

CHILDREN FIRST

THE ETHICS OF DIVORCE.

(By THE REV. P. J. COONEY, in the *Lyttelton Times*.)

Now and then one would start fearfully and stare up the narrow road obscured by Eucalyptus trees. The boat was to land at Calcutta, and a native waggon would be used to bring the mother up the coastwise road to their camp.

The sun rose higher and higher remorselessly, urging on the hours. Father Augustine drew on his pipe. The acrid fumes bit at the roof of his parched throat. He struck it against the bench and stepped on the dottle, then posed, arms folded, staring up the road.

It was almost with relief that they heard the clicking of wheels and the rustling of brush. Father Augustine with grave courtesy extended his hand to the bright-faced old lady who was its only passenger. "I am Father Augustine," he said simply.

She smiled and then they saw the resemblance to her son. She extended her hand to the squat little man, his companion, who accepted it solemnly.

Then her face clouded.

"John," she questioned sharply, "Father John, where is he?"

Father Augustine answered her. He drew back the flap of the tent and motioned within. "In here," he said gently. "He felt unwell and we made him stay in bed." When she entered he dropped the tent fold helplessly, then held his breath waiting for the mother's despairing cry. He caught the other's eye and lifted his shoulders in an expressive gesture of despair.

From the tent came a rapturous cry of greeting, then a flurry of inarticulate conversation—and only that. Unbelieving the two men stared at each other.

The mother appeared in the opening. Tears were on her cheeks but her eyes were smiling.

"Come in," she commanded gayly, "how you frightened me. Why, he isn't sick at all."

Incredulously they stared at the man who, propped on his elbow, smiled at them from the bed. The eyes that smiled affectionately at them were clear and shining, the features were pinched a little but well defined and his voice as he introduced them was strong and resonant.

Outside the tent again the two looked at each other.

"Tell me," said the small companion. "My eyes may have tricked me but didn't his face look like that of a man in perfect health?"

The other nodded slowly.

"Do you think," the other persisted, "that it was a —?"

"Why not?" said Father Augustine. "They were both clients of Mary and Mary can surely work miracles."

"Besides," he added softly, "isn't Mary herself a mother?"—Rev. J. S. Sexton, in *The Magnificat*.

In a recent article on the ethics of neo-Malthusian birth control, written for the *Lyttelton Times*, I set out to show that where there is an exact science and art of procuring sexual pleasure without offspring, facilities are afforded for dissolving marriage. It is the childless marriages that lead to divorce; and, again, it is divorce that leads to childless marriages. Hence, psychologically speaking neo-Malthusian birth control tends to loosen the marriage tie, and the loosened marriage tie tends to develop neo-Malthusian birth control.

Statistics show that during the year 1923 there were 666 petitions for dissolution of marriage in New Zealand, and that of the parties concerned in the petitions 232 had no children, while 153 cases there was only one living issue. These statistics throw light on the ethics—and, shall we say, civics?—of divorce. Since the enactment of the first New Zealand Divorce Act in 1867 we have proceeded more or less rapidly down the slippery slope until the present day, when we have silently and almost surreptitiously reached divorce by mutual consent? Everybody knows that for years past the great majority of divorce cases are in effect collusive. All that is now necessary to procure a dissolution of marriage is for the parties to separate by mutual consent, remain so separated for three years, after which either may proceed for divorce!

Christian Civilisation.

The structure of Christian civilisation rests upon the foundation of the family. And the family rests upon the firm rock of a holy, indissoluble and single family tie. Everything that threatens either the unity, sanctity or indissolubility of the marriage relation menaces also the stability of the State. It is an old lesson. But it is a lesson that many politicians seem to have forgotten, and many nominal Christians never to have quite learned. It is difficult to prove ethical principles. Indeed, it is usually difficult to prove any principles, and especially ethical principles. Strictly speaking, principles are not so much objects of proof as means of proof. We do not usually prove principles by anything else; we prove other things by principles.

Strangely enough, the thinkers tell us that the only means of proving First Principles to one who denies them is by a *reductio ad absurdum*. In other words, any one who denies First Principles will soon find himself in a horrible mess. If he denies intellectual first principles he will soon be floundering in a horrible intellectual mess. If he denies ethical first principles he will sooner or later be wallowing in a reeking moral mess. It is remarkable that the Ten Commandments which contain the ethical First Principles of Christianity, do not announce these ethical ultimates in the form of principles of statements, but in the form of commands. They do not say: "Stealing is morally wrong," but: "Thou shalt not

steal." This is an emphatic way of stating that ethical principles, being practical principles, are only truly accepted when they are put into practice. To hold them is to live them. "This do, and thou shalt live. This do not, and thou shalt die. The wages of sin is—death."

Ethical Principles.

In other words, ethical principles, though patient of intellectual statement, and therefore of intellectual proof, are neither fully stated nor fully proved in a merely intellectual and abstract way. By their fruits they are known. But as fruits are effects which need time for development, ethical principles can be denied without at once protesting against their denial, by their inevitable harvest of harm. Hence, in the matter of divorce, we must be armed against the classes of men whose profession does not deal mainly with ethical proofs. Thus the scientist is conversant with the proofs of the laboratory; the doctor with the proofs of the operating-room; the lawyer with the proofs of the witness box. These methods of proof are all valid for their own subject-matter. Yet it would seem to be indisputable that for another subject-matter, viz., ethics, other methods of proof are alone valid. And in an ethical matter of such fundamental importance as marriage and divorce it would seem equally indisputable that only the official ethical expert, the Church's priesthood, could be expected to apply these delicate methods of proof, with the carefulness of science. Thus, although the Catholic priesthood does not claim fully to understand everything relating to marriage—more especially in those matters that lie outside the domain of ethics—yet no other profession can understand the Sacrament of Marriage better than does the priesthood, and especially the celibate priesthood. The celibate having offered up to his Master in holocaust the previous quality of wedded love, is not likely to belittle his own sacrifice. Indeed, with that poetry which is the heart of the liturgical achievements he alone is found not only to countenance wedlock, but to bless it. The State sanctions wedlock, the Church sanctifies it. The State sometimes makes monogamous marriage a social institution; the Church exalts it as a divine Sacrament. Moreover, the priesthood, being accustomed to the steadfastness of Divine love, takes human love at its own valuation. As the phraseology of love is always a profession of eternal fidelity, the Church takes love to mean what it says, by accepting the plighted troth as being "till death."

Marriage a Sacrament.

Yet the Church of Jesus Christ, which may be said to have instituted monogamous marriage, has never looked upon it merely as an indissoluble relationship between two parties—a mere bi-lateral contract regulated and measured by commutative justice. In the eyes of the Church marriage is a great

HEALTHY LIVER FOR A HEALTHY BODY.

When your liver is sluggish you suffer from dizziness, sick headache, loss of appetite, etc., For these and allied complaints take **ELAXA TABLETS**. Purely vegetable these tablets stimulate the liver to increased activity and aid digestion. PRICE 1/6 per bottle post free from . . .

W. F. Short

MONUMENTAL SCULPTOR

Every description Monumental Work undertaken in latest and most up-to-date style.

POWDERHAM STREET

New Plymouth