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BY WALTER JEWELL



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DIVORCE

BY WALTER JEWELL

THE CHILDREN

WHEN one has nothing else to do, it is an interesting exercise to see how far back into early childhood our memories can carry us. The best that I myself can do in this direction is to recall part of a conversation overheard at the age of four. Some people claim to better this considerably, and to be able to conjure up events which took place in the dim mornings of their lives. No one, of course, can remember the dawn itself nor can we even foster recollections of the helpless condition of early infancy. Our memories commence at the age when we have learnt to do certain things for ourselves, and to make small decisions on our own account.

The greatest asset of a baby is his voice, which is remarkably vigorous in comparison with his other bodily powers. But this is clearly necessary on account of his very helplessness. Sometimes, in later life, we find ourselves in this same position of complete dependence upon others to supply our needs, on account of illness. But even this does not really recall our babyhood, because nothing can do so. Yet there can be no doubt that we did indeed pass through that strange period when every sight and sound was a new marvel, and when life itself was only maintained by the ceaseless activity of other hands and feet than ours; but the memory delivers up no secrets from those depths.

Now it is certain that, during that stage of utter helplessness through which we inevitably pass, and which diminishes very slowly with the years, we need a continuous and devoted

service of a very high order. There must be a loyalty available at all hours of the day and night, taking no account of personal health and convenience. And in the absence of such whole-hearted devotion we may very easily die.

The people most likely to accept so necessary and exacting a role are our parents, for it is insistently demanded by what we call Nature. This does not mean, of course, that Nature's demands are always complied with. Parents can be neglectful of their children to the point of murder, whilst they may receive tender and saving care from strangers. But these cases are the exceptions, and we shall stray far from the paths of common sense if we mistake them for the rule. We need never seek far for this rule. The interest of parents in their children is something quite unique and unlike any other possible kind of interest. It involves one of the most awe-inspiring and amazing of the operations of nature—the power of living creatures to produce others like themselves from their own being—a power unspeakably more wonderful in the human sphere. Only common and everyday experience has power to dim the wonder of it. There lies the child, a complete individual person, daily becoming more and more assertive. There is the complicated physical structure, sight, hearing, taste, touch, smell, energy, and profound unity; there, too, is the inquisitive mind, the dawning and development of the intelligence. And yet, but for the parents and their deliberate act, there would be nothing at all. A powerful and unique *incentive* is needed to ensure that children, in all their helplessness, should receive for many years a special tenderness, and in the marvel of child-birth the Author of Nature has provided it. The child is the living expression of his parents, and, in the vast majority of cases, is so regarded and treated.

I make no apology for glancing once more at the obvious, for that exercise is so often necessary to any true view of life. It is obvious, then, that a child comes into the world as the result of the united act of his parents. Had they not consorted together he would never have been. But here the question arises: Is the act in question an expression and a

consummation of a solid and *lasting union* between them? If so, the strong parental bond will not merely overshadow the cradle, but will remain a unique protection for an indefinite period along the road to manhood. If, however, it is simply a matter of passing indulgence, then that tireless devotion, so necessary to a child's full protection, is liable to be cut off at any moment, even supposing that it is offered at all.

It has been said that, when King Edward I presented his infant son to the Welsh, he used his own shield as a cradle. This may serve as an analogy of the protecting power of real and lasting marriage. For, under such conditions, the united act of the parents is not only the cradle upon which the child is borne into life, but also the strong shield held firmly over him whilst his own powers slowly develop. In short, he is defended by the love which gave him birth, which, as we have seen, is unlike any other. We may take it as certain, then, that the law of Nature, and therefore the Author of Nature, must demand that this shield should remain intact and inviolate. Divorce means that the child is resigned to the care of one parent only; the protecting shield is split, and one half wrenched away completely. The loss of a parent is serious enough in all conscience, for it is no exaggeration to say that the rearing of a child is hard work for two people. But even this is not the total of the loss sustained. There is also the question of what is known as 'atmosphere'. A child of divorced parents is overshadowed, not by a strong shield, but by a dividing sword. At one time his parents were all his world, and he knew no other; than they became his guides and interpreters in the larger world that lay around them. But now they are divided and at war. For example, should he be taken by his mother to see his divorced father, she will probably remain out of sight until the interview is over; the bitter chasm between the parents must be crossed by the child, all alone, and he cannot remain with the one, without separating himself from the other. They who have chosen this darkness cannot leave him in the sunlight; he must descend with them into the gloom and taste its bitterness.

