

You And Yours

Practical Talks on Home Life. Part 4 - Mainly on Courtship

By Martin J. Scott, S.J.

Catholic Truth Society of Oregon No.fam025 (1922)

Talk 9. WOMEN AND DRESS.

The purpose of dress is twofold, to protect the body and to ornament it. Some women nowadays pervert the use of dress.

It is the nature of woman to be attractive. But her greatest attraction should be her modesty. Any woman can attract by a certain style of dress, or the lack of dress, but it is not the attraction that a Christian woman cares for.

A man whose love is worth having is repulsed by the woman of that kind, whose appeal is only to his lower nature. He may use her as a toy, but he will not love her. The very men who take every concession that a woman will make, respect her less the more she yields. They will amuse themselves with her, but they will not marry her, ordinarily.

God put the instinct of "attractiveness" in women in order to induce honest love and marriage. The way some women dress now induces only dishonorable love. In fact, it is wrong to call it love at all. It is just passion, sex passion, and implies no esteem, no honest purpose, no idea whatever of true affection.

In women, the instinct to be attractive is very strong. But whenever that instinct is gratified by a lack of self-respect, it acts as a boomerang. Any woman who attracts attention or admiration at the cost of modesty is committing moral suicide. She is doing harm to herself and others.

Do not think that I speak thus because I am a priest. It is not only religious people who lament the indecency of modern dress. Physicians, statesmen and moralists join in the condemnation of the present immodest fashions. They condemn them because of their positive harm.

Dr. Francois Victor Foveau de Courmelles, one of the best known French physicians in Europe, declares that some of the worst evils now confronting civilized nations may be laid at the door of the feminine craze for indecent dress. Among other things, he says: "Woman's clothing has reduced itself to the most simple expression by its scantiness. She is dressed in these days when she is undressed." What a dreadful indictment by a man of the world!

The unusual always attracts. If a woman concedes more than propriety allows, of course she will attract notice. She may even get a certain sort of admiration, the admiration that spells ruin.

Man has a twofold nature, animal and spiritual. An immodestly dressed woman may win the admiration of man's animal nature; but it is a brutal admiration, not only not worth having, but positively dangerous to both man and woman. A decent woman does not want the admiration that

comes from sacrificing her modesty. And a decent man does not want to associate with a woman who disregards modesty.

If a woman wins a man by any improper display of her person, she will regret it. Such a man will treat her in accordance with his brutal instincts. A marriage resulting from such admiration will be a matter of lust, and not love. Lust is cruel, and when it is too late, the woman will realize it.

If all this is so, you say, why is it that in society there is so much immodesty in dress? And I ask you, why is it that in society there are so many divorces and separations, and so many charges of cruelty and incompatibility and so many tragedies?

Unfortunate marriages are frequently the consequence of merely sensual attraction. Nothing fades so fast as the attraction founded on passion. That is one reason why there are so many regrettable marriages now. The scandalous dress of some women exposes them to lustful eyes, generates false love, and lays the foundation for lifelong misery.

It is because the Catholic Church seeks the true welfare of women that it insists so much on modesty in dress. The womanly qualities, which attract the true love of a man, are those not dependent on an unseemly display of the person. And if a woman does not win the true love of a man, she had better a thousand times remain single.

Extremes in dress not only submit woman to the wrong sort of admiration, but moreover, make her the means of the temptation and downfall of man. Women, as a rule, are not aware of the effect, which an improper display of their person has on men. Unfortunately, it is a fact that, although a man may be disgusted at the first sight of an improperly dressed woman, if he gazes at her he experiences emotions as sinful as they are alluring.

A woman, therefore, who dresses without Christian propriety becomes an instrument of Satan. She does his work. She helps to pull down man to an ignoble and sinful level. Good men have frequently remarked that the way women dress nowadays is a constant temptation even for virtuous men.

In Catholic times and countries, modesty in dress is characteristic of women. And that is so of true Catholics everywhere. The Catholic Church, realizing the vital necessity of safeguarding virtue, has always taken a firm stand against lascivious dress. But with the spread of irreligion among the nations, the voice of the Church has not been heeded outside her own children, with the result that fashion has gone mad. Paganism, with the added lure of modern devices, is rampant.

Dress is now frequently designed to excite sexual desire. Exposure goes as far as possible, within the law. Indeed, it has even gone beyond the law of civic decency, as we see by the crusades in many places against it. In some social sets, the indecency of dress is so extreme that if it were on the street, it would subject the offender to arrest. And the morals prevailing in these circles are quite in keeping with the indecent styles.

The pity of it is that Catholics are affected by all this. Modesty of style depends somewhat on the custom of time and place. The moderately short skirt, which shocked some years ago, is not noticed now. The Catholic young woman will know how to keep a few steps behind the pace set by extreme styles. Even non-Catholics expect the highest propriety in Catholic women. Certain styles are incompatible with modesty always and everywhere.

Fashion is set mostly by Society. By degrees, the manners and dress which prevail there tend to make their way among the middle and lower classes. Persons in society, from their early years, are so accustomed to certain conventionalities that they are not at all affected by what would greatly shock others. Moreover, in society, there is a marked restraint, the result of education and environment. Even so, the effect of immodest dress there is deplorable.

But when this same license of dress is transferred to the ordinary walks of life, the result to morals is most detrimental. And it becomes positively ruinous when it pervades certain ranks. When license of dress takes hold of factory girls, or clerks in stores, or office girls, it makes of them so many proximate occasions of sin to those with whom they associate.

I can understand how a flighty girl may indulge in such license of dress through vanity and ignorance of its sinful effects, but how a Christian mother will tolerate it in her daughter is incomprehensible. Mothers have had experience with the pitfalls of life. They know that with every precaution there is nevertheless constant danger for their daughters. Yet they allow those dear to them to risk their worldly happiness and their immortal souls for the sake of fashion.

