

The Christian Home

Part 2C. On the Necessity of Home Life

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CHAPTER 6: Necessity of Home Life.

THE enemies of religion and in particular of the Catholic Church often maintain that the Church has failed in her mission to make men virtuous, because even among Catholics there are many that lead immoral lives. And some go even so far as to see in this a proof that religion is incapable of making men moral.

The fallacy of such reasoning lies, of course, in ascribing to religion those moral failures who disregard her precepts and who neglect to use the means of practicing virtue that she enjoins. The same fallacious reasoning is used in regard to the home.

The home has failed, it is said, to take care of its members during their leisure hours; it does not offer recreational facilities enough, especially for young people. And as our young people will seek diversion and amusement in improper places if we do not provide wholesome entertainment for them, we must have Catholic clubs and social centers where they can recreate themselves in a harmless manner.

A Matter of Training.

Those of our social workers and sociologists who reason thus evidently overlook the fact that there is an endless variety of not only innocent but also beneficial amusements that may be had in the home; and furthermore that it is just as possible, by proper and timely education, to educate people to seek their recreation mainly at home, because of the priceless advantages that home life offers, as it is to induce them to patronize Catholic community centers in preference to the more alluring public places of amusement.

Such, then, is the purpose of this chapter — to ripen the conviction in the reader that home life should be cultivated on principle by every member of the family; since home life is an indispensable means of obtaining in full measure the blessings of religion in the home and the true happiness and welfare of the entire family.

Point 1. A Plain Duty.

In every perfect society, it is the duty of the members to further the purpose of the society. Now the family is a perfect society, whose object is to promote the temporal and above all the eternal welfare of its members. Hence, it is the duty of each member of the family to do his share towards the attainment of that end, even at the cost of some sacrifice or of some inconvenience to himself. No member of the family has a right to shirk his duty toward the rest. No member of the family stands alone and is simply free to live his own life without any regard for the others. But the proper

fulfillment of each one's respective duty towards the other members of the family necessarily demands the spending of a certain amount of time at home in the family circle.

The Parents' Part.

Upon the father, as head of the family, naturally devolves the first duty of fostering home life by his example as well as by providing reasonable recreational facilities, and, if need be, also by using his authority to prevent unreasonable or excessive gadding abroad. Yet, though the father has the greater authority to safeguard home life, the mother, as the mistress of the home, has the greater opportunities; and hers, therefore, should also be the chief care in fostering a deep-seated love of the home and binding all members of the family by invisible ties to the paternal hearth.

Indeed, the mother is the real center of attraction, the very heart of the Christian home. Because the care of the children and the superintending, if not always the actual performance, of the household tasks requires her presence, the home is the mother's natural abode, and, with but rare exceptions, her ordinary sphere of action.

A Mother's First Care.

It is true, the practice of many women and mothers of our day seems to indicate that women have a much wider field of action than that circumscribed by the limits of the household. Yet that does not alter the fact that woman's natural place is the home, and that, ordinarily, she should not engage in any work, not even of a social or political nature, incompatible with the performance of her duties to her family. (See below for Pope Pius XI's quote on Mothers Who Work Away from Home.)

As the great Jesuit authority on moral philosophy, Victor Cathrein, says: "To give her children a good education and to maintain a well regulated household, must always be woman's first care." And lest it be thought that this is an outworn doctrine that must be rejected because of changed conditions, and that woman must needs adapt herself to the times, he continues: "Far from estranging her more and more from this mission, as it must be regretted has hitherto been done in consequence of modern industry and modern ideas, one should aim to regain for her in its entirety the place that she occupied in former times. The foundation of domestic happiness is a virtuous, pious, diligent woman, who loves order, and who possesses the gift of making her husband attached to his family and of educating her children to be good citizens and good Christians" ("Moral Philosophy," Book 2, pages 384-5).

Pope Pius XI on Mothers Who Work Away from Home.

"Mothers will above all devote their work to the home and the things connected with it. Intolerable and to be opposed with all our strength is the abuse whereby mothers of families, because of the insufficiency of the father's salary, are forced to engage in gainful occupations outside the domestic walls, to the neglect of their own proper cares and duties, particularly the education of their children."

Encyclical "Quadragesimo Anno," on the Social Order.

Note Well — If His Holiness condemns the abuse whereby mothers are forced to work away from their homes, what must he think of those mothers, who, without any compulsion whatever, entirely of their own accord, pursue gainful occupations outside the domestic walls?

Exceptional Cases.

