

A MIXED MARRIAGE

BY BISHOP SHINE

THE number of mixed marriages in this country is so appallingly great that it is wise to consider seriously what a mixed marriage means and entails, and its too frequent evil consequences: the weakening of the faith of the Catholic partner and the loss of the faith of his or her children.

A happy marriage! That is the desire of most young men and girls. There are numberless happy marriages. There are rich people in high position who are happy in marriage. There are poor people who are equally happy. It is not wealth or position that makes a marriage happy. There are many husbands and wives who can look back through a vista of forty, fifty, or even sixty years and recall great trials, trials that have come from sickness, penury, and death; trials that have come from serious disappointments and high hopes unfulfilled; yet they have been happy. They have grown old together, always sharing the same interests, always with the same convictions on the big things that matter, always recognising the same source of comfort in their sorrow, and always, even in the darkest hour, bright in their hearts with the same undying hope.

Marriage a Serious Step

Marriage is a serious step; it is an important undertaking. It is a life-long bond. You put your happiness into another's hands. For years you and that other will live together as if you were one life and not two. You will be two in one flesh. Husband will leave father and mother and cleave to his wife, in sickness and in health, in riches and in poverty. God joins you together and no man can sunder you.

Youth is a time of impulse and of hope. Seldom does the youthful eye see clearly down the future when romance has faded, and the days are drab, and time has developed tendencies good or bad in you and in that other human being with whom you have linked your life for ever. Happiness is possible for you. Happiness in like circumstances has often been achieved. Is it not, however, obvious that unity is necessary if the union is to be peaceful? Unity of thought and conviction regarding the purpose of life and the great fundamental things of life, unity of religious belief, when both think alike with regard to Friday abstinence and Sunday Mass, the Priesthood and the See of Peter, the helping of the dead and the power of prayer; when both attach the same importance to Our Lord's words: "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his soul?"; when both can together say from their hearts: "I believe in the holy Catholic Church, the Communion of Saints, the forgiveness of sin, the resurrection of the body and life everlasting."

Choice Made Without Judgment

Without such unity of faith there is anxiety and disaffection. What one holds sacred the other looks upon as superstitious. What one regards as all-important the other despises. Without such unity how can there be that true sympathy which smooths away the roughness that chafes even the best of souls? True, there is often unhappiness even when there is unity of faith, but it is because that faith is not practised or because the original choice was made without judgment and with prayerless precipitancy.

It sometimes happens that a mixed marriage is a happy marriage, in which husband and wife are visibly blessed and their children are solid and fervent in the faith. But we venture to say that in such cases the non-Catholic is, perhaps without knowing it, a Catholic except in name, with a genuine love and appreciation of the Catholic faith.

So many boys and girls set out with a sense of certainty that their mixed marriage will be one of the blessed ones. To make that enterprise in such a spirit is to gamble with life. How few are the fortunate ones!

Those Promises!

You contemplate marriage. You meet someone with whom acquaintance soon ripens into friendship. You know he is

not of your faith. He, perhaps, despises or detests it; very likely he knows nothing about it, or if he has any ideas regarding it they are probably false. You, possibly, do not tell him at first that you are a Catholic, or, if you do, you give him the impression that you consider it no barrier between you and him. Not many weeks before the marriage day you timidly inform him that he is supposed to promise to bring up your children Catholics. Perhaps he refuses, perhaps he hesitates, perhaps he says he has no religion and you can do as you like. You get married, and what do the years tell?

Marriage is a serious step. Why did you not regard it as such? Why did you not pray for him? Why did you not go to Holy Communion for him for months before the marriage? Why did you not enlighten him about your faith and tell him what the Church really teaches, and show him by your life and explanation the peerless beauty of the Church? It did not seem to matter then. It matters now, and it will matter all your life and maybe for generations.

Enforced Silence

Yours was a mixed marriage. You married in hope. You were confident that no power could influence you or turn you from the straight way of your faith. But it is hard to kick against the goad. It is hard to lead a lonely life, and life is most lonely when your nearest and dearest, the person who is half your life, cannot share your highest thoughts and your deepest convictions, or your most sacred interests. Your husband is an honourable man, he is also kind and considerate; he would not hurt your feelings by saying an ignorant, wounding word about the history or doctrine of your Church, but does not this mean enforced silence? Silence about all the dear, pulsing life of your parish and your Church, the Mass, Benediction, the Sacraments, the parochial activities. That is hard, even when your husband is, as so many non-Catholic husbands are, thoughtful men of honour, who would put their wife's happiness before their own; but the springs of happiness are too deep down in the soul, and no-one can release them who is a stranger to the energies of the faith within. Life on the agree-to-differ basis can be very desolate. To eschew all discussion of, and reference to, things spiritual would be a penitential and devastating ordeal, especially when the training of the children at home and at school demands consideration; though, on the other hand, to discuss such vital matters without the possibility of mutual understanding and agreement would be futile. And so the silence and the loneliness and the struggle go on, and you grow tired and your spirit is worn down by years of sad endeavour to find success where, in the circumstances, it is so difficult to find it.