Of course, I know that some mothers will say that they cannot help it. If they cannot, let them blame themselves. The first time that a girl attempts to wear a dress that improperly exposes her is the time to act.

I know a man who took the right kind of action, not only with his daughter, but also with his wife. He had arranged to take them to the opera on the girl's birthday. The mother, yielding to the girl's vanity, had allowed her to get a very extreme dress. It was worn the first time this night. When the father saw his daughter, he was shocked.

"Mary," he said to her, "tell your mother I wish to see her."

The mother came presently. He privately told her that their daughter's dress was unbecoming a Catholic girl.

"But, dear," she replied, "everybody is wearing that style."

"Everybody is not our daughter, mother dear," he answered. "We are responsible for her, not for everybody. I will not go out with her in that dress. You may go to the opera with her if you like. I have done my part."

The mother, for a moment, was dumbfounded.

Then the tears came to her eyes, and she said: "God bless you, John, you have expressed what was in my heart, but I did not have the courage to speak out."

That is it, the weakness of mothers. Men do not like to interfere in these matters. It is the mother's place. A girl will not be a bit more extreme than the mother allows. But you cannot permit your daughter all sorts of license while she is growing up, and then expect to control her when she is a young woman. No. You must begin from the beginning. Let your daughter see by your own dress and ideas what will be proper for her.

Of course, I know that many excuses will be given for indecency in dress. Some girls say that they cannot spare the time or money to have a dress made, but must buy it ready made, and they can only get what is in style. But many of the dresses that are objectionable, are not obtained at the stores, but are made to order.

Moreover, if the store style is extreme, it is because the demand for it is great. If Catholic girls insist on the proper style, it will be found on the counters. In most of our cities, the Catholic trade is worth having, and stores will supply that trade. But even if the stores are to blame, which I do not concede, a modest girl will know how to make a modest alteration.

Why should Catholics take up the fashions of those who are living merely for the life that is passing? Our forefathers suffered confiscation, imprisonment, exile and death for the Faith. Were they all fools? Millions of martyrs endured indescribable torture for the Faith. Were they wrong? Is what Christ says true, or not? "What does it profit to gain the whole world and lose your soul?" The life is more than the body, and the soul is more than life. Because there is a sort of Christianized paganism abroad, are we going to be swallowed up by it?

In the early days of Christianity, the followers of Christ had to take their stand. If they had not, there would have been no Christian civilization. And are not we going to take a stand to preserve what was established in their blood!

If our religion is worth anything, it is worth making sacrifices for. 'The kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and only the violent bear it away'. If we want to be followers of Christ here, we must do violence to our licentious tendencies. The Religion of Christ means restraint, a restraint on anything that tends to lead us astray. But it is a restraint for our true welfare.

A man crossing a precipice on a plank would not complain that a railing was a restraint. It restrains him, yes, but from instant destruction. So modesty restrains from immorality. Immorality leads to a hell on earth, as well as to hell hereafter. Any victim of impurity will admit that.

Indecent dress is a torch to inflame the passions of men, passions bad enough without adding fuel to the fire. And that is what young women do by their extremely lascivious dress. Some of them know it. Others do not.

Some parents find it hard to instruct their children on these matters. It is hard. It is hard for me to touch on this subject. But it is better for me to do it beneficially than to let them remain in ignorance or learn through harmful sources.

The way some girls dress, you would think that the object of life was just to amaze people. I am not setting myself against attractive dress, but against the improprieties of dress. A girl should dress well. A man is not likely to respect a girl who is carelessly or unbecomingly dressed.

Charm of person is one of God's gifts to women. That charm is not lost, but enhanced, by modest dress. Any charm of person shown at the expense of decent dressing detracts from women in the estimation of honorable men. And who will court the esteem of any but the honorable?

Attractiveness, which comes from good taste in dressing, is a desirable quality in a woman. Men admire very much a girl who shows individuality and character in her dress. A girl who dresses well is apt to do other things well. Fine taste in dress is one of the best gifts a woman can possess.

But when a girl, instead of winning admiration by exquisite taste in dress, does so by vulgar display of her person, she shows not only her vulgarity, but also her incapability of dressing intelligently and decorously. A girl of brains and taste does not have to depend upon impropriety to make herself charming.

I might go into details, but there is no need of it. All know what I mean. There is an instinct, which tells one when one oversteps. I have known women who pretended that their extreme style was

perfectly proper, but on the approach of a really proper person, they hastily covered themselves with a shawl or wrap. When I say proper persons, I do not mean prudes or so-called church people. I mean men and women of the world who realize that woman is too sacred to become a mere object of lustful admiration.

It requires no talent or art to be licentious. It is no credit to anyone. If a young woman wants to be attractive, let her do it in a way that implies the possession of good qualities. Her manners, her mental equipment, afford fine means for displaying her charms.

Such charms are distinctive. Immodest charms are vulgar. They are the property of any woman who cares little enough about herself to show them. A young woman, I am sure, desires to be distinctive, "to be somebody". She can be that, and at the same time be a good Catholic woman, without in any way aping the fashion of false and fatal fads. Fashions, which are now quite accepted in some social sets, were, a few years ago, the stock in trade of the 'demimonde'. Is that not enough to show the significance of such styles? Does that not show their inherent purpose?

When we consider the seriousness of life, and it is serious even for the butterflies of fashion, as they learn too late, it is amazing how we multiply misery for ourselves. Even when a good man or woman is on guard and takes every precaution, it is not easy to continue virtuous. Why then make it harder for oneself and for others by playing into the hands of Satan?

