at an intimidating 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 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?

### Unwise Waiting

Many will protest that they are only waiting until 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 and set your feet on the waters and walk. You must not hope for an unaided miracle.

Chorus of indignation: 'A reckless, 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, and 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 out 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 it and you will find that quite a different set of ideas from true vocational ideals govern 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 elevated 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 commonplace 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 goldmine 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 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, earthly; but winged for heaving, 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 to correct them? There is only the one way. It is to hold up to the eyes of the world a true model of 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 the 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 not you 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 today is alive and tomorrow 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" (Mt 6:24-33).

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 his tail) went 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 very many who have the capacity, and the dormant will, to make this venture in faith. Each pair who does 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 organisation 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.

## ‘Weigh the Thought that in Man’s Heart Doth Flow ...’

Edmund Spencer, *Faerie Queen*.

The most serious evil which can menace anyone in life is that of having the natural swamp the supernatural. This is not merely a danger; it is almost inescapable. With the dawn of reason itself, down comes the visible, the sensible – that is the natural – on our soul like a great deluge. It proves too much for most of the children of Adam.

But suppose we happily survive the fullness of that peril, what then? Having risen above the destroying tide of irreligious or non-religious thought, and being set on a course which aims for the Heavenly Ararat, does the soul then steer undeviatingly on?

Unfortunately, no! The spiritual voyage – like that of true love – runs neither straight nor smooth. Happily, we have been preserved from catastrophe. We have made the supernatural our guiding star. We are in a fair way of speed. Therefore, all should be well. But whatever queer freak inhabits these poor bodies of ours, we do not seem

to be able to do anything exactly right. Rebounding from one exaggeration, we race into the contrary one. Having averted our eyes from Scylla, we find ourselves in the deadly embrace of Charybdis. Like the pendulum, we swing from one extreme to the other, precisely as if the whole idea was to keep away from the centre point, the golden mean. But between ourselves and that pendulum there is this difference: thereby the pendulum accomplishes its purpose; thereby we tend to frustrate ours. That imp of extremism makes every circumstance of our lives its plaything, so that our progress is no straight line, but an eccentric zigzag. What is the opposite extreme to which we can swing when we have freed our souls from the grip of the purely natural and set up supernatural objectives?

### **Natural and Supernatural**

It is to neglect the natural. We proceed to act as if the only thing that matters is to have the Faith, to pray, to perform religious duties, to avoid sin. So far so good; for these are basic. But that foundation laid, then any sort of superstructure will satisfy. We need not give the thought, we do not bestow the pains, that the children of the world would give to their employments. We believe as if religion was not only an excuse but a justification for all such defects. As we make life’s journey, we are disposed to act as if the natural and the supernatural were two roads running side by side; say one a railway and the other the ordinary highway. If we are going by one, we mentally separate ourselves from the other road. Occasionally we may glance in boredom or in curiosity at it, but it has nothing to do with us.

Oh! But that is a lamentably wrong view to take of the soul’s journey through life. The natural and the



supernatural are not alternative routes where necessarily we have to depart from one when taking the other. On the contrary, they are two tracks, complementary to each other and essential to each other. A more exact image – in fact the true one – is the case of the body and the soul. These two are, so to speak, fused; each only acts by the other. Eliminate the one or the other, and ... !

### **Nature and Grace in Legion Work**

So with nature and grace. We must work supernaturally, but we have to work through nature, that is through our faculties, and themes through the people and circumstances around us. As you know rather to your cost, the Legion system has seized on that principle of the inter-dependence of nature and grace and based on it its insistence on perfection of method. It gives it somewhat of the wearisome treatment that the dog gives the bone. On every occasion you find it before you, until finally it begins to dawn on the most careless and gay recruit that there is something in it – which is just the idea that all the worrying and stressing had in view.

Running through the pages of the handbook is the theme – taken from the saints – that in all our legionary endeavours we are to depend on the supernatural as though there were no such thing as the natural; and then we are to rely on the natural – that is on our own efforts – as if there were no supernatural. Our scheme of life must take in both at the same time – not separately like the person we picture above who may travel today by rail and tomorrow by the parallel highway. No natural act has any value except it be livened by the supernatural; and no supernatural act can be performed by us other than through natural means. Therefore, both must be taken in,

and the quality of each must be screwed up to maximum pitch.

