

DIOCESE OF AUCKLAND

CATHOLIC MARRIAGE LAWS

A PASTORAL INSTRUCTION IN THREE PARTS

(Continued from last week.)

PART I.—Things more or less Fundamental.

I. The Family in Relation to Society.

II. The Family: Duty in the Home. Grounds of such Duty—(1) As furnished by pagan Greece and Rome; (2) as furnished by 'modern' Philosophies; (3) 'parasitic' Morality; (4) grounds of Duty in the Home, as furnished by Religion.

III. Religion and the Family—(1) The Church: her Mission and Authority in regard to the Family and Society. (A) Why the Church was founded. (B) The Church's Teaching Authority. (C) The Church's Authority: Legislative, Judicial, Executive. (D) The Church's Independence in the Exercise of her Authority. (E) The Church's Continuity. (F) Summary of Part I.

HENRY WILLIAM, by the Grace of God and the favor of the Holy Apostolic See, Bishop of Auckland: To the Clergy, Secular and Regular, and to the Laity, of the said Diocese, Health and Blessing in the Lord.

II. THE FAMILY: DUTY IN THE HOME.

The experience of ages, as set forth in the pages of Mommsen, Lecky, and other historians, goes to show that periods of decline of religious faith have also been periods of 'real abasement of the morality of humanity,' of greater or lesser degradation for woman, of greater or lesser disregard for child-life and child-rights, of disintegration in the home, of decay of national ideals and national strength. In our own day we are passing through one of those recurrent phases of widespread unbelief (with its usual accompaniment of increased credulity and superstition⁹), which pass at times like an epidemic over the face of society. It is no mere coincidence that, in lands much smitten with unbelief, we see in their dire operation the forces that are most destructive of a clean, holy, and wholesome individual and family life. Such, for instance, are the crying scandals of the 'divorce-mills'; the tendency to degrade matrimony into a mere temporary union; the gospel of 'free love' and the spread of coarse vices;¹⁰ the organised war upon the family; the increasing disregard for the sanctity of human life, as evidenced by the revived pagan teaching on suicide and the current proposals for the euthanasia or painless slaughter of the weak, the aged, the imbecile, and all that are called 'unfit.' In the whole range of the materialistic philosophy of our day there is not one principle which could, logically and consistently, condemn as violations of real moral obligation the early social conditions of Oneida, or the nameless abominations of the 'white slave' traffic, for which sundry standard-bearers in the atheistic war on religion in France were lately sentenced to long terms of seclusion from a social life on which they had long been a fetid cancer.¹¹ To the domestic and social plagues already enumerated, add the new education in destruction that is sweeping deep and broad below the surface of the social life of our day, and its foul results: the wholesale 'slaughter of the innocents,' and that other form of 'the sin of the century'—race suicide.

9. Lecky (himself a Rationalist) somewhere remarks on this accompaniment—we have not the reference to hand as these pages go to press.

10. Experience shows, and social science recognises, that the views and practices of a people in the matter of sexual relations form a good criterion of their general moral condition. Sorel, 'Le Systeme Historique,' vol. ii., p. 159.

11. A cable message said: 'The evidence (in the secret trial in Paris) is so shocking that even the French papers dare not publish it.' Some noteworthy comments on the case appeared in the Sydney 'Catholic Press' in January, 1912.

Writing of Herod's slaughter of the Holy Innocents of long ago, Father Faber says: 'We hear loud voices and shrill expostulations, as of women in misery talking all at once, like a jargon in the summer woods, when the birds have risen against the hawk, and then the fearful cry of excited lamentation, with the piteous moaning of the infant victims mingled with the inconsolable wailing of the brave, powerless mothers.' In our times a massacre of the innocents is going on night and day, more widespread, more cruel far, than that of Herod. And there is no wailing of 'brave, powerless mothers,' no 'shrill expostulation,' 'like a jargon in the summer woods'; for the new Herods are (by themselves or by their agents) none others than the mothers themselves! Many a fair-faced assassin of this kind (remarks an American writer) 'stalks about, proud as a Modoc chief in feathers and war-paint, but the scalps at her girdle are those of her own unborn offspring. When whole communities regard a household of children, however winsome and happy, as a matter for gibe and censure, and when reduction of family becomes the great domestic ambition, it ought to be said and known that the desire and the fact are among the surest indications of the decline of races and nations.'¹²

Here again we look in vain to the anti-Christian philosophies of our day for so much as a solitary principle which can consistently condemn, as violations of human duty or obligation, this criminal degradation of marriage, this disintegration of family life and discipline and character, this fount of the physical, mental, and moral decadence of nations. 'That nation is the richest,' says John Ruskin, 'which nourishes the greatest number of noble and happy human beings.' The highest values, both for the individual and the family and the nation, are moral values. A nation is great not because of its rich mines and its thriving farms and its fleets of formidable warships, but because of the high ideals and virtues of its homes and of those that dwell therein. And we must look elsewhere than to a 'modern' anti-religious philosophy for the principles that constitute high life-ideals as of obligation for the individual, for the home, and for the nation.

3. "PARASITIC" MORALITY.

In countries predominantly Christian, many beneficial external causes¹³ stand between such teachings and the full calculable results which they would achieve in a more favorable environment. Chief of these happy hindrances is the restraining, refining, and elevating moral influence of Christian sentiment, which is woven into the very substance of our civilisation and social life, and which endures long after the beliefs, out of which it grew, have ceased to gain assent. 'The Key to the World's Progress,' by Devas¹⁴, furnishes some illuminating reading in this connection. It is true of Christian sentiment, as of Moore's attar-jar, that

'You may break, you may shatter the vase if you will,
But the scent of the roses will hang round it still.'

In 'The Foundations of Belief,' Mr. Balfour compares the examples of virtue (apparently) unsupported by religion to 'parasites which live, and can only live, within the bodies of animals more highly organised than they.' 'Their spiritual life,' adds he, 'is parasitic; it is sheltered by convictions which belong, not to them, but to the society of which they form a part; it is nourished by processes in which they take no share. And when these convictions decay, and those processes come to an end, the alien life which they have maintained can scarce be expected to outlast them.'¹⁵ The Christian code of morality has created a healthy public feeling which governs or influences even those who reject Christianity. 'Christianity,' says Father Hull, S.J., 'has created a state of public opinion on matters ethical, which will long continue to survive when the grounds on which it rested have disappeared. The

12. James C. Fernald, 'The New Womanhood' (New York, 1894, p. 330).

13. Several of these are stated in the present writer's 'Secular versus Religious Education' (Dunedin, 1909, pp. 38-9).

14. London, 1906, pp. 18-58.

15. Pages 87-8. In plant-life, the climbing parasite known as the dodder furnishes a very good illustration in point.