It cannot be denied that there may be circumstances in which individual women may very properly widen the field of their activities, either for their own advantage, the advancement of women's interests, or for the welfare of the public in general. But these will be, for the most part, women without families, or such whose children no longer need a mother's care; and with women thus circumstanced I am not here concerned.

But if woman's chief concern is the proper education of her children and the care of domestic affairs her presence in the home is indispensable. Or how can a mother fulfill her sacred duties towards her young children if she is rarely with them? If she is frequently absent from home or if she leaves the children almost entirely in the care of a nurse or maid, how can she guide their childish steps aright, mould their tender hearts to virtue, and administer the necessary admonitions, reproofs, and punishment? For the words of Holy Writ are still as true as they were of old: "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but the child that is left to his own will bring his mother to shame" (Proverbs 29:15).

Big Brothers and Sisters.

In as far, too, as the assistance of the older children may be helpful or necessary in the care of domestic affairs, the mother not only may but should require it. The training of the children is indeed the mother's duty; but just because it is her duty, she has the right to demand the assistance of the elder children in order that that duty may be properly performed. She has the right to demand that they remain at home to help her take care of the younger children, to aid them with their tasks, or merely to keep them company and entertain them so that they will be content to remain at home. Why is it that sometimes even the very young children are anxious to get away from home, except that most of the other members of the family are out and the children are deprived of the companionship they crave? It is above all at nighttime, and in particular for the adolescent boys and girls, that the home is truly a haven of safety to shield them at least for a time from the dangers of the outside world; and parents may become guilty of grievous sin, if they are grossly negligent in keeping their children at home at night to shield them from evil companions and other occasions of sin.

But even for the elder children, home life is a necessity for the proper development and safeguarding of their spiritual life; and this all the more if they are old enough to be obliged to work and are in consequence exposed to the evil influences of the outside world. Or, indeed, how can they benefit by the practice of family prayer, if they do not take regularly even one meal a day with the entire family when grace is said in common, and if they are never at home in the evening to join in the recitation of the litany or rosary?

How will they devote any time to Catholic reading, and how can they be beneficially affected by the Catholic atmosphere of the home, if almost the only time they spend there is spent in bed?

Weakening the Family Circle.

But the frequent absence of the elder children from the family circle not only deprives them of the benefits of family prayer, good reading, and a Catholic atmosphere, but deprives also the other members of the family of the benefit of their company and their good example. By absenting themselves from home, they weaken the family circle and make it harder for the rest to profit by the advantages of the Catholic home. If the older children would stay at home, it would be easier for the rest to stay and devote a little time to family prayer and Catholic reading. Their very presence, their interest, and their example would make home life more agreeable, and all would become more and

more permeated with the wholesome influence of a Catholic atmosphere. But if one brother or sister goes out, another will want to go, too; if the elder brothers and sisters are gone, the children will not wish to remain at home; and thus the family is broken up and instead of a place to live in, the home becomes merely a lodging and boarding house — a place where one sleeps and perhaps takes one or the other meal.

Modern Conditions No Excuse.

No matter how common this state of things is at present or how well satisfied people may be with it, it is greatly to be deplored; and parents as well as children should do their utmost to restore the home life of the family to its pristine and normal condition. Every member of the family should be prompted to foster home life for his own advantage, because it is for his own good to spend the greater part of his time at home. He should be further impelled by regard for his brothers and sisters, whom he is bound to love more than others not so closely related, and whom he should be willing to help by his company and good example. And lastly, he should be induced by love and gratitude towards his parents, when they desire him to remain at home; and even by obedience, if they direct him to stay at home to take care of the children, to help them with their tasks, or merely to entertain them.

The parents themselves are in duty bound to foster home life, because it is an almost indispensable means for the proper Catholic rearing of their children. It is the presence of the parents, and especially of the mother; it is their example, their authority, their interest, and above all their love that must knit the family together, ward off the dangers that threaten it from without, breathe into it the true Catholic mind and Christian spirit, and guide it to its eternal destiny.

It is the Home That Counts.