I really think that legionaries have well grasped that principle of inter-action. Generally, they try to clothe the supernatural spirit in a body of good methods and hard work, and I believe that somehow you have not struck too uneven a balance. Certainly you devote plenty of time at all your meetings, congresses and reunions to the perfecting of your instruments and methods of action. Indeed, I imagine that a voluntary organisation could not attempt much more in the direction that you are doing.

But besides our methods and techniques, there is another instrument of our action – one which we overlook. Yet it is the chief instrument, the one on which all the others depend. But because it is so intimate to us, part of our interior processes, we do not put it in the category of instrument at all. As a consequence, we do not give it the attention which we lavish on the external instruments though it is the operating agency of them all. I refer to the *mind*.

### The Place of the Mind

We take the mind for granted because it is part of ourselves. But were we to make the distinction in our intellectual processes and view the mind as being but the instrument of still higher powers, there would still exist the practical difficulty: what are we to do about it? Even those who study the mind know little enough about it and to the rest of us it is *terra incognita* – unknown, uncharted territory. We understand what happens directly as the result of the operations of our senses. But beyond that what idea have we as to what goes on inside the cranium? About the same

as the average person knows of what takes place inside a wireless set!

But if the mind *is* an instrument and therefore controllable, would it not be a gain, justly describable as immense, if we could form for ourselves some simple but expressive picture of its working? For understanding of the latter necessarily means potential control. It is something gained to learn how to alter the speed of an ordinary machine. Obviously, the slightest degree of additional insight into the functioning of the mind would place us in a better position for influencing the actions which follow on the mental operations. Most human acts are unruly. The conduct even of the nobly inclined falls distinctly short of their intentions. And take ourselves – the Legion. What tremendous good for souls there would be if we could only make ourselves more responsive cogs in our bold apostolic programme so that it be enabled to operate ‘according to plan!’

But here let me pause to reassure you as to my intentions. I am not attempting a disquisition on psychology; I am not capable of it. If that reason did not include all other reasons, a second one would be that the simpler I can be, the more effective I am likely to be. Main issues can be obscured by over-elaboration.

Neither is my aim to naturalise religion, but rather – in the approved Legion style – to try to supernaturalise the natural. I am going to suggest a few simple ideas for influencing the mind – of course with special regard to your own works and problems. Necessarily such influence will be limited, verily a case of the remote control that the scientific world talks so much of. For, as I have already said, the mental processes are both obscure and complex. An inscrutable ferment takes place in the mind in connection with the simplest thought.



Now, if we could advance but a single step towards the regulation of that ferment, then indeed that single step would be like one taken in those seven-league boots of which we used to read in childhood days.

### **Devising a Mental Compass**

For how often are our decisions wrong – or else feeble because they have so much admixture in them. Even when they are finally right, by what tortuous and torturing paths have they been reached – perils on the way and waste of time and energy all along! Oh! If we could only devise a sort of mental compass which would give us right direction amid those mental wastes and darkenesses, false lights and brainstorm!

A first step to such a device is to emphasise the mechanical character of what I am forced to call, for simplicity’s sake, the mind. For the mind does possess many of the qualities of a machine. And among machines, what sort of machine may it be likened to? A weighing machine, I suggest; better still, a weighing scales, for the imagery I am going to propose to you is that of two opposing scales with a pointer which turns to the side is the heavier.

Apply that image to the mind. According to the things that are piled into those competing scales by the senses, and subjected then to the process of reasoning, prejudice or passion, will the indicator register a result. For our purposes that indicator means action, because in the normal course action will follow from the decisions of the brain. According to the swing of that pointing needle do we act – either one way or the reverse way – or perhaps not at all if the needle points inconclusively to neutral, showing that the scales are evenly balanced.

## Weighing Motives

The bigger weights that go into the scales are our motives – good and bad. You know how in the detective stories they always probe for the motive when somebody is found done to death! Motives may be defined as the main principles of action. But they are far from being fixed ones. Still less predictable are the smaller weights, that is the less thought out motives, the emotions and fluid ideas of all kinds. These are at the very best only half controlled. Like the wind itself, they can swing about with such rapidity and impartiality as sometimes to give the impression of blowing from all directions at once. Based on all those shifting and uncertain factors, the mental processes are infinitely complicated. It is beyond the power of mortal man to sound its depths. But that impossibility does not prevent people from trying. The number of books which have been written to that end – if not as the sands of the sea – are at least many. But what have they really taught? Men are still struggling with the problem of thought. Yet after centuries of thinking how to think, is it not obvious that they were never doing it less scientifically; and that their judgements were never less reliable? They have cast aside the old Christian motives and standards of thought which once the whole civilised world accepted and which were really scientific inasmuch as they were consistent and implied law, reasoning, orderly building. For this fine code there has been substituted a mental jungle law, a nightmare conglomeration of regional, racial and personal whims which *cannot* be right and which *must* lead the opposite way to civilisation. But this is only futile digression. Let us get back to our weighing machine.