By all means, let us cultivate the niceties of life. Let us endeavor to be exquisite in dress, charming in manners and person. But above all, we should remember that life is only the path to eternity. For the sake of a few flowers by the wayside, we should not wander from the way that leads to the blessedness of life eternal.

Sin comes too high, it costs too much. It asks us to give up everlasting life for the pleasures of a moment. It would have us exchange the inheritance, which the Son of God came on earth to give us, for the deceptive promises held out by Satan. Even in this life, the wages' of sin is death. And hereafter!

Talk 10. WOMEN AND ORNAMENTATION.

I know I am now on dangerous ground. I can only hope that my readers will hold their feelings in check until they have finished this chapter. Then they will see that I am their friend.

An Irish girl, who had returned to the Old Country from America some years ago, opened the eyes of her former companions by her dress and looks. What most astonished them was her ability to have cheeks and hair of far finer hue than graced her before crossing the ocean. Gradually the secret leaked out.

At first, everybody was shocked. But one or two girls got the idea that it was not so bad after all. If they could wear fancy gloves to bedeck their hands, why could they not bleach their hair or color their cheeks to improve their looks?

The necessity of dealing with the subject of this chapter may appear from the following regulation issued by the office of the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad to its several hundred clerks and stenographers: "Skirts shall be a modest length — the interpretation of the term modest to be at the discretion of the head of the woman's welfare bureau. No more rouge whatsoever, and powder to be used only in moderation." One or two tried it, but their mothers made short work of their logic.

However, a certain girl who was altogether unattractive, if not positively homely, had a strong desire to try the new art of ornamentation. She had a scruple about its being sinful. Like a good girl in doubt, she asked her confessor if it was sinful 'to paint'. The priest had no notion of any kind of painting going on in his parish except house painting, and so he said:

"What's that, Mary, I did not understand you."

Hesitatingly, she repeated: "Is it sinful to paint, Father?"

"Why, no, my child," he replied. "Sure, your father and brother have been painters these many years."

"I don't mean that kind of painting," she said.

"Well, what kind do you mean, Mary?"

"I mean painting yourself, Father."

The priest reflected a moment, and then said slyly, with a look, which indicated that he realized that she was very homely: "If you believe your inner person, Mary, is not something beautiful, then, let me say this. It is not a sin for you to paint, Mary."

That was enough for Mary. She never gave 'painting' another thought.

'Painting' is an admission of its need. We do not paint oak. Cheap wood may require painting. Fine wood only requires polishing. Be as clean as you like. But do not 'paint'. Before you "tut-tut," and say that I am talking of something I know nothing about, hear me out, please.

I know all the reasons that women give to justify 'painting'. The best reason I have heard is that of a married woman, who must go out with her husband when she is fatigued and wants to appear presentable for his sake. Well, Mrs. Married Woman, ask your husband, since it is for his sake you do it, if he wants you to 'paint' for his sake. That is my reply to such persons. Since when has it become a discredit to be weary, or less than perfect in health?

Others justify 'painting' by the requirements of dress. They say that, to wear the prevailing styles, which are all fashioned for those not on in years, it is necessary to be youthful. Girlish dress and faded or wrinkled cheeks do not match. But since when has it become necessary for a matron to be dressed as a maiden? Or for an elderly woman to be garbed as a school-girl?

"Nonsense, nonsense," I hear you say, "Stick to your own affairs, and let the women manage theirs." Well, let us see. You will admit that this is very much an affair of mine, when I tell you that I have seen more homes wrecked by false impressions created by artificial appearances, than by almost any other single cause.

Let me exemplify. Take a young woman whose beauty plays an important part in winning a man's regard. Even if that beauty is genuine, it is a poor basis for married happiness. But suppose that her beauty is artificial. Suppose that when she becomes his wife, she appears plain and ordinary without her veneer! Her husband has been tricked by camouflage! He has gotten a counterfeit! He married her for her looks; his so called love is changed into disgust, and then trouble begins.

If you buy and pay for an oak table, and find that it is only painted pine, you will be incensed. You will send back the table and claim your money. A Catholic man cannot send back his painted wife!

We hear a lot about incompatibility nowadays, and cruelty, and neglect. In many cases, the wife has brought it on herself by her pre-marriage deceptions.

I beg a young woman who is contemplating marriage to avoid even the slightest deception. Either she is naturally attractive to the young man, or she is not. If she is, she does not need deceptive aids. If she is not, she is like a merchant disposing of goods under false pretences. I beg of her not to create a mistaken notion in the man who will be intimately associated with her all her life.

Now it is evident why it is my business to touch on this matter. Peace and welfare here are concerned, and too often, eternal welfare also. For pre-marriage deception may be the cause of sinful accusations and quarrels, and not infrequently of life-long estrangements.

Whatever a man's response to a painted face may be, deep in his heart he has an aversion to it. The girl who 'paints' loses some of his respect. I have heard men talk on this matter. Moreover, since a man knows that 'painting' is generally an indication that a woman is older than she cares to admit, he wonders whether she is concealing not only years but defects. A 'painted' face makes a man suspicious.

So much in regard to the effect of the 'painted' woman on men, when they know from other sources that she is a good woman. If they do not know her very well, they may easily put her in the class with those who use 'paint' as an aid to their vile profession.

Sometimes you will hear girls justify 'painting' by saying that people in society do it. Believe me, young women, the ladies of real society do not do it. I have had opportunity of observing women at social functions in circles of culture, and the women who 'painted' were the exceptions. That some society women dress immodestly, and 'paint' and bleach, does not mean that true society sanctions it. Moreover, since when has the code of society replaced the code of Christianity?