This old-fashioned doctrine has recently found champions in unexpected quarters — the camp of the psychiatrists — as may be seen from an article entitled "Home Still in Fashion," in "The Literary Digest" for October 10, 1931. Commenting on an address to 2,000 school principals in New York by Dr. Leon W. Goldrich, director of New York City's newly established Bureau of Child Guidance of the Board of Education, the New York Times says that it has been demonstrated that any home, even one of contention and unkindness, is better for the child than no home at all. "It is a doctrine which until recently demanded exceptional courage to maintain. An age devoted to self-expression and freedom preferred to think of the harm done by taboos and fixations, and to overlook the good done by fathers who provided food and shelter and mothers who provided care." We are now emerging from this revolt against the home, continues The Times. "People are beginning to say generally in print what the social workers and the officials of the juvenile courts have been saying all the time...It is the home that counts. Scientists are beginning to emphasize the importance of loving care — the very thing recently abominated as the source of so many complexes."

It is almost needless to say that I do not advocate spending all one's leisure time at home, nor maintain that one must never go away except for very urgent reasons. There may even be homes in which the moral conditions are so bad that it would be more advisable to spend the majority of one's evenings away from home. But apart from such very exceptional cases, one may safely say that home life is not fostered, as it should be, by those persons who, without sufficient excuse, spend the majority of their evenings away from home.

Point 2. The Causes of the Trouble.

If people are to be interested in the great social work of making the home circle flourish once more, it is necessary for them to understand the causes of its disruption. One of these, the expansion of industry, has already been alluded to; but as the purpose of these booklets is to bring about an improvement of the Christian home even before the reform of our present industrial system may be hoped for, it will be more to the purpose to expatiate on other causes; and chief among these, without doubt, is the inordinate quest of earthly pleasure.

Joy versus Pleasure.

In that charming little book, "More Joy," by Bishop Paul Wilhelm Keppler, the author points out the important distinction between joy and pleasure. There are too many pleasures, he says, and too little joy. Which is only another way of saying that too many people seek happiness in things that are not conducive to true happiness; and consequently, though they give themselves up to amusements, to the enjoyment of sensual pleasures, they do not find true joy but merely a temporary forgetfulness of life's burdens and sorrows. True joy consists in contentment, in peace of heart, in the testimony of a good conscience, in the control of one's animal instincts by reason, in the subjection of the passions. Man, being a rational and moral being, albeit an animal, cannot find real joy in pleasures that conflict with reason and the moral law. And that is why those people are most joyous who are content, for the most part, to find the needed recreation in the simpler joys of the family circle. For these joys are consistent with a good conscience, whereas the pleasures that are the usual offering of public places of amusement can frequently not be indulged in without either searing one's conscience or at least exposing oneself to grave moral danger.

The Lure of the 'Gang'.

If I should be asked to state in particular what pleasures tempt different members of the family to spend their evenings away from home, I should say that in the case of young men, and especially those still in their "teens," it is mainly the pleasures found in the company of the "gang." By the 'gang', I do not mean a number of boys who are usually found together in their outings, nor the boys of a neighborhood who are regular playmates in their daily games. Such gangs hardly interfere with, and oftentimes practically coalesce with the family circle. No, the 'gang' that seems to me to be a menace to home life and to the proper training of young men, is a group of boys who usually spend every evening and the entire evening together at some place away from their homes; and I do not hesitate to call the desire of a boy always to be with "the gang" an inordinate desire for pleasure and a dangerous occasion of sin. For what is the chief attraction of such company? The absence of all restraint. They want to be alone with youths of their own age, unobserved by their parents or teachers. They want to enjoy 'liberty', 'independence'; and this 'liberty' consists in freedom from all restraint — from the restraint of cultured society, the restraint of politeness, the restraint of gentlemanly deportment, the restraint often even of Christian virtue and common decency.

Bad Influence of the 'Gang'.

But freedom from such restraint cannot but have evil consequences for undeveloped characters, as experience proves only too well. Where is it that vulgar words and expressions are most commonly heard? In the company of the 'gang'. Where is it that indelicate stories are unblushingly told? In the company of the 'gang'. Where is it that obscene hints are given, suggestive remarks made, improper songs sung? Where is it that gambling is learnt, drinking taught, disobedience, untruthfulness and dishonesty towards parents and teachers approved and applauded? In the company of the 'gang'. It is the almost uninterrupted daily association with such company in such circumstances that

roughens the character and degrades the morals of our young men. And the most natural and most effective means of withdrawing them, at least to a great extent, from the debasing influence of such company, is to have them spend the majority of their evenings at home in the company of their mothers and sisters.

The naturally more gentle and more refined nature and manners of mothers and sisters are a splendid means of leavening, of tempering, and of toning down the coarser and wilder nature of the young man and the growing boy. And happy the boy and the young man who submits to the influence of such companionship! That companionship, coupled with the entire influence of a good Christian home, will go far towards saving him from the evils of the “gang.”