One scale goes down, as the net result of the weighing of the rival sets of thoughts, and a decision issues. But

has the right side prevailed? Full well we know that more often than not it is (from the ideal or higher point of view) the wrong side. Furthermore, if the balance is even, does it prove that one side is essentially as good as the other? No, it only signifies that items have been placed in the opposing scales which appeal equally to the mind, but which may be very far from having equal value. For instance, if on ordinary scales are opposed lumps of gold and of iron of equal weight, the scales will assure us that they are identical. If we leave the mind to itself it will err in much the same stupid fashion.

But you object: it is going too far to compare the crude movements of a balanced beam to the intellectual operations. Yet I do not recant. Indeed I go further. It is safer to accept that iron *v.* gold decision of the scales than to accept the uncensored judgements of the mind. For the emotional and sensual things weigh out of all proper proportion in the mental scales. They overwhelm the intellectual and spiritual considerations, so that according to the scale in which they rest, they tend to settle the issue. Often they dictate it beyond question of *yea* or *nay*, and commonly in favour of the lower things. Even if they are on the right, or ideal side, that constitutes only a happy accident.

But our destiny cannot be left the plaything of accident — not even of happy ones. Therefore let us see if we can bring some law and order into the mental jungle.

### **Law in The Mental Jungle**

I start with a few main points: *First*: The regulation of the mind can only be exercised indirectly. You cannot manage the mind just as you would turn the handle of a mangle, nor as you would guide a horse by his bridle. Control over



the mind is far less direct, for it has a peculiar independence of its own. It is not the same things as YOU. Procedure has to be by way of influencing it and not by driving it. That influence must take the shape of a sort of mobilising or planned handling of the motives. *Second:* That influence must be exerted inside the process of forming a judgement – and not subsequent to it in the mode of a higher court of appeal. For when the circumstances of a case have been weighed in the mind and a decision has been arrived at, it is often hard to intervene effectively. At that stage the mind is much in the category of the runaway horse or the avalanche. Therefore that stage must be anticipated.

Now, some cautions of what I may call a negative character. The emotional considerations must be controlled or neutralised to some extent. I do not say 'disregarded'. That would be the old game of rushing from one extreme to the opposite one. One's emotions often play a useful or necessary part. Therefore the aim must be to allow them to exert a proper influence and no more.

Another 'negative' consideration is the fact that whatever is concentrated on is magnified. The more one surveys it, the more impressive it becomes. Therefore, do not over dwell on the unpleasantness or the difficulty of a situation. If you do, that thought will dominate the scale, so that a worthy assessment is out of the question.

### **Think Positively**

For us legionaries who are usually trying to handle difficult works and nearly always an unpleasant one, it is a primary principle to think positively. We must be more concerned about the object to be attained than the obstacles in the way; and about the Cause to be served than the forces – exterior and interior – mustered against us. Big among

these latter will be our old opponent – fear. He is one of the elementals of life. He lurks in every situation. Sometimes he shows himself undisguised, where we are crudely and violently afraid. From that it shades off into more refined and less identifiable forms. Among these take particular note of human respect, super-sensitiveness about reputation, apprehension of failure, fake prudence and other shapes. All of these are fear with a veneer, and often the more dangerous because of that concealment. You know, for instance, the incalculable harm that has been wrought in the world by that word 'prudence,' which as ordinarily applied means that you are to attempt nothing except you are sure of success – a diabolical rule of action which would ban every voyage of discovery, every grand enterprise, every venturing, most of the noble strivings of life.

Also in the negative order, that is to be guarded against, are prejudices of one kind or another. These are so attuned to our poor human nature that they will bulk large in whatever scale they lie and sway it to an incorrect result. For what is prejudice but another word for a false estimate? If we are prejudiced in favour of a person, it means that we will take a falsely favourable view of him; and while that is a more charitable attitude than the reverse, it is no more accurate.