THE PARENTS

Now let us, for a while, turn our thoughts away from the children, even though they are the main consideration. Any couple, undertaking marriage, are attempting something tremendous, and embarking upon a great and perilous adventure. In proposing marriage to a girl, the man pays to her the highest and most delicate of all compliments, just so long as he is sincere. He is telling her that he wishes to be always at her disposal, to work always for her, and to live always with her; to meet every difficulty with her confidence and assistance, to share every triumph and setback. In short, he proposes that they should be no longer two, but one. No poetry or admiring phrases that he could possibly conceive are in any way comparable to this.

But in due course this subtle and far-reaching compliment has to be translated into hard reality. It thus becomes a perilous quest for a really great happiness—something which can be obtained, but never with ease.

And when we consider this with eyes wide open, it becomes evident that we must, by some deliberate act, write off and cancel our past mode of living in such a way as to dismiss any notion of forsaking our partner and returning to it. In other words, we must burn our boats. Having landed upon the shores of this land of brilliant promise but stern difficulty, we must scuttle our craft, thus cutting off the way of escape. Having done this, vain regrets and faint-heartedness are far less likely to trouble us. As there is no retreat, our only salvation lies in *advancing*, and by sheer determination making marriage even more marvellous than its promise. But the growing practice of easy divorce sweeps away this first and essential precaution. So far from burning the boats, it leaves them within easy reach, and makes them as comfortable as possible. They are never out of sight, and the eyes of a man or girl will turn wistfully towards them whenever wearied or disappointed. They are the legal forms which offer an apparently honourable retreat, pandering to our moods and sym-

pathizing with our cowardice. But they are also a menace to any lasting happiness, because their presence is ruinous to the idea that this new land is our permanent *home*. Unless we really do consider ourselves at home, we shall be visitors only, and the essential spade-work will never be attempted.

For one can only marry a human being, and this is another of those obvious truths that will bear thinking about. In any partner we choose we shall find both sunshine and shadow, the characteristics which appeal and the traits which repel. During the time of courting and early marriage, these latter will appear only as very small clouds in a brilliant sky. But at certain periods in later life they may grow and gather, and there will be times when the whole horizon seems black and the road futile. On such occasions, our thoughts can so easily turn to those comfortable boats, rocking gently by the shore, and ready to carry us off to a less troubled clime; that is, assuming that they are there. How immeasurably better for the prospects of married life if they are not! If indeed we have completely burned our boats, and the road must be trodden, then the difficulties of married life will be confronted by two determined people; and in most cases, the clouds will be dispersed, understanding and tolerance will grow richer and deeper, and we shall attain to the indescribable contentment of the happily married.

SOCIETY

AND now a word as to the effect of all this on social life generally. This age, like so many others, is an age of societies. Even in trifling matters, such as a preference for riding in tramcars, or a dislike for tobacco, men tend to build up definite bodies with officers and rules. Even a revolt against officialdom would be certain to set up its own officials! But, with a few exceptions, there is one society which a man never joins, because, from the dawn of his being, he has always belonged to it; it is known as the Family. His membership of this first

society of nature he takes for granted; as we have seen, it is his cradle and his shield.

But the family itself needs protection, and shields are much more effective when locked together in the Roman fashion. The State, therefore, should be a solid wall composed of families, behind which the natural affection between the sexes, the marvel of child-birth and the strength of family life should flourish in peace. The families must, of course, remain individual shields; any attempt to exchange them for one single, vast shield is a blow at the roots of Nature itself, where things are arranged very differently.