Girls’ ‘Sets’ and Parents’ ‘Clubs’.

No less disastrous than the ‘gang’ in disrupting the family circle is the girls’ ‘set’ as well as father’s and mother’s ‘clubs’. The objections to be made against the girls’ ‘set’, — unless its gatherings are far less frequent and properly chaperoned — are the same as those I have made against the boys’ ‘gang’. It opens the door to unrestrained liberty and contempt of time-honored conventions for which the less respectable element among our modern young womanhood is so justly condemned. As to the ‘clubs’ to which the parents and especially the mothers belong, nothing craves more wary walking than these. Many a child is a stranger to parental care and to all the blessings of home life because of its mother’s insane devotion to her ‘club’, or to what she dignifies by the name of “social duties.” There are wives and mothers who imagine themselves bound to be busy almost everywhere except in their own homes. One afternoon or evening they must be at their ‘club’; another afternoon, at a card party; another day, they must attend an afternoon tea or a lecture; and still another day, a reading or sewing circle. And thus, what with their social calls and social duties, they are mostly absent from their homes and their own children are neglected.

Charity Begins at Home.

If such mothers would only devote themselves conscientiously to the God-given task of bringing up and training their own children instead of attending, or even giving, lectures on the uplift of society, society would be in a far better way than it is at present. It may be that some of these women are at heart well-meaning and sincere, and that, blinded by the glamour of altruistic activities, they do not realize their mistake. But the truth of the matter is that the performance of welfare work is often an excuse for neglecting the more confining and more tedious household duties. No matter how good and praiseworthy it is to practice the corporal and spiritual works of mercy, our Lord certainly would not countenance a woman’s practicing them to the neglect of her own family. A woman’s first social duty is to her own family. Let that duty be properly attended to first, and then she may think of extending her charitable activities abroad. Charity should begin at home.

Value of “Monies” Overestimated.

A second attraction that draws not only the young men and the young women, but even their younger brothers and sisters away from the home at night, is the theatre, and especially the moving picture theatre. A great deal may be said in favor of the “movie,” not only on account of its recreational but also on account of its educational value; yet it is my opinion that this value is greatly overrated, and that, as far as children are concerned, whatever amount of education may be obtained by attendance at moving pictures can be equally well obtained by other means. In other words, I firmly believe that a child that never attended a “movie” can, and in most cases will be, just as well educated as one that attended “movies.” It would be possible to show that whatever good is

accomplished by the “movies” (and I am speaking only of the good ones), is discounted by the harm that they indirectly do even to the cause of education. But as I am speaking now of the “movie” only in its relation to the home, I wish to emphasize here merely this harmful result of attendance at the “movies”, that it withdraws the members of the family from the sanctuary of the home, and by developing the “movie” habit, makes it impossible for them properly to share in the beneficial influence of Christian home life.

In view of the fact that children lose nothing worth while by rarely attending moving pictures, and that frequent attendance almost inevitably withdraws them from one of the best of all educational influences, that of a good Catholic home life, it is hard to understand how thoughtful parents can be so imprudent as to take their young children regularly to such amusements even before the latter are old enough to attend school. But such parents usually reap the fruit of their folly.

If children become accustomed from early childhood to frequent public places of amusement, it is not surprising that in their adolescence they can hardly be restrained from roaming about at night.

Excessive Joy-Riding.

The third great enemy, and no doubt the greatest enemy, of home life in our day is the automobile. As long as practically the whole family goes riding, and as long as the outings are not too frequent, there is no objection to this means of recreation, in particular for those families who are thereby enabled to benefit by the advantages of a more healthy atmosphere and a more agreeable environment. Yet it cannot be denied that the thing is overdone. In many families, the car is in constant use. The children want to be out at every possible opportunity, and the far more valuable means of recreation to be had at home are neglected. In other families, the car is used in turn by different members of the family. One evening it is one of the boys who has it; another evening, one, or perhaps two, of the girls; a third evening the parents, and thus the family circle is always incomplete and it is impossible to enjoy the benefits of real home life. It is imperative, therefore, that parents who aim to promote the true welfare and happiness of their children put a stop to this excessive automobile-riding.

A Snare to Virtue.