Side by side with the danger of incorrect decisions is one that may possibly be described as even worse. 'Irresolution,' an old saying has it, 'is the deadly original sin of the human mind.' At least, the ideas or weights of commoner metal made up our minds for us, sometimes for the best. We have to be careful lest where we diminish their influence on the scales, we lose the capacity to make up our minds at all; so that the balance is all a-tremble;

the mind a jumble; we vacillate helplessly between two courses.

It is not for the best if undue time is spent in making up our minds. Presumably it is even chances that the stake of indecision will end badly. Even if it ends well, there has been a costly waste of energy. Then when circumstances have forced a hesitating acceptance of one course, what is the power behind it? There is no power, because there is no conviction. Automatically the resulting action will be hesitant, colourless and weak.

### **Four Ideas for Positive Action**

Now for the positive elements in that mobilisation of motives. They are so simple that nothing could be more simple. They comprise just four ideas. The suggestion is that every time you find yourself in a position of fear, distaste or deadlock, you should give a few seconds' reflection (no question of a formal mediation!) to each item on that list of four. If you do, I would venture to assure you that almost on the system of the penny in the slot, the mind will yield up the right verdict and the strong action.

The items on the list are not exactly weights placed among the other weights (that is the motives and feelings) on one or the other scale of that weighting apparatus which we have been imagining. The list is rather an adjusting mechanism. When incorporated in the mental weighing operation, it has the property of reducing all those other incredibly diverse and numerous weights to their true value. The sterling ones are fully appreciated; the cheaper ones are given proper relation; the baser ones rejected.

This prospect is intriguing. It sounds like that wonderful thing: something for nothing. You are agog.



But perhaps I have keyed you up too much, so that there will be disappointment at the unpretending thing I have to show? One would have expected the Wise Men to be disillusioned when, after their long, miraculous journey they came to Bethlehem and there discovered such simplicity. But they were not disappointed; and it is the very same holy, vital simple things that they saw and were pleased with that I now place before you.

### God – Mary – Church – Legion

The first one is the thought of God. But it is not another case of running to extremes to propose that we should thus think specifically of God in the thick of a work which was started for him and is being done for him? Surely God is effectively present to us all the time? Present undoubtedly! But only too often as nothing more than one of the motives, one of the weights in the scale – truly the golden weight among the big brass or iron ones, pressing down no more heavily – perhaps less heavily – than the various worldly or even base ideas which form the dynamic part of the weighing. If in that weighing we leave God indistinct, general, secondary, is it not improperly hopeful to suppose that his cause will prevail among those clamant, peremptory impulses which turn the mind into a whirlpool by their contending?

We must give him, *as an idea*, no less status than we allow those other vivid ideas. So, in those difficult moments when you feel you are to drive ahead or when you do not know what you are to drive ahead at, take No. 1 on your list and think specifically of God in relation to your crisis. In a fashion which must be experienced to be appreciated, that chaos yields obedience, as if – to quote Milton – ‘confusion heard his voice and wild uproar stood

ruled, darkness fled, light shone and order from disorder sprung'.

The second item on the list is the thought of Our Blessed Lady. Her cause is the cause of God; nevertheless she constitutes an additional motive, especially for you legionaries, whose consecration to her is supposed to be the real article, stipulating a union of hearts and action.

To think of God rectifies the motives in one way. To think of her will rectify them in a supplementary and necessary way, God having made it so. Moreover, she vibrates a different set of mental strings. To introduce her into our thoughts rearranges them in the supernatural light, which – like the x-rays – shows things as shadow that looked solid, leaving the essentials to stand out in bold relief.

Then item No. 3. It is the idea of the Mystical Body: God made part of his creation: Our Lord in the souls of those around us – to be seen by us with the vision of faith and to be served in a way which will not profane that sublime idea. Truly a compelling thought in the face of the situation which looks so formidable and against which our instincts rise up in sheer revulsion!

The fourth item is the Legion itself. Placed deliberately in the scale, it will bring into effective action our soldiership of Christ. Soldiers we are; and everything for which that word in its best sense stands will stir in us. We must rise to the heights to which the Legion summons us. We must be faithful to the principles which it proposes to us. Among these do not decry the more natural ones. These are – as already insisted – part of a whole, the groundwork of the supernatural qualities. Recall those words of the Legion Promise:

'Which binds me to my comrades,  
And shapes us to an army,

And keeps our line as on we march with Mary.’