Now all kinds of dangers threaten a State from outside, such as war, earthquake, and famine. These are usually warded off in one way or another, and the nation is wounded but not killed, particularly when the family shields present a firm front. But what if those individual shields are split by the practice of easy divorce? Such blows must fall, not upon the bones and flesh, but upon the very heart of the body politic, and will prove in time the strokes of death.

PRIMEVAL MARRIAGE

OUR conclusions so far have been based upon the ordinary observation of life as we find it. Such observation in itself can inform us that the laws of Nature, profound and mysterious as they are, definitely point to the sacred bond, the unbroken shield, and the perils of divorce.

Now all this the Catholic Church endorses, but she has rather more to say about the natural law, and a great deal more to add about the mind of God on this subject as made known to her. We began our study by going back to the morning of a man's life; the Church takes us back to the dawn of the entire human race. The curtain rises on the first scene of the first act of all history, and we see, not merely a habitable place, but a very 'paradise of pleasure'—a land of great rivers and fruitful trees. We might well expect, there-

fore, to see men and women, the primeval parents of all mankind; in point of fact, we see only one man and one woman. These two, the prospective father and mother of the race, are alone. And not merely alone in Eden, but in the whole length and breadth of the world, for they are the first. From one couple alone the human race has sprung.

Quite clearly, God could have arranged matters in some other way. He might, for example, have created at once a whole colony of people to fill and subdue the earth much more rapidly. But time means nothing to God, and there are two reasons, at all events, for that lonely sovereignty of the first human beings:

- (1) The whole human race thus became one real and single family in Adam.
- (2) By this single union of one man and one woman in a lonely world, God demonstrated for all time what He expected of marital relations.

It is with the second of these reasons that we are concerned just now. God, by setting the stage in this particular manner, clearly pointed, from the beginning, to the unbroken shield and the inviolate bond in marriage. This one man and this one woman were obviously intended for each other; they were the first, and they were alone. God had presented His pattern and made known His wishes.

Thus it was that when Christ our Lord was confronted with divorce as allowed in the Mosaic Law, His mind soared back through all history, surmounted the ancient law-giver and the Patriarchs, and seized upon that first and unique romance cradled all alone in the arms of the mighty world. "In the beginning," He said, "it was not so". Coming down to present time, Pope Pius XI is able to write of "that original and perfect unity restored by the Gospel". The twin figures of our first parents in that lonely paradise overshadow every true marriage in all history, not only within the Church, but

in all the world. For within the natural framework every proper union, including that of Jew, Moslem, Buddhist, or aboriginal, is surrounded by God with this law, and touched by Him with that sanctity.

DIVINE MARRIAGE

MAN is a highly mysterious creature. Here is his body, very solid, very material, with a certain weight and measurement. His strength is by no means impressive by comparison with the animal world around him. And yet, in that strange element called his thought, invisible and incredibly powerful, he is able to overleap time and space, and consider the whole universal scheme of things. It is in this immortal, spiritual life of the soul that he resembles God Himself, although always from an infinite distance.

It is quite fitting, therefore, that his true marriage unions should recall and resemble a Divine and eternal marriage in which God Himself is one of the partners. It is the marriage or union of Christ (God Incarnate) with His Church. Because of its vital bearing upon the whole question of divorce, we must now consider this truth in the light of St Paul's teaching.* It is he who tells us that men must love their wives as Christ loves the Church; clearly, in order to grasp the significance of this, we must consider Christ's view regarding His Church, and the love that He bears to her.