Though I am speaking here of the automobile only in as far as its use affects home life, it may be useful to add a word of warning to parents against permitting their son or daughter to go riding unchaperoned with a companion of the opposite sex. Not only Catholic priests but also non-Catholic judges and social workers deplore such rides as the occasion of the moral downfall of countless young men and young women. If the boy and girl are honorable and sensible, they will welcome a third person to their party both as a means of warding off suspicion and as a guardian of their virtue. And in order that their adolescent boys and girls may take this sensible view of the matter, parents should instruct and train them betimes to follow Christian and not pagan standards of propriety in their relations with persons of the opposite sex. — Unless they do this, their children will almost inevitably take their cue from what they read in secular papers, from what they see on stage and screen, and from what they witness in actual life; and this to their own great moral detriment, to the dis-edification of their acquaintances, and oftentimes to the tragic grief of the very parents who refused to be so old-fashioned as to curb their children’s liberty.

Point 3. Homes Must Be Made Attractive.

What a world of evils would disappear at one happy stroke, and what a world of good would be accomplished, if people would only stay at home and be occupied in the family circle! The great question is, then, how shall we induce people to stay at home? If it is the desire for amusement, for recreation, for companionship, that leads them abroad, how shall this desire, which is certainly legitimate, be satisfied at home? In advocating home life, nothing is farther from my thoughts than the desire to deprive anyone of legitimate pleasure. Indeed, to put more real joy into men's lives, while at the same time furthering their spiritual interests, is the very purpose and object of these booklets. If I thought that it would not help to achieve this purpose, I would cast it into the fire.

Cleanliness the First Requisite.

By all means, then, the home must be made attractive. The attractions that lure one elsewhere must be offset by counter attractions in the home. The strongest tie that binds one to one's home is love of home — a quality that can be developed just the same as the habit of frequenting public amusements is developed. Therefore, the first requisite for attracting one to one's home is that the home, the abode itself, be pleasant and inviting. Even the humblest home can meet this requirement, at least in the interior; for poverty does not imply squalor, slovenliness or disorder. Let only cleanliness prevail, let only the rule be observed, "A place for everything, and everything in its place," and the resultant neatness and tidiness will lend a simple dignity and attractiveness to even the poorest interior. It is by no means always the luxurious or palatial homes that are the most charming.

Coziness, like hospitality, is more often found in the workingman's bungalow than in the rich man's palace. One cannot imagine the Holy Family of Nazareth living in a splendid home. They were poor, and their abode undoubtedly reflected their poverty. Yet, however scanty their resources and however stinted their use of earthly goods, one cannot but believe that their home was a model of cleanliness, orderliness, and good taste. For cleanliness is not only next to godliness, as the proverb says, but actually pertains to godliness when practiced from supernatural motives, as it certainly was by the Holy Family; and as it easily can be by anyone when practiced for sweet charity's sake. If God will reward a drink of cold water given in His name, and will regard what we do to the least of His brethren as done to Himself; then surely He will look with approval on the pains we take to make our home attractive to those with whom He wishes us to share it.

Ownership of One's Home.

It will be readily understood that the married couple that owns its home will be more likely to be attached to it and more inclined to make it attractive. For this reason, all young couples should endeavor to own a home of their own as soon as possible. The very fact that their dwelling place is their own will give them a feeling of security and independence that they can never have in a rented home. And when they own the soil beneath their feet; when they need consult no landlord on making improvements; when they have no fear of being forced by the sale of their home to seek another dwelling place, their love for their home will strike firmer roots and quite naturally give birth to the desire to make it harmonize ever more and more with the home of their dreams.

Ownership of one's home, too, is the best guarantee against a life spent in restless and ill-advised wandering from place to place. In fine, it is the only surety one can have of enjoying the blessings of a fixed abode, chief among which are a firm anchorage amid the vicissitudes of life, a circle of true and tried friends, lifelong associations, and that peculiar charm which in all civilized nations is associated with the word home. Like the lowly cottage overgrown with ivy, a home may be very

plain and prosaic itself; yet to him for whom it was the center of childhood's joys, youth's aspirations, and manhood's struggles and achievements, it will always be beautiful with the clinging ivy of fond recollections.

Effect of Mutual Love.

The strongest means, without doubt, of holding the family circle together is the practice of mutual love between all members of the family. The scriptural saying that charity covers a multitude of sins (1 Peter 4:8) may be fitly applied to the home whose poverty and consequent lack of material attractions is more than compensated for by the unselfish love that pervades it. Just as warm-hearted kindness can light up and lend charm to even a homely countenance, so it can also brighten a home and by its almost magic influence transform a hovel into an abode of delight. This often explains why many a child finds the far more humble home of a neighboring family more attractive than its own.