That binding to our leader and to our comrades has an expressive term to describe it – *esprit de corps*; that is loyalty to the regiment. We can mar what others have made. So let no act or thought of ours tend to lower the standards, dilute the quality, sap the spirit or break the discipline of the force.

Those are the items of the list; the little litany is quickly said. They represent, you see, certain primary spiritual principles which, applied to ideas, will reduce them to proper perspective. They all stand for the one thing – God; but none are thereby redundant. For each appeals to a different area of the intelligence. Each, like the facet of a diamond, looks in a different direction; reflects and responds to a different array of impressions. The light that each catches it absorbs; so that the precious stone glows and sparkles in its depths with all those varied gathered rays; but only to give them forth again compounded into its own characteristic glory. That radiance issuing from the stone is an image of the flow of perfect, balanced thought from the mind.

Thus far, I have not spoken of grace, but in terms of mere psychology – that is the reactions of the mind to the impact of ideas. But of course the ingredient of grace has not been absent. It has seized on those natural acts. In fact it needs them as a foothold, so to speak, for its own godlike movements. If it finds in them a firm foothold – that is a plenary human co-operation – it will elevate them to the highest supernatural plane and render them fit metal – as the above quoted Legion Promise prays:

‘To work Thy will, to operate Thy miracles of grace,  
Which will renew the face of the earth,  
And establish Thy reign, Most Holy Spirit, over all.’



## ‘With Vast Respect Does God Treat Us’

Book of Wisdom 12:18

‘St Francis honoured all men, that is, he not only loved but respected them all. What gave him his extraordinary power was this: that from the Pope to the beggar, from the Sultan of Syria in his pavilion to the ragged robbers crawling out of the wood, there was never a man who looked into those brown, burning eyes without being certain that Francis Bernardone was really interested in him, in his own inner individual life from the cradle to the grave; that he himself was being valued and taken seriously.’

G.K. Chesterton

Legionaries are told: ‘The source of influence is love.’ St Augustine’s intriguing saying is repeated to them: ‘Love and do what you will.’

Pious stuff? Exaggeration? No – true as Christianity is true, for those phrases express Christianity. But there is need for a little amplifying. Do not suppose that influential love to be the mere emotional discharge which is the theme of tale and talkie. The Christian faith is a matter of facts and fixed truths – not a set of opinions which vary with one's feelings. The love which is founded on that faith should have the same substance. It must be no creature of our thoughts – a sort of barometer indicating mental climate. It must be an active love, turning into force the things the Faith has taught us.

One of its subjects is to be our neighbour. We must love him for God's sake; because God has commanded.

We must love him even for our own sake; for if we fail therein, we do grievous hurt to our own soul.

We must also love our neighbour for his own sake. For our Faith tells us that he is a very wonderful person, worth more than the whole material universe; indeed an infinite type of being, made to the image and likeness of God; in fact that God is in him, so that what we do to him is done to God.

### **Love by Action**

Every Christian will admit that duty of love. That is a first, substantial step. But to acknowledge it merely in our hearts or in our speech does not suffice. To go thus far and no further will only earn a condemnation, and the hearing of dire words: '... sounding brass ... a tinkling cymbal ... profiting nothing ... depart from me ...'

So on from faith to charity, from theory to practice, from words to deeds, must all proceed. Wherefore, have we 'taken our places in the ranks of the Legion and ventured to promise a faithful service'. Various tasks are

placed before us and we set ourselves to perform them with thoroughness and out of the motive of love.

But even in its apostolic stage it is possible for one's love to be defective and one's motive flawed. It is more than possible in the non-apostolic members of the Church. It is almost inevitable in the rest of mankind. We may be producing something that looks like loving service of our neighbour, but which may be a hollow sham. It may be only a projection of ourselves. It is possible to be immersed in works of charity and yet to be ministering to ourselves alone. Such self-centred piety is a hideous thing.

It is possible to overflow with gentleness, tenderness and forgiveness towards others and yet to have only a subjective attitude towards those people – by which I mean that we ourselves are the centre of the circle and the whole performance revolves around us and is for our sole benefit. We manifest those qualities because we believe that they are proper to us and should *proceed from* us, not because they should proceed *to others*. The whole thing is an exercise of vanity; self cultivation and not Christian love.

Thus we make what amounts to an idol of ourselves. Virtually we are saying: 'I am kind, therefore I must show kindness. I am generous, so I must show generosity. I am patient; I am sweet; I am thoughtful; I am forgiving; I am just; I am merciful – and accordingly I must cause all that loveliness to shine forth from me over the world around me.'

