

## LEAKAGE

I KNEW a Catholic who married a non-Catholic, and they had three children. One of the children married a convert, one married a bad Catholic, and the third made a mixed marriage. There were seven grandchildren, of whom six were brought up as Catholics, and one, the issue of the mixed marriage, was not. Of the six Catholic grandchildren, one lapsed, one ceased to practice his faith for a number of years, and one nearly lost his faith, but was saved by a miracle of grace.

Five of these grandchildren married, and only one of the five married a Catholic. The lapsed Catholic abjured his faith and married outside the Church. Two marriages were mixed marriages made by the Catholic partners with the best intentions of running the home on Catholic lines, and of bringing up children as fervent Catholics. The grandchild who was born of a mixed marriage in the previous generation, and who had never been brought up as a Catholic, naturally married outside the Church.

The fourth generation numbers eight great-grandchildren, of whom only three are being brought up as Catholics.

In the case of two of the Catholic marriages, the husbands were converts during the period of the engagement. In no single case of mixed marriage did the non-Catholic partner become converted after the wedding had taken place.

We hear and read a great deal about the 'leakage.' Here we have a deplorable instance of it. Of the twenty-four descendants of one mixed marriage, fourteen are Catholics and ten are non-Catholics . . . and the tale of fourteen Catholics is only made by including one bad Catholic and two slack ones.

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I believe that this is by no means an isolated case.

The deduction is obvious. The facts prove what the wisdom of the Church has pronounced. Mixed marriages are to be condemned, and dispensations only to be granted for grave reasons.

Catholics living in England in a society where they normally meet as many non-Catholics as Catholics, sometimes wax restless under the prohibition. This is particularly so when they have already fallen in love with a non-Catholic. They are eager to marry, and they think themselves quite capable of estimating the dangers and difficulties which may beset them in a mixed marriage, and of coping with them. They feel that the Church is a little too grandmotherly in her care for her flock, and inclined to get over-anxious about their spiritual welfare. In any case they believe that even if the Church is right in general, and the prohibition is reasonable in most cases, it is not so in their own, because they want to marry an exceptional non-Catholic. So they apply for a dispensation without more ado.

If love is blind, it is perhaps more so in this matter than in any other. Desire magnifies good intentions till they have the force of accomplished facts. The Catholic intends to be faithful to his Catholic habits. In his mind's eye he sees his wife first impressed, then curious, then eager, then under instruction . . . all the stages of conversion rattling on with the rapidity of a cinematographic film, and with the reception into the Church as apotheosis. If children should arrive before the moment of this happy culmination, his instructions to them will be a happy stage in the process.

But his imagination is leading him astray, and the devil intends that it should. Any priest can assure him—almost always fruitlessly—that this is not in the very least the way things will go. People in love are, as a rule, in an unreasonable frame of mind in so far as

any conflict arises to threaten the longed-for course of true love. Love is in its very nature generous, and the state of being in love involves so generous an attitude to the beloved that all the virtues are magnified and all the faults minimised. Moreover, the conditions and exactions of the marriage relationship are such that they cannot be imagined before they are experienced. So advice which seems to imply distrust or criticism of the beloved is dismissed more or less summarily. The conscience is not deeply involved, because loyalty and integrity push the Catholic along the very path which he is anxious to tread.

It seems to me wrong-headed to minimise or ignore this force of true love. I have read a number of articles on the evils of mixed marriage which seemed to me to lose considerable force just for this reason. The ordinary Englishman is incapable of a 'mariage de convenance,' which seems to suit the temperament of our continental neighbours. If an Englishman makes such an alliance it is rarely a success. Young people of a marriageable age in England naturally—and I think, for them, rightly—reject a suitor selected for them by their parents. They would also consider it priggish to make a deliberate survey of their Catholic acquaintances with a view to discovering the partner 'most worthy of them in all respects.' They are not anxious to meet the young woman who is most devout in Church and most expert in housewifery, nor the most hard-working and abstemious young man. Instead, they enjoy themselves innocently and wait till they fall in love. Then, if the object of their affection has no vice, they marry and rub along together in a sensible give-and-take fashion. There may be occasional quarrels, but their genuine love, safeguarded by the Sacrament of Matrimony, carries them successfully over the rough places, smooths their irritating mannerisms, and files away their faults until the marriage is

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justified by its success and they arrive at mutual understanding and respect, and a profound and enduring affection. But with the normal Englishman the fact of falling in love is the determining factor in making a choice of his partner, and in the present state of England the choice is as likely to fall on a non-Catholic as a Catholic.