Women may say that they 'paint' in order to be pleasing to men. A poor compliment to men. Moreover, the way some women 'paint' is a sin against art. It is as if a house-painter attempted a portrait. But, it may be said, should not a woman aim at being beautiful for the sake of the aesthetic demands of social affairs? A woman may use every legitimate means of dress and ornamentation to set off her beauty, but she should not parade under false colors. The lily may be placed in an artistic setting, but a painted lily!

'Painting' is vulgar at its best. It is an admission of fading charms even when it is done artistically, and when not so done it is disgusting. I know that many girls do not look upon it in this way. Their opinions are taken from the crowd.

In the long run, 'painting' defeats the very purpose it has in view. 'Painted' beauties become old before their time. We cannot trifle with nature with impunity. And oh, the tragedy of a girl caught off guard, without the chance of getting at her 'paint pot'!

Besides, some girls owe their ruin to 'paint'. Men are apt to be bold with painted beauties. A 'painted' girl is more or less an invitation to license, to men who meet her casually. I heard a woman complain to a policeman that a man was staring her out of countenance. He looked at her for a moment, and said: "Madam, you invite it." And she did, by her 'painted' face and her abbreviated dress.

In dealing with this matter so far, I have spoken on grounds of good taste and welfare. A word now to young women as Catholics.

Of all women whose appearance should conform to the most proper standards, Catholics should be conspicuous. Let those who have no religion, or very little, use the arts that deceive and mislead, and very often tempt to sin. But a Catholic woman should keep aloof from any such artifices.

Sometimes you will hear Catholic girls or mothers say that they have got to dress in the fashion and follow the lead of society people or give up social aspirations. Let me narrate an experience of my own.

I was asked to go on a sick call to a fashionable hotel some fifteen miles from a railway station. When I had administered the last Sacraments, and performed my duties, it was early evening, and my host, the father of the sick man, informed me that the next train would not start for five hours.

Accordingly, I dined with him at the hotel. He was a Catholic gentleman, with whom I had frequently discussed vital matters of religion. That very day on our way from the station, we had talked of the free ways into which some of our Catholic women were drifting. He agreed with me that the tendency was a decided shame.

At dinner with him, I was shocked more than once by the style of dress and the painted faces of women who entered the dining-room. I mentioned my observations to my host and said, "Isn't it too bad that you people in society set such an example of impropriety?"

To my astonishment, he replied: "Father, believe me, not one of these women painted and dressed so unbecomingly, belong to society. We have an outside element here tonight, from a neighboring town, because we have an open dance." He proceeded to inform me that the guests of the hotel were nearly all people in society — strictly so-called. By observing from whom the waiters collected the bill for dinner, one could tell who were the guests, and who were the visitors from the neighboring towns for the dance of the evening. I found that in every case but two, the painted and objectionably dressed women were at tables where the bill was paid.

"You see, Father, that the society people here are not the offenders. Real society people, for the sake of good form, are just as careful of propriety as the strictest Catholics. By that, I do not mean that society has not its sins, as has the rest of the world, but anything that is against what we call good form is more shocking to us than to anyone else."

I suggested that perhaps the standard of good form was at fault. To this he remarked that there were fools in society as elsewhere, and that unfortunately they and their doings sometime gave a wrong notion of society to those not of it.

If a society lady paints or dresses lasciviously, society itself very often gets the censure which belongs to an individual, and for something which society condemns as much as anybody else.

I told my host that I was extremely interested in his observations, because I knew so many Catholics who were society people and who were also among the best Catholics of my acquaintance.

He answered sadly, "Yes, Father, but let me say also, that some of the worst offenders in the matters we speak of are certain Catholics who think that they are conforming to society by aping its most discreditable representatives."

I quite understood, and said that I too had observed how social climbers copy the vices rather than the virtues of the set that they were trying to enter. My host replied by calling my attention to two guests who were among the offenders. "They are, I am sorry to say, breaking into society; they are Catholics and I am not alone in being ashamed of them."

People who ape others are apt to go to extremes. Afterwards, I saw other things which went to prove that the best way to get on socially is to be true to good form, and that the best of good form is the Catholic standard. I could go into detail in regard to this statement, but I prefer not to. Suffice it to say, that the best thing in life is to be always at your best, but your genuine best.

A wise merchant displays his goods to advantage, but he does not sell cotton for wool. A woman who paints is passing herself off for what she is not. If we get counterfeit money, we are angry on discovering the fraud. If a man gets a counterfeit beauty, will he not be angered and disgusted when he realizes the deception?

The girl who ‘paints’ to win her future husband, cannot keep herself ‘painted’ always. If a woman wants to win a man for a few hours only, ‘paint’ may be of service to her. But for an honest and honorable woman to ‘paint’ is, apart from religion, bad policy.

Either a woman is badly in need of ‘painting’ or she is not. If she does not need it, let her avoid it. And young people generally do not need artificial color. If women need to ‘paint’, it is a sign that their health is bad or that accumulating years are treating them harshly. In either case, the best ‘paint’ is exercise and moderation.

For ‘paint’ really deceives no one. Age can be judged by other things than looks, and a woman who looks younger than she is, invites close inspection. Thus, the signs of age are discerned beneath their covering of cosmetics. ‘Paint’ always makes men suspect the worst and leads them to consider the woman much older or more invalided or homelier than she really is.

Catholics, thank God, have for the most part set a splendid example of propriety. So much so is this the case, that people now expect only the best from Catholics. In fact, they are shocked if they see Catholics conforming to some of the vulgar ways, which are prevalent. That in itself is a great compliment.

Catholic women should remember that they represent their Religion. People will form their estimate of the Catholic Church not by its teaching, which they do not know, but from Catholics whom they know and see. Deep down in their hearts, people will respect and envy those who take a stand, which they themselves admire but are often too weak to uphold.