Plainly that thing is not love, but only as gold plating on base metal.

### **Respect – Hallmark of Love**

Then how are we to judge as to the real gold? I give the answer in a single word – Respect. Respect is the first fruit of charity. Therefore its presence is the mark of the



genuineness of that thing called love. It defines love which otherwise is incapable of definition.

Respect can only proceed from the conviction that our neighbour is in himself a worthy object of our respect and hence that he must get it from us.

It must not depend on our just feeling that way - for in ten minutes' time perhaps we may feel differently - nor on that person's possession of certain qualities or assets. Tomorrow those qualities may not appeal to us and those assets may be gone.

In ways innumerable we deceive ourselves. Monsignor Benson somewhere warns us against that glow of benevolence which comes to us at a warm fire on a winter's evening after a good meal and a little wine. Likewise, the expectation of gratitude is a powerful but unspiritual incentive to do good to others.

Neither is an equivalent to respect. It may be nearer to fear.

Christian respect is none of these emotions, but a realisation of the supreme dignity of our neighbour as a soul in whom God is living. If that is really appreciated by us, the automatic response in us will be that delicacy of behaviour which I call respect.

Respect is the very kernel of our love, the living germ of our service of others. In that light God looks on it and for that reason insists on it. But even the crudest world prizes it uniquely. It is the 'healthful binding' in all human relationships. It is the ingredient which gives savour to all the amenities of life.

Among these latter, it is (as a writer says in another connection) 'like fire among the elements, or gold among the metals, or the carnation among the flowers, or the diamond among the precious stones'.

Perhaps you recoil from this as being too sweeping? Is respect any more precious than freedom and justice? And what of the lesser but still important items like generosity, tenderness, civility, good living conditions? Yes, signific

ant – all of them. But not sufficing the heart of man except, and to the degree, that they bear with them that vital element of respect between parties. Freedom itself, that jewel for which men die so gladly, freedom without the enjoyment of respect is a misnomer; for it is empty of the dignity which is the essence of true liberty. Such liberty is nearer to slavery; and so may all those other amenities, without respect, be found in slavery and be bestowed on slaves.

### **Christ in Our Neighbour**

You know full well – for all have had the painful experience – how some people can give you courtesy, fair dealing and all the outward seemings of Christian charity and yet leave it evident that they have no real respect for you. In such cases how do you instinctively react? You bristle like a dog. Those civilities only rile you – as if they were insults. Grateful? Attracted by the givers? Not at all! For they are considerate to you only as they would be kind to animals. It is their code, and they meticulously conform to it where it touches you. In much the same spirit they would oil and clean their cars. You are little more than those animals or the mechanisms that they own. You are only a device for serving them or through which they love and serve themselves. You are only the stage on which they are playing their effective role. You are the screen on to which they throw their imagined perfections, so that they appear substantial and real. You are the mirror into which they gaze and see what they want to see about

themselves. It is not *your* colour, warmth, beauty, life, that they see in you, but their own.

If people have that detached attitude in regard to you, nothing that they do for you will satisfy you. Their acts of service will only seem like offensive patronage to you. A cynic has said: 'One would need a godlike nature to receive a favour and yet love the giver.' What! Yes, therein is hidden a mighty truth. For most favours imply superiority – which men resent, however great the favour.

So, if I have not been vehement enough up to the present, let me now be stronger and say: You can be unkind and unjust to men; steal from them, oppose them, ill treat them in diverse ways; you may even make war on them. All that they can allow for and forgive. But stop short at that capital sin against your fellow man – that attitude of impersonal contempt. For it will stir up in him gall of a peculiar kind which will permanently poison his system against you.

Have I been depicting a monster? No, simply digging down a little into human nature and exposing the Old Adam who lurks there stinking with pride and self-sufficiency. He will absorb us if we play his game. So we must do the opposite. The opposite to being proud is to be respectful to all men.

But note two paramount considerations: (a) the acid test of respect is that it is to be manifested towards people at times when – humanly speaking – they do not deserve it; (b) the Legion handbook, when laying down the law on this subject, does not propose to us the sort of respect which equal offers to equal, but the respect of the inferior for the superior, of the servant for the Lord. Is this prescription rushing to extremes? No. For the ultimate



basis of Christian respect is the recognising of Christ in our neighbour.