It is curious that the Catholic hardly ever sets to work with determination to convert his beloved during that one period when he would have greatest chance of success—that is to say, the period before marriage. More than one non-Catholic has assured me that if it had been made a condition of the engagement, he would have become a Catholic; yet, once married, he could never be persuaded to give the Catholic religion a serious thought, and the chance of making a sincere convert of him was lost for ever. It is tragic that the Catholic partner ignores his power or is fearful of putting it to the test. If he cannot bring himself to say and to mean ‘I will not marry you unless you become a Catholic,’ he would be safe in making it a condition of engagement that the non-Catholic be thoroughly instructed in the Catholic faith, exactly as if it were a preliminary to reception into the Church. If conversion did not result, at least the non-Catholic could not later plead ignorance as an excuse for breaking his promises made to the Catholic at the moment of marriage, or for attempting to persuade her to courses condemned by the Church.

As things are, in the majority of cases, both parties to a mixed marriage contract it in an appalling and devastating state of ignorance. Love tends to deify the beloved, and they attribute to one another every beautiful quality of soul and mind—above all, super-human patience and understanding. This tendency is fair and holy and God-given. It is a heavenly compensation for the lack of charity which we meet in other

directions. But it may be misleading if worked to excess. For example, the Catholic dreams how, after marriage, the non-Catholic will find himself intrigued by Catholic practice, whereas it is possible that he may find signs of the cross in public bad taste, fish on Fridays a bore, and Sunday Mass a positive nuisance. The Catholic imagines an avid interest on the part of the non-Catholic while the children are being catechised, whereas the children may realise quicker than he himself how bored the non-Catholic is, in spite of gallant attempts at concealment. The Catholic foresees too little of the struggles ahead—for baptism as soon as possible after birth, which the non-Catholic considers unnecessary; for confession, which he thinks morbid; for Communion, which he thinks a menace to health; for a Catholic education in Catholic schools, which he considers inconvenient, unsuitable, and a social drawback. The young lover, still unmated, is utterly unable to imagine the part which his children will seize for themselves in his heart and mind and life. As surely as in a true Catholic marriage they will unite their parents more closely, so surely in a mixed marriage will they prove a source of division and discord. Inevitably the children will suffer, and it is their souls that will suffer most. The family whose history for four generations forms the text of this article furnishes proof from experience of this. In its fourth generation, the issue of mixed marriage is in the following plight. The children of the lapsed Catholic are being brought up as Nonconformists, and the one child of the slack Catholic as an Anglican. The children of the fervent Catholic are now nothing in particular because their Catholic mother died when they were babies and the non-Catholic father married again. The last mixed marriage will probably produce no children.

In these days the devil has a particularly effective weapon for wrecking a mixed marriage. From time to

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time cases arise when married people are advised not to have children. (It will readily be realised that such advice is more likely to be offered by the non-Catholic specialist than by the Catholic.) Now the Catholic wife who is married to a non-Catholic is in a very difficult position indeed if a specialist advises her not to have children. If she were married to a Catholic the only problem would be the value of the specialist's judgment. If his advice is accepted, then she and her husband would have to obey the clearly-defined laws of the Church. Nor would they despair of obeying them, thanks to the means which the Church provides—namely, the Sacraments, above all, the abiding grace of the Sacrament of Matrimony. But the non-Catholic husband is mentally at sea, and is without these helps. He has to depend mainly on natural good qualities which may not happen to be strong in him, and he probably lacks that self-discipline which the practice of Confession fosters. Moreover, he sees a simple—and, for him, reasonable—way out. He, therefore, advocates the use of contraceptives. If his wife rejects this solution of the problem—and she is bound to do so under pain of mortal sin—she must risk her life to fulfil her part of the marriage contract, and she must be made of heroic stuff to do so with love and good-will.

These are merely the everyday problems of the mixed marriage. In very rare cases the non-Catholic is converted after marriage. Not so rarely the Catholic loses his faith, sometimes from laziness and inertia, sometimes because he is too weak to continue the struggle to the end, sometimes because he crazily throws up the sponge at the very beginning. But as in none of these cases is his change of front due to conviction, so is he hounded to the end by remorse and craving for his lost faith. Happy he, if a death-bed repentance gives him peace of soul at last.

If, on the other hand, the Catholic sticks to his guns, the non-Catholic partner has his own grounds for discontentment and for revolt against what seems to him the tyranny of a Church which does not hesitate to dictate his conduct of intimate details in his relationship with wife and children. Its crowning insult is that it dictates successfully. I have in my possession a letter which proves the disastrous failure of mixed marriage from the point of view of the non-Catholic. A paragraph runs as follows :

'When I married I knew nothing of your religion, and was passively indifferent to all religious dogmas. Now I know something of it and am converted to active antagonism to all things Catholic. I hate it with a bitterness you do not conceive, and if I allowed my children to be Catholics some of that hate would become detached and we should become estranged. I unblushingly plead guilty to a breach of faith—with your religion—but I do not admit that the promise to bring my children up as Catholics was made with my eyes open. I would never again make the mistake of marrying a Catholic.'

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