Feeding the Fire of Affection.

Only too often this congenial atmosphere is wanting in the home, not because the inmates do not love one another truly, but because they do not manifest their love sufficiently. There is a lack of the little courtesies and amenities that are so powerful a means of fostering affection. Even the most sincere and deep-seated affection must be fed, if it is not to wither and fade. It is like the cozy hearth fire, which must have fresh fuel now and then, if it is not to burn low or go out altogether. Failure to heap the coals of kindness and sociableness upon the fire of family affection is sometimes due to a naturally sullen disposition. More often, it can be traced to lack of training in that point; the parents failed to foster sociableness among their children. Quite commonly it is the result of preoccupation with other affairs — business, social or private interests. At times, too, it is due merely to oversight. Attention was never directed to the propriety and advantage of cultivating habits of mutual kindness, cheerfulness, and good will; and in consequence, there may be a touch of chilliness and gloom about the home where an atmosphere of genial warmth and sunshine should prevail. But, whatever the cause of deficient sociableness in any members of the family, it can and it should be removed.

Effect of Kind Words.

The story is told by the author of "The Man Who Was Nobody" of a man who never thought of saying a friendly word to his wife and family. A friend called his attention to the fact. He made it clear to him just how he was acting and what an effect it was having on his dear ones, even though they never complained. He listened to what his friend had to say and agreed that he was right. He promised to begin to do better that very day. That evening he went home a changed man. He greeted his wife and children; he said nothing about business and the worries of the day; at the dinner table, he led the conversation. In every way, he was most considerate. After the meal was over, he went so far as to put on an apron to help dry the dishes.

When his wife saw that, she broke down. "What's the matter?" he exclaimed. "Oh, everything has gone wrong today," she replied, "and to cap the climax you come home drunk."

His conduct was so affable, so different from what it had been, that there seemed to be only one plausible explanation; namely, that he was drunk.

Politeness the Robe of Charity

If any of my readers should be obliged to admit that their past conduct has resembled that of the man in this story, they, too, no doubt will decide to reform. For it needs only that it be pointed out for one to realize that little attentions, little compliments, little words of appreciation, encouragement, comfort, and cheer are dispensed with as much propriety within as without the home. To mention but one instance, should we not have a cheery good morning, a kind good-bye, a pleasant word or smile of welcome, and a cordial good-night for the members of our family just as well as for our friends and acquaintances? It is quite true that politeness is not of the essence of charity. As practiced by worldly people it is a purely natural virtue, and it is sometimes used as a cloak for a very uncharitable disposition. But it can be super-naturalized, and the fact that it is sometimes misused by evil men is no reason why the good should disdain it. Because of its exterior resemblance, politeness might well be styled the garment of charity. And so well does this vesture become the queen of all virtues, that charity never appears more gracious, never shows to better advantage, than when arrayed in the charming robe of Christian politeness.

Need of Occupations at Home.

Despite the attraction of pleasant surroundings and congenial companionship, the urge to leave home during leisure hours may still be very strong if there is nothing to do at home to occupy one's leisure. Here, then, is another point that calls for attention in making the home attractive; and among the various occupations conducive to that end I would assign first place to the performance of certain tasks or the care of certain things. Let parents begin early to develop in their children an active interest in their home by assigning to each the care of a certain thing and by teaching them to take pride in doing their part well. Thus one could have the bookshelves to keep in order, or the library table; another the dining room table; a third some pot flowers to water, and so on; each one having the care of his own toys, shoes, and other personal belongings. Outdoors, to one could be assigned the care of the lawn or a part of it; to another a flower bed; to a third the walks or the porch; and to each a garden to cultivate or at least a tiny patch to weed and water. The keeping of a few chickens or other domestic fowl would offer another interesting as well as useful occupation. And to keep the children from growing one-sided as well as to revive their interest, they could also take turns in the performance of certain tasks, either every day or every week or every month, whichever way might be thought best.

Pet Animals.

Then there are the pets — dogs, cats, rabbits, singing birds, parrots, anything that will enlist the interest of the children and serve as another tie binding them to their home. Interest in such things can be developed to such an extent that children will sometimes rather forego some other pleasure than leave home and neglect the things committed to their care. To foster this interest, the parents themselves must show a keen interest in their children's efforts, and always have a kind word of encouragement, appreciation or praise for their achievements, no matter how trivial and childish the latter may be.

Games and Toys.