Besides, and above all, proper Catholic women know that they are doing what God wants. With them, His approval is everything. For in the end it is His approval alone which will matter.

Talk 11. YOUNG MEN AND COURTSHIP.

One of the most important periods of a man's life is that which precedes marriage. Marriage is a contract, which almost every man makes sooner or later. It is the biggest contract of life. It binds to more than any other contract we can sign. Christian marriage is a bond, which only the Creator can undo. A good marriage is the greatest blessing a man can enjoy. A bad marriage is the most dreadful calamity, humanly speaking, that can befall a man.

Business men, before they sign a contract of importance, reflect a good deal on the Issue. Yet a business contract may turn out badly without destroying a man's happiness. He may try again. He can start anew even if the contract has ruined him. But marriage is for better or worse until God parts man and wife by death.

Therefore, the young man who is keeping company is at the most consequential period of his life. The result of his courtship may make him a happy husband and father, or a miserable and disheartened partner for life. The girl has it in her power to make him happy or wretched for life.

There is no middle road in matrimony. A wife is to her husband either a solace or a sorrow. His children will be, to a great extent, what his wife makes them. A good marriage means more to a man than a fortune. A bad marriage is little short of a catastrophe. On no one thing of life does so much depend as on marriage.

This means that a young man's most important decision is made when he says, "This is the girl I am going to marry." For she is going to make his marriage a boon or a bane. All depends on whether or not she is the right girl for him. A girl who would make one man's life agreeable might make another's wretched. The thing each man must be sure of, as far as possible, is whether he has chosen exactly the girl for his happiness.

Marriage is a lottery, it is said. That is because so many young men make it a lottery. They marry a pretty face rather than a girl of suitable disposition. A pretty face is all very well, but frequently it is misleading. There are certain persons who are satisfied with what is superficial. Some people buy a book for its cover. A pretty face is not to be scorned but it is not enough.

Is the girl with the pretty face also a girl with sensible ways? Is she the right girl for you? If not, she will be your undoing. Is her character suitable to yours? And how are you going to know? Ah, there's the rub! If a man could only know!

However, just because it is so uncertain, a man should take all the measures possible to know what he is doing. That is the object of courtship. But if he turns courtship into "spooning", everything conspires to make him marry the wrong girl. If he employs the opportunities of courtship as an occasion of dissipation, of course he will regret it later.

Many of the unhappy marriages nowadays, and there are not a few, are made so because the young man is out for a good time during courtship rather than to consult his future welfare. A good time, certainly, is not taboo — courtship is an oasis, one of the few in the desert of life. But why forget the journey ahead, in the short rest and refreshment possible on that tiny spot? A man and a maid can have a very good time during courtship without losing sight of its main object, and without doing anything that will make them repent afterwards.

For a Christian man will regret it if, in any way, he treats the girl who is to be his wife and the mother of his children with less respect and propriety than he would manifest toward sister or mother. The girl who is the right girl for a young man will inspire him with reverence for her. Unless she makes him feel that he is in the presence of something almost sacred when in her company, he does not truly love her, no matter what attraction she may have for him.

Certain qualities in women attract every man. But love is more than attraction, — it is reverence as well. It is something, which makes a man feel that the girl he is courting is a God-given treasure that will ennoble and enrich his life. The girl a man marries should be an inspiration to him for higher and for better things. Courtship, if conducted in the Catholic way, which is God's way, will show a man, ordinarily, whether or not the girl he hopes to marry is suitable for him.

What a dreadful mistake, therefore, some young men make when they rush into marriage because they are taken by a soft voice or a winsome face! What a misuse of courtship those make who measure its success by the extent of the liberties they can win from a maid! Mark it well, young

men, the girl who is free and easy with you during courtship, may not be more honorable as a wife than she was as a maiden. The maiden without modesty may be the wife without love.

Love is so sacred, so sublime, that it is cultivated only in modest courtship. Its fruition is in marriage only. Any word or gesture that a man would resent if used toward his mother or sister should be banished from courtship. Your fiancée is not your wife. The purpose of courtship is not the enjoyment of any, even the slightest, tokens of wifely affection, but to discover whether the girl of your choice is suited to be your life's companion.

For she will be your closest companion all the days of your life, closer to you than father or mother, without displacing father or mother in your affection. She is destined to be your helpmate, a help meet for you. Your sorrows, and you will have them, will be hers, your joys also. If she is the right girl for you, she will enable you to face any difficulty and to bear any reverse. She will be your inspiration. It will be a pleasure for you to work for her and your home. No matter how good or great a man may be, he is better and greater if the girl he marries is the right girl for him. On the other hand, if she is not, she becomes a dead weight on her husband's aspirations and achievements.

Am I not right, then, young men, in saying that the time before marriage is the most important period of life?

In important matters, wise people consult wiser heads. No matter how well educated you may be, even if you have had advantages greater than your parents, it will do you no harm to consult with them about your marriage. I realize that young men at present consider themselves well able to take care of themselves. But it is only necessary to look about you to find that in many cases they have made sad work of their boasted self-sufficiency.

A young man owes it as a matter of obedience and love, to consult with his parents on such an important step as marriage. If his own boy later on should fail to show him the respect of advising with him on such an important matter, he would feel it keenly. The man who expects God's blessing on his married life, must do his part to deserve it, and He commands us all to honor father and mother. Some young men forget that there is such a commandment. They only recall it when they have children of their own.

Love can be a mild form of insanity. Oftentimes I have heard men say that they must have been crazy to marry such a girl. Perhaps they were. When young people are enamored of each other, they are in a trance, delightful, maybe, but there must be an awakening. And then they say love is blind. At least, it is not always clear-sighted. That is why consultation and advice will do the young lover no harm.