In the first place, He made her. The Church is not a mere conglomeration of His followers, but a result of His own particular choice. He collected His disciples during His early travels, calling them away from their occupations, which they seem to have left without a backward glance. If we can imagine ourselves leaving our own occupations in this drastic way in obedience to a similar call, it will help us to understand His own comment: "You are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world". They were nearly always

* See Ephesians 5 : 21-33.

with Him, and He took particular care to see that they, at all events, understood the heart of His teaching. Through them He gave special instructions and power to the Church in future ages. He loved this Society, then, as its Author and Origin, a particular type of affection quite different from any other. As He consciously approached the moment of His supreme sacrifice, His thoughts centred around the infant Body in a most intense way, as a fundamental purpose of His life and death. He told His disciples to ask for anything in His Name, and He would do it. He focused His whole attention upon them in the prayer: "I pray not for the world, but for them whom Thou hast given Me". At the time of His arrest He firmly stepped between them and the approaching armed force, thus ensuring their escape. Finally, it was for the Church that He suffered and died.

And that, says St Paul, is how we must love our wives. It certainly implies an immense patience, and a readiness to suffer and die for them, if necessary, or it means nothing at all. And it leaves no room for divorce. The union between Christ and His Church is an eternal one; living for ever with His Life, she is to adore Him through all eternity. A bond or union contracted here below which failed to remain sacred and inviolate unto the death of the body would be a strange symbol of the Divine wedlock!

The Pauline teaching does not stop there. He draws attention to the fact that the Church is also the *Body* of Christ: "We are members of His Body, of His flesh and of His bones". It is nourished and cherished by Him for that reason, and we, like him, must love our wives as our own bodies. There are two important points to note here. Firstly, the kind of care that men usually give to their bodies is both tender and continuous. We devote a very large amount of time and trouble to the body's various needs, i.e., resting, feeding, washing, doctoring, and exercising, and, in general, make it as comfortable as possible. Secondly, we are firmly united to our bodies until death overtakes us, and we regard as abnormal those men who take steps to anticipate *that* separation. Any

idea, therefore, of loving our wives as our own bodies is altogether meaningless if we intend anything but a lifelong union.

THE SACRAMENT

Now marriage is peculiarly suited to this life, and it is quite clear that it ceases at death. But, if we concluded from this that it is earthbound in its significance, and that beyond the grave it can be consigned to the limbo of forgotten things, we should be completely wrong. God takes no such view of the matter, for He has deliberately taken marriage and closely bound it up with man's last end or final destiny. Let us now consider how He has effected this.

God has made man in order that he may come to see Him directly and to live with Him intimately. But what is God? The Source and Fountain-head of all Creation—the Primeval and Ultimate Loveliness existing of Himself. And what are we? His creatures, fashioned by the Divine Artistry from nothing whatever; always and utterly depending upon Him for existence itself, and having no strength or beauty with which He has not endowed us. If, therefore, this personal embrace between God and ourselves is to become possible, it is clear that there must be some very special provision on His part. He has, in fact, made it known that it is necessary for a man's soul to be flooded with His grace in this life, and for him to die in that condition. And so it becomes of the first importance that we should discover exactly how that grace is to be obtained.

Well, marriage is quite definitely one of the channels, and the only one with which we are directly concerned just now. That is to say, God uses the affection, the fidelity, and the lifelong union of a man and a girl to draw them both immeasurably closer to Himself by the gift of grace. It is not nearly enough to say that this grace is given *on account* of the marriage; the marriage itself is the Divine, transforming touch. This is what the Church means by calling matrimony

a Sacrament, and it is very closely connected with another, i.e., Baptism.

Now Baptism may be called the introductory Sacrament, for it opens the floodgates of grace to a man for the first time. This original Divine flow is marvellously free in its application. It is a gift of Christ given through His Church, and yet anyone, within or without, may baptize. It has been described as a river overflowing its banks and spreading far and wide. And the point that concerns us now is that any baptized couple who marry lawfully receive their union *as a Sacrament*, i.e., as a means by which a further torrent of grace pours into the souls of them both. In other words, when baptized people marry, their union binds them, not only to each other, but in a very particular way to God. Baptism, the earlier Sacramental river, has cut its own great courses through the world, enriching the soil of humanity with higher life. Marriage, the later flood, follows and plunges through many of the same channels. Thus, there are untold numbers of people outside the *visible* unity of the Catholic Church, who are baptized and sacramentally married.