And finally, though most of the occupations I have spoken of really constitute excellent recreation if properly directed and not overdone, there must needs be also sheer amusements — pleasurable pastimes, undisguised enjoyments, and care-free indulgence in interesting games. In these days of the player piano, the phonograph, and the radio, not to speak of the numerous playthings that electricity and other modern discoveries and inventions have produced, this phase of the problem of

home life is not hard to solve. But even in those families that may be too poor to afford such luxuries, there need be no lack of amusement; for the old-fashioned games of lotto, dominoes, checkers, mill (or nine men's morris), cards, authors, and Parcheesi (or Ludo), all of which may be had for a few cents each, can still hold the interest of old and young alike. By one who has a little skill, many of these games can be fabricated at home with hardly any expense; and the fact that they are homemade often makes them the more enjoyable. Indeed, it is a quite common experience that few games are enjoyed more by children than those that are entirely their own invention.

Not Too Many Inhibitions.

There is just one more bit of advice that I think should be given in this chapter and that is: Let there not be too many inhibitions in the home! Those who must guard against excess in this point are the mothers and the elder sisters. It goes without saying that even the members of the family will not enjoy staying at home, if they are not made to feel at home; and no one can really feel at home, if he is hampered at every turn by instructions and reminders not to do this and to avoid that. Discipline and order there should be, of course; but it need not be the discipline and order of the church or schoolroom. The very proximity of the walls and ceiling impose a certain amount of restraint that is absent out of doors; but it need not be the restraint demanded by the presence of strangers. Yes, mother dear, and dear elder sister, train your dear ones in orderliness and neatness and well-bred deportment; but let it be done with the sweet reasonableness of a mother and sister, and not with the tyrannical imperiousness of a Xantippe. If undue restraint is placed on them at home, your growing boys and girls will soon find an opportunity of escaping to more congenial places of amusement; and then, instead of spending your evenings in the midst of a joyful, if perhaps a little too noisy family, you will be left to keep late and lonely vigils worrying over your wandering boys and girls and perhaps over the head of the house himself.

Make Everyone Feel at Home.

By all means, then, let the home folks be made to feel at home. Let the father of the house occupy the finest easy chair, even if he is not arrayed in his Sunday clothes. Let the grown-up sons smoke in the sitting room or in the parlor, even if the smoke does stain the curtains or the wall paper (unless they have decided to abandon smoking altogether as an unhealthy practice). Let there be music and song and games at the time for recreation, even if they are somewhat noisy. Let the children have their own theatricals, if they like to; let there be an abundance of clean wholesome reading matter, picture books, puzzles, and toys; let the parents themselves join in or at least show an interest in the amusements of their children, and the home will become so attractive that there will rarely be any temptation to seek recreation elsewhere.

“Keep the home fires burning” is the slogan I would suggest to all who are laboring for the reform of society. Instead of nightly faring forth to the club, the theatre, the “movies” or some other place of amusement, let the members of the family once more gather round the hearth, whether to work, to study, to read, to amuse themselves or to pray. Better far one such night spent in the bosom of the family and in the atmosphere of a truly Catholic home than a dozen nights spent at the club or the “movies”, no matter how unobjectionable, educational and inspiring.

A Voice in the Wilderness.

Think not, kind reader, that I do not realize (and oh, how poignantly!) that, in making this plea, I shall be looked upon by the great majority as hopelessly behind the times, and as making a futile effort to turn the current of our modern age. But was there ever a more glorious battle fought for a

principle, or was there ever a more heroic stand made in defense of the right than when the defender was faced by overwhelming odds?

If, like Saint John the Baptist, I am but the voice of one crying in the wilderness, at least I have the consolation of being in good company. And if, like the early Christian apologists who raised their voices in protest against the persecuting emperors, I may seem to be trying to stave off the inevitable, I again find comfort in the fact that the Church that the apologists defended still exists and exerts her benign influence, while the all-powerful empire that persecuted her is long since a heap of ruins.

God's Grace Still Powerful.