I know that some who read this, will be ready to grant that it is true generally, but they will say that it does not apply to them. That is why I wish to convince you that it does apply to you, to you more than to anyone else. The blindest in love are those who think they see best.

I knew a man of great business acumen, whose common sense was remarkable. He had often given sound advice to others and was held in esteem for his good counsel. He frequently boasted that he would never be fooled by a girl, that when he married he would know what he was doing. Hearing him speak in this strain, I cautioned him: "You are the very kind of man that gets a bad bargain, when your business is with a woman's heart." But he was sure of his own prudence. Well, he got married, and his wife turned out to be a vixen. She led him a furious dance, and before long, the

poor man seemed to have lost all Interest in life. Three years after his marriage, he said to me: "Father, no man is so big a fool as the wise fool!"

I do not mean to be hard on the girls. A girl is just as apt to be deceived as the man. In my talk to young women, I shall tell them how much depends on their accepting the right kind of man. Both man and woman are entering upon a very serious and uncertain venture. Again I say, "Go slow; seek counsel; consider not only a girl's face, but her disposition." Nothing that attracts the love of a man loses its hold so quickly as a pretty face. The strong bond of love is disposition. That does not wear out. Looks, especially the artificial looks of the modern girl, fade, but a good disposition lasts and improves with association.

In every walk of life, there are men who know everything, apparently. Usually they come to grief. Successful men are successful because they have profited by the wisdom and experience of others. Having shared for years the confidences of men and women seeking help in marriage problems, and having employed sincere effort in helping those unfortunate in marriage, I may truly say that courtship is the period in a man's life when he can least afford to be unmindful of the future.

We hear a good deal nowadays about incompatibility. A young man and woman stand before the priest to be married; he thinks that she is the most wonderful woman in the world, and she considers him the finest man that ever lived. If the priest should say to either that something might one day estrange them, they would not believe it possible.

And yet how often these two, after a few years, sometimes after a few months, barely tolerate each other! It hardly seems possible. During courtship, they seemed angels to each other. After marriage and its close association, they appear as ordinary mortals. During courtship, each saw the other under only the most favorable conditions. Instead of employing that period to get acquainted, it was used for amusement, regardless of what the outcome might be.

If a man uses all his power and resources to please a girl, of course she seems angelic. Later on, when he pays her just ordinary attention, her true disposition appears. In courtship, therefore, try to be what you expect to be all your life. In a word, be just yourself. Then she will be herself, and there will be less likelihood of mutual disappointment.

In this advice to a young man, about choosing wisely, I do not imply that the girl is not lovable and desirable. A girl who would make an ideal wife for one man might make marriage a veritable plague for another. Unless there is mutual adaptability, a young man may as well say farewell to happiness if he marries.

In speaking thus to a young man, I am not taking it for granted that he is perfect. What I say to him I say to both: that they should make sure that they are suited to be life-long companions, in the most intimate companionship known to mankind.

Since religion plays such an important part in the life of a good girl, it is ordinarily a mistake for a Catholic to marry a non-Catholic. With good people, religion is a serious matter. A good girl who is a non-Catholic will thus be at variance with her husband in a matter, which plays a big part in life.

If it should happen that the wife's religion is not a serious matter, another great difficulty arises. Children will be under the influence of a mother to whom religion means little or nothing. In spite of all their father may do, the chances are that they will grow up indifferent Catholics, or lose the Faith entirely.

The religion of a non-Catholic wife either means a good deal to her, or it does not. If it does, there is created by that very fact a serious difference between husband and wife. If it does not, the Catholic husband is consigning his children to irreligious influence. Children will not make religion a serious matter ordinarily, if their mother does not. A mixed marriage is a great responsibility for any young man.

As a matter of fact, difference of religion does ordinarily cause more or less estrangement between man and wife, introducing an element of discord. It does not show itself in courtship, when both are so wonderfully absorbed in each other that other things are in the background. But when everyday life begins, differences in religion assert themselves.

A young man should not wait until he is deeply in love with a girl before knowing what her religion is. It may be too late then. Before he begins to court her, he should find out her faith. Even with similarity of religious belief, there are apt to be many differences between man and wife. If difference of faith is added, other differences will be multiplied in number and intensity.

If you are willing to take the advice of one who knows intimately the conditions, which ordinarily prevail in mixed marriages, you will hesitate seriously before marrying a non-Catholic. Even with the help of religion, marriage will have its hardships and misunderstandings. A young man needs only to look at his own family to verify this. He knows what has happened in its circle. Of course, he fancies that his own married life will be different. His father and mother had the same conviction; otherwise, they would not have married. But all of us must expect our share of tribulation in life, as a reminder that our heaven is not here.

However, do not mistake me. I do not wish to discourage marriage, but rather, to help introduce into it the maximum of happiness. If marriage has its uncertainties and sorrows, so has single life. A good marriage is the greatest good fortune a man can experience in life. A young man should pray frequently during courtship for God's guidance. He prays for success in other things. Nothing compares in importance with marriage. His happiness here, and perhaps hereafter, is intimately associated with it.

In conclusion, therefore, let me sum up. Courtship is to be regarded not as a diversion, but as the most serious period of life. During courtship, a man should reverence the girl he hopes to make his wife. A good woman values modesty above everything else, and a good young man will not want a wife who does not put virtue above everything.

Courtship does not entitle a man to any more liberties with a girl than are customary in the family circle. Lust is not love. Sexual familiarity of any kind is just as much a sin in courtship as it is out of it.

Even betrothal does not entitle a man to liberties. God has implanted certain sexual instincts in man and woman for the purpose of drawing them together in marriage, but before marriage, any deliberate indulgence of a passionate character is a sin. This applies to the woman as well as to the man.