Bearing all this in mind, let us look into a church where a full Catholic marriage is taking place; for it is here, at the true home of the Sacraments, that the full doctrine is best seen and understood. What we shall probably notice, first of all, is the presence of the priest at the altar. That, of course, we should naturally expect, but, unless we look below the surface a little, we may easily misunderstand the real reason for his presence. It is true that he normally administers the Sacraments, but he does not administer this one. The Sacrament of Matrimony is given and received by the man and woman standing before him, who thus co-operate with God in giving grace to each other.

The manner in which they do this is remarkably simple and direct. They are asked about their intentions, and reply briefly and decidedly. They join hands and repeat the familiar words of the vow: "to have and to hold, from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in

health, till death do us part . . .". The priest joins them together, invoking the Name of the Holy Trinity. They are sprinkled with holy water, the ring is blessed, and gold and silver delivered into the hands of the bride. Finally, the bridegroom places the ring in position, finger by finger, corresponding with the invocation: "in the Name of the Father; and of the Son; and of the Holy Ghost". The tone throughout is one of finality.

Here let me repeat that in the foregoing simple words and acts the couple have administered to each other the sanctifying grace of God. Each has received from the hands of the other that priceless gift which alone makes Heaven possible. This infusion has taken the form of a triangle; God is at the apex, and the man and woman are the two basic points. His grace poured out to them, forms the two sides, whilst they, passing that same gift, from one to the other, complete the figure. And because of this figure it is remarkably fitting that God should be present before them in the Blessed Sacrament of the Altar when the vows were exchanged.

And it is fitting in yet another way. We have seen that the Church is the Bride of Christ, to whom He is wedded *for all eternity*. And in the tabernacle on the altar God is resting, as it were, in the arms of His Beloved; and it is within a few paces of the altar, in front of this august Union so wonderfully manifested, that our own human espousals are made. Permanence is the very atmosphere, both of the time and place. And when the Nuptial Mass follows the ceremony, the Divine Victim who is offered on behalf of this fresh union, is He who "loved the Church and delivered Himself up for it".

Marriage, then, as understood by the Catholic and applying to all the baptized, is not only a brilliant and crowning star set in the skies of human relationships; it is also an immense Sun with life-giving warmth and power. And so, from this viewpoint, divorce is not only an abuse of the natural law, but also a blotting out of this Sun, involving ruin and spiritual death. To spurn one's partner is to spurn God, who was so closely involved in the union, and to lose Him for all eternity.

And in dealing with the very real difficulties of married life, we must never turn our backs upon this Sacramental Sun, or we shall walk in the shadow. For it does not only illumine man's final destiny. It is vitally concerned with married life itself, in all its detail, and with the attainment of real marital happiness here below. And we shall need it always to enlighten our minds and warm our hearts so that we may never know the coldness of estrangement and the darkness of failure.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

WE began this study by considering marriage in its purely natural state, i.e., apart from the question of baptism and membership of the Church. We saw that by attempting divorce men wage war against nature, and in consequence against the Author of nature, and even against themselves. It is certain that, when a man does that, there can be no result that does not involve his own downfall. We then passed on to consider the Sacramental Marriage of the baptized, and saw that this same attempt must divert the stream of grace and imperil a man's ultimate happiness. It now remains for us to gather up certain loose ends in order to make this brief survey as complete as possible:

The Pauline Privilege.—From the earliest times the Church has been confronted with problems arising from marriages made by her children entering her life and unity. For example, we might consider a case of two young Romans marrying at about the end of the first century. Together they have given religious adoration to the Emperor and the goddess Rome, as well as to the gods and families of gods thronging the eastern and western skies. After marriage one of them, shall we say the husband, becomes captivated by Christianity, and is received into the Church. He is now a Christian having a pagan wife, and no matter how intimate their mutual

relations, they must now regard many of the great issues of life with very different eyes. This does not mean that their marital life must necessarily tumble in ruins about them. The natural love which drew them together in the first place may well continue to bind them happily; in fact, it may even become a pleasant and inviting path upon which she may follow him to the light of the Faith. But even apart from this consideration, marriage in its purely natural state is a solemn and sacred thing. Provided only that the wife *accepts the position reasonably*, he must remain absolutely loyal.