It is true, the Church is the work of God, and its preservation, its spread, and its conquests have been accomplished more by the power of God than by the wisdom and power of man. But so, too, is the family, and especially the Christian family, the work of God; and if it is to accomplish its God-given mission in the Christian home, it has less need of human means than of divine. And therein precisely lies my hope. God's grace is still active and still powerful; and it is solely through it and not "by the persuasive words of human wisdom," that I hope to accomplish any good through these pages. There are still well-meaning souls in this wicked world; souls who want to do the best they can; naturally Christian souls who long for something better, higher, nobler. It is to these especially, and, more particularly still, to young wives and mothers that I address myself in the hope that, as they read these instructions and counsels, the grace of God will inspire them anew with a strong desire and an earnest determination to make their homes models of what a Christian home should be. Let them establish their homes on the rock bottom of religion; let them cultivate prayer, foster good reading, preserve a Catholic atmosphere in their homes and promote home life, and, by the blessing of God their homes will become veritable strongholds of the Faith, schools of virtue, abodes of peace and happiness and love, which the angels of God will delight to visit, and which God Himself will look down upon with pleasure and bless with a foretaste of the joys of Heaven.

CONCLUSION.

IT is with a feeling of deep satisfaction that I bring these little booklets on the home to a close. God grant that they may be the humble instrument of accomplishing at least a small amount of the good for which it was undertaken. To that end, I can only beg the kind reader who has had the patience to peruse the foregoing pages, not to put the booklets aside for good after the first reading, but to pick them up again and again until the lessons they contain become deeply engraven on his heart. The substance of those lessons is this: that since society, which should help the individual to lead a God-fearing life, has become a means of leading him astray, to counteract this evil influence, the family, which is the unit of society, must be reformed by being again imbued with the spirit of Christianity. When religion once more directs, controls, and permeates the family life, not only will the individual have an effective safeguard against the evils of society, but society itself will be reformed.

The means to accomplish this end are the simple but efficacious ones that I have pointed out. Think not lightly of them, dear reader, on account of their simplicity, and despise them not for that they are old. Parents above all, fathers and mothers, see to it that these old-fashioned manifestations of Catholic life once more come into honor in your homes. You cannot have religion without religious exercises, as little as you can have fire without fuel. Nor can you make of your religion a purely church affair, because it is something that touches life at every point.

To children, and especially to those young men and young women who will soon be looking forward to establishing homes of their own, I say: If you hope to have a truly Christian home when you marry, you must lay the foundation for it now. Be faithful to the practice of daily prayer and frequent Communion in the years of young manhood and young womanhood; be chaste during the time of courtship, and you may justly expect God to bless your future home. But if you neglect your religion and incur the wrath of God by your liberties in keeping company, you run great risk of building your Christian home upon sand. Avoid the occasions of sin, therefore; for he that loves danger shall perish in it (Ecclesiasticus 3:27). Let me warn you especially against following that custom, as pernicious as it is widespread, which accords young unmarried couples the privilege of almost as complete privacy and seclusion as if they were already married.

The proper place for keeping company is in the presence of the father and mother or some other member of the family. These nightly tete-a-tetes and long drawn out private interviews between two young persons of opposite sex are occasions of sin and a source of many other evils, not the least among which are hurried and unhappy marriages. It is during the time of courtship, I repeat, that the foundation is laid for the future home. Let it be made of religion and virtue, my dear young men and young ladies, and then you can securely build up thereon that beautiful edifice, that bulwark of religion, that fortress of morality, that pillar of society, that citadel of peace and happiness — the model Christian home.

Home, sweet home! What a multitude of tender thoughts and feelings are associated with the utterance of that sweet word! What a host of happy memories it conjures up of the innocent days of childhood, of the carefree days of youth, of the toilsome days of maturer age. The home is, indeed, the center of the sweetest and purest of all earthly joys, the starting point of all that is best and greatest in human history. Our Divine Savior Himself gave the home a special consecration by gracing the humble home of Nazareth with His presence during thirty long years; and He thereby gave us also the first and the supreme model of the truly Christian home. Yes, so sacred is the word home that it is commonly used to designate even that eternal dwelling place that God has prepared for those that love Him.

Love your home, then, dear reader, and try to make it worthy of that sacred name. You can adopt no surer means than to establish religion in your home by enthroning the Sacred Heart as its King and by conforming it as closely as possible to the home of the Holy Family.

If the father seeks to imitate Saint Joseph; if the mother emulates the loving care of Mary; if the children are docile and diligent after the example of the Child Jesus; and if all seek first the Kingdom of God and His justice, — be it ever so humble, yours will be a happy home. What, then, if those foes of your salvation, the devil and the wicked world, storm and rage without, — you and yours will be safe within the walls of your Christian home. For, built as it is on the rock of Faith, we may truly say of it what Our Blessed Savior said of those who hear His words and do them: “And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew; and they beat upon that house, and it fell not; for it was founded on a rock” (Matthew 7:25).

(Thanks to the Franciscan Herald)