A loose code of morals prevails among many people who are irreligious and worldly, and the consequences are most dreadful. But I am addressing Catholics, who realize that passion must be controlled by the law of God. If a man's feeling for the girl he intends to marry is of such nature and strength that he cannot restrain it within proper bounds, it is to be feared that he is swayed by lust rather than by love.

I am speaking plainly, because with some people courtship has degenerated into license. And courtship so carried on, breeds nothing but misery, besides being sinful. Marriages that result from that sort of courtship will not be happy, ordinarily. They do not merit God's blessing on them.

Again, I say that modesty is the guardian of purity, and purity is the basis of Christian marriage. Everything is undue in courtship that is undue out of it. A sweetheart who invites familiarities, is not the girl for a good young man. Moreover, the sweetheart who is subjected to undue familiarities will suffer inexpressible anguish if she is virtuous. True love will never humiliate or embarrass. Because a girl is weak or over-anxious to please a man, he should not take advantage of it. Let him conduct himself as a man of Christian honor. In that way, true love will increase between him and his betrothed; this is the only love that will ennoble both and make them worthy of each other.

When a young man goes a-courtting, therefore, he should realize that the girl whom he addresses will be his companion of soul as well as of body and mind, for life if he marries her. He should employ this momentous time to find out if their dispositions will make for agreeable association through all the years during which they may be man and wife. And, above all, he should be mindful of Catholic modesty, the guardian of purity and the guarantee of true love. A courtship conducted thus may reasonably be expected to confer on man and woman that greatest of life's blessings, a happy marriage.

Talk 12. YOUNG WOMEN AND COURTSHIP.

Marriage means a good deal to a man, but more to a woman. When a marriage turns out badly, the man has any number of diversions and business interests to occupy his time and thought. The woman, whose duty is mainly in the domestic circle, has little opportunity of distraction, as our ethical code permits her almost no social life independent of her husband. It is safe to say that for determining her natural happiness, and comfort, marriage is the most important step in a woman's life. The most important person in her world is the man she marries; he is part of her life — and a very considerable part.

Suppose you could choose your own father or mother! How careful you would be to select the best possible. A husband is more in a girl's life than father or mother have been. Yet some girls accept a man's attentions without knowing anything more about him than he shows when on exhibition.

Every man courting a girl is on exhibition. He is at his best. If she accepts him at face value, basing her estimate on appearances only, she will believe that he is one of the finest men that ever lived. It is easy for a man to be nice to a girl when he is attracted by her. He can hardly help it.

Some men are angels in love and brutes in marriage. After the spell of love-making is over, the man returns to normal. It is his normal self that will eventually be in the home. Common sense therefore tells the girl to try to know what kind of normal man he is who courts her. For the sake of a little vanity or brief enjoyment, she should not give herself to a man whom she does not know thoroughly.

Why are there so many unsatisfactory marriages nowadays? The man does not know the girl and the girl does not know the man. They think they do. But it is harder to know a man or woman than to know anything else. Yet young people often fancy that they know each other after a very short association.

They forget that there is more camouflage in courtship than in anything else, except war. Indeed, we may leave out war, and put marriage first. A man presents his best, and only his best, to the girl he

courts. Of course, that is right, — for him. But the girl should realize that he will not always be at his best, and that she must discount a good deal if she wants to know what he is normally.

How often have I heard married women say: "Oh, if I had only known him, I never would have married him!" Perhaps he says the same of her. At all events, it brings home the point I wish to make. A young woman should study the man who offers her attentions, more carefully than any other matter in life.

And yet, see how many fine girls rush to the first plausible man who holds out a hand to them! It happens, too, that a girl, after she has found that the man is undesirable, will sometimes continue to accept his attentions. She fears talk.

What will people say? Her vanity or pride or weakness makes her give her hand, if not her heart, in marriage. And then she wonders that her married life is a nightmare.

The beginning of courtship should be so slow and reserved that the girl may withdraw at any time without attracting comment. Before accepting constant attention from a man, she should observe him seriously and thus be in a position to prevent the full development of a courtship, which cannot ripen into a happy marriage. A girl should not accept the marked admiration and favors of a man until she knows him well enough and favorably enough to accept his proposal.

In Catholic countries where a marriage is always a careful procedure, unhappy unions are the exception. Here nobody knows anybody any too well, and there is so much mingling of the sexes, and so little of home life and neighborly acquaintance, that the whole problem is different and difficult. A girl frequently permits a chance meeting to develop into courtship. What is the result? Too often a broken life.

A man should not be taken at his face value. Let him visit the girl in her home, and let her see him at his home, before she allows him to go out with her regularly. And when she finds him repeating his attentions, let her ask the opinion of her parents about him, and better still, find out, if she can, the real opinion of his own parents about him.

I know that some girls consider themselves the sole and capable judges in such matters. Very well. They will not be the first to find out, too late, that two heads are better than one. If the young fellow is suitable, a girl's father and mother will be more glad to say so than she will be to hear it. That is certain. And if he is not suitable, it will be as hard for them to say it, as for her to hear it. It can be taken for granted that a girl's parents love her and want her to be happy. But they love her sensibly. A girl in love loves foolishly, too often. She closes her eyes to the future to indulge a pleasant prospect for the moment. There are few regrettable marriages where girls are guided by their parents.

The first direction I give, therefore, to a girl contemplating marriage is to go slowly and carefully. If a man really loves her, he will love her all the more for her reserve.

This leads me to the second point. It may sound contradictory, but it is nevertheless a fact that men, or at least many men, will take all the liberties a girl will allow and yet the more she allows, the less they will think of her. Is that not strange? A man never loves a girl so much as when she keeps him at a proper distance and makes him respect and reverence her.