But she may prove hostile, and perhaps bitterly so. Regarding him as mad or disreputable, she may either desert him or create an impossible situation within the home. In such a case the Church will interpose on Divine authority. She will open to him the door to full Sacramental Marriage by permitting him to marry one of her children, the first relationship being thus ended by God. The Church has always been prepared to act in this way in similar circumstances, the privilege being known as 'Pauline' because it is an application of the Apostle's own teaching: "If any brother have a wife that believeth not, and she consent to dwell with him; let him not put her away. And if any woman have a husband that believeth not, and he consent to dwell with her; let her not put away her husband." "But if the unbeliever depart, let him depart. For a brother or sister is not under servitude in such cases." (1 Cor. 7: 12, 13, 15).

Unconsummated Marriage.—After the marriage ceremony a couple are bound to each other by a relationship that God has created between them, and at the same time they are drawn to Him much more closely. The proper intercourse of the marriage bed now lies before them as their right, and it is interesting to note that, until this takes place, dissolution is not absolutely impossible. This could be brought about either by the solemn profession of one of the parties in a religious Order, or by the Pope himself granting the necessary dispensation. But once intercourse has taken place, both these doors

are closed for ever, and the union is utterly inviolable. It is clear, then, that the Church does not regard the sexual act as something sordid or undignified; on the contrary, she sees the light of God resting brilliantly on the marriage bed in a final benediction.

Separation.—It has been said, truthfully enough, that it takes two to make a quarrel. Nevertheless, it needs only one to break up married life. Successful marriage calls for two determined people assisted by God; if one of them fails to co-operate with God, and his or her partner, then catastrophe must follow. Should the position become intolerable, the Church will permit a separation, the marriage bond remaining intact. The sacramental position is now as follows: The innocent party, shall we say the woman, now living apart from her husband who has treated her shamefully, is receiving Sacramental Grace because of her union with him. To preserve this union and to keep in the path of this grace, she has a very simple but sometimes very exacting duty. She must not attempt to marry again.

Nullity.—This has really nothing to do with our subject. Unfortunately, however, some people seem to regard it as a canonized form of divorce, and it may be as well to touch upon it here. Appearances are often deceptive, and marriage ceremonies are no exception to the rule. A man and a woman may go to a church or a register office, make satisfactory responses and observe the formalities, and go away apparently man and wife. But it may be that one of them has done all this before, and his or her partner may still be living. Or again, the woman might be speaking and acting in mortal fear, either of the man or some other person exerting unjust pressure. For these, and various other reasons, a marriage may be non-existent—a mere sham, and when the facts are brought to her notice the Church will say so. Freedom is of the essence of marriage—both freedom from impediments and freedom within the mind. A statement by the Church

that no marriage has taken place is known as a Declaration of Nullity.

IN CONCLUSION

GOD, then, has made certain rare exceptions to His Law against divorce, whilst some ceremonies, appearing to be marriages, are actually nothing of the kind. Apart from these considerations, there is absolutely no appeal, and we are called upon to trust in the infinite Wisdom. Marriage is a great, protecting rock. Its base is the natural law, but it reaches up to supernatural heights, and behind it shine the stars of God's eternal purposes. Thus, we may reach the welcoming arms of God by scaling it if that is indeed our vocation. On the other hand, we may be so foolish as to attempt to dynamite it, but, in that event, it is our own broken bodies that will be found at the foot of those heights which otherwise might well have proved our safety and our crown.

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