Moreover, the willingness to take liberties with a girl, and true love for her, rarely go together. The man may think he loves her, but it is his animal nature that asserts itself. A man who, out of regard

for the woman who is to be his wife, does not master his passions and respect her modesty, will not respect her as his wife and the mother of his children. It is common to hear men say that they would never marry a girl who would allow familiarities.

A man can recognize a girl's love for him without her relinquishing anything of maidenly propriety. On his very first attempt at being unmindful of her womanly dignity, she should put her foot down hard. If she does not, he may take it as an indication that she wants him to go further. Then the barrier of decency and reserve is down, calamity follows, and eventually sin, which is worst of all. A man loves a woman in proportion as she shows maidenly reserve. If he does not respect her modesty, she may know that he will not make her a true husband.

Now I come to the third point, which will make many scowl, I fear. And yet more depends on it, almost, than on any other one thing. In courtship, of course, the girl will appear at her best. But she should not pretend to be what she is not. Deception during courtship is accountable for more unhappy marriages than anyone could believe.

Some girl's do not care for consequences. They are satisfied to make an impression, regardless of whether or not it is genuine. What is the result? A dreadful disillusionment comes at a time when it is too late to offset it. Love turns into indifference or disgust and the married life becomes a prolonged misfortune. It is very well for a girl to be at her best, but let it be her true best — with a resolution to maintain it all her life. I have heard girls say that they would use any means to win a man. Such girls usually come to grief — and they deserve it.

Another point I wish to insist on is that a girl should regard not so much a man's looks as his character. If his disposition does not fit in with hers, if there is not a sympathy of feeling between them, if their natures are not congenial, it is a sign that they are not intended for each other. Better no marriage than an uncongenial marriage. The trials of married life are many under the best circumstances, but under bad conditions, they are innumerable and unbearable.

I now come to my last observation. Even with the blessing of religion on married life, we find a good deal to make us realize that our heaven is not here below. But without religion, we are deprived of the very best means given by God, for marriage welfare.

True, some mixed marriages turn out well. But even these would be doubly blessed if both persons were Catholics. Many mixed marriages are tragedies. Nothing is so near to the heart of a true Catholic girl as her religion. Some men will respect the Faith and practice of a Catholic wife, but many more notwithstanding their pre-marriage promises, will not. Every priest has a sad record of broken families due to a difference of religion between man and wife.

When a man is in love, he is under a spell. It is easy for him to rise to wonderful heights of magnanimity. But that spell does not last. The points of difference about religion, which seemed little or nothing previously, may rise up and form a wall of ice between husband and wife. What is deepest in her life, she finds, has no meaning for him.

But that is not all. When the children see the father practice one religion or none at all, and the mother another, they conclude in many cases that religion does not matter much. The number of children of mixed marriages who have lost the Faith is legion.

(Footnote: When one of the parents is a Catholic and the other a Protestant, only 34 out of 100 of the young men, when they grow up, cling to some faith.

When both parents are of the same Protestant denomination, 68 out of 100 of the young men profess some belief.

When both parents are Catholics, 92 out of 100 of the young men go to church.

In other words, from the Catholic families of the country only 8 out of 100 are lost to the Church. From the Protestant families where the parents are of the same religion, 32 out of 100 are lost to Christianity. While in the families of mixed Catholic and Protestant marriages, 66 out of 100 give up the profession of any religion.

Two-thirds, then, of the sons of mixed marriages go to swell the great army of the indifferentists who are drifting back to paganism.) (Quoted from "The Holy Name Journal".)

A Catholic young woman should hesitate to assume the responsibility of such an outcome. Before a girl permits courtship to begin, she should ascertain whether the man is a Catholic and a good Catholic. The single state in life is a thousand times preferable, in most cases, to a mixed marriage. When husband and wife are of the same faith, there is a bond uniting their very souls. In joy, they will rejoice more abundantly, and in sorrow, they will have an unfailing support.

To sum up, therefore, let me say again that choosing a husband is, humanly speaking, the most consequential thing in a girl's life. In regard to it, there should be exercised more deliberation than on anything else.

In courtship, maidenly reserve should never be compromised. Modesty should be held sacred. It is the guardian of purity. It is a maiden's most beautiful adornment. Even the men who will do their utmost to rob a maiden of that adornment, will despise her when they have succeeded.

A Catholic girl should not be guided by the loose moral code of those who have no religion. Courtship has degenerated among certain classes into downright sin. Some young folks think that courtship entitles them to free love. The law of God holds for young people during courtship just as strictly as it does for everyone else.

The young lady who joins maidenly reserve to her other attractions, inspires love far more than does a girl who makes concessions to her lover. And when I speak of concessions, I mean anything and everything which a girl would hesitate to do in the presence of her sister or mother. Courtship is a preparation for marriage. If she expects God's blessing on her married life, she must respect His law during courtship. Again, I say it is only right and proper that a girl should be at her best during courtship — but let me remind her that it should be her genuine best.

Moreover, as marriage is so important an event, everything should be done to have it as God wishes it to be. Without every possible safeguard, marriage with a non-Catholic is a losing venture, and even with every precaution, it risks true welfare. A girl should prepare for marriage by being true to her religion. Marriage deserves every effort to draw God's special blessings on it by prayer and frequent Holy Communion.

If my advice and counsels have helped one young woman to recognize and accept the right man, a man of her own religion, who will find in her a God-given wife, I shall be recompensed for my efforts. My words may perhaps, in some respects, seem to restrict inclinations, but I can affirm from long experience that they point the way to permanent peace and welfare.

In conclusion I say, seek first the kingdom of God and His justice. God's way is always the best way, here and hereafter. The longest life comes to an end, May the marriage of the Catholic girl be

the means of making that end the beginning of everlasting life and blessedness for herself and the man to whom she gave her heart in wedlock.