Your Faith a Dead Thing

But what would your life be in spite of the hope and courage with which you began if your husband was hostile to your faith? Ah, then, the struggle is poignant. No wonder many give it up in despair. Five years of such married life see your faith a dead thing, not yet shattered, but dead.

Happiness does not easily co-exist with such a gruesome reminder of the great religious principles on which all happiness depends. A common faith makes the closest bond in marriage. In a mixed marriage there are opposing faiths; what should beautifully unite, cruelly separates.

Right and Wrong

How often hope in a mixed marriage is quickly swallowed up in disappointment. You find that your view of marriage is not your husband's. Your moral tenets are not his. What he says is right you know to be wrong. He countenances and demands practices which are gravely unlawful in your eyes. You try to convince him, but you fail. You end by pretending that he has convinced you, and your life will be one long-drawn-out contradiction of the voice of your conscience. So numerous are mixed marriages that there is no lack of experience to tell us that the tolerant smile of engagement days, when your faith seemed to glow under it, not rarely changes into a frown of disapproval when the first child is born; and when that child is ready for school the promise of Catholic upbringing has been turned into a stern prohibition.

We have mostly referred to marriages in which it is the wife who is the Catholic. What we have said is equally true when the husband is a Catholic, even more deplorably true.

Our Faith is Priceless

We daily profess our belief in the One, Holy, Catholic Church. We believe that Christ Our Lord founded one Church and only one, the Catholic Church. It was the Church of old England; it is the Church of the ages; it is the Church of the wide world; it is the Church of God. Its teaching is God's teaching. Should even an angel from heaven come to teach different doctrine, let him be anathema. That is our belief. In that belief we want to live and die. In that belief we want to bring up our children. Knowing the truth, beauty, and divinity of our faith, we would that all shared it, and we deplore the disunity that disfigures the country today. Our faith is our most treasured possession. It is priceless. It may not be bartered away. It is more precious than any man or woman, of more value than all the wealth and honours of the world.

Not so long ago our forefathers gave up lands and life to keep that faith. Are you recklessly going to endanger it? It is a fearful thing to frame conditions in which your children are likely to grow up with a mere veneer of Catholicism, or an utter contempt of it. The faith by which the just man lives, the faith of so many generations of their blood that have gone before them, is theirs no longer. Can a Catholic parent witness such a catastrophe and be happy? Many evils stop with the present, but this evil goes on into the far future, affecting not only your children but their children, so that the unborn are robbed of God's most precious gift.

The Children and Religious Practices

In these days, with so many dangers and temptations on every side, it is by no means easy to bring up Catholic children in the fervent practice of their faith even when a Catholic father shows in his life its grandeur and attractiveness, and a Catholic mother draws them and holds them by her devotion and her prayers. How difficult, then, to keep them true to their religion when one parent actually does not believe in it, when even though he makes no slighting remark about it, he is indifferent, and never by word or deed encourages or approves; never by action leads or guides so as to intensify his children's pride in and loyalty to the faith of their fathers.

But what shall we say when, as is sometimes the case in a mixed marriage, insults and even blasphemy are expressed against God's Church and its teaching. Pity the children whom a Catholic parent tries to bring up in the faith when such an antagonistic attitude on the part of the other parent tends to alienate and embitter them. Are we surprised that there are so many failures?

Hidden Sorrow

Ah, how many regret that they ever took the step which they were advised not to take! We know how they would now advise a young Catholic who thought of a mixed marriage. They would say "Don't." Who could tell their whole history? They have hidden their sorrow. God only knows the grief that has gnawed at their hearts as they themselves, discouraged and despondent, have tried to practise their religion under almost insuperable difficulties, and they have seen the bloom wear off from the faith of their little ones in the blighting atmosphere of infidelity. They are, however, grateful that they have not been quite so desperate as many others who have given up, through sheer hopelessness, their efforts to live a Catholic life and who watch, either with an aching heart or sad resignation, their children grow up pagan strangers to the faith their ancestors loved.

An Exemplary Life

Have you contracted a mixed marriage? If it is one of the happy mixed marriages and all goes well, thank God. If you have difficulties in your married life and experience the trials and anxieties we have spoken of, make the best of it. Do you pray regularly and perseveringly for your non-Catholic partner? Do you try by an exemplary life to show what the Catholic faith can do for men and women? Are you not aware that many of the difficulties of a mixed marriage come from the careless life of the Catholic husband or wife? A good Catholic life is irresistible. Pray; teach your children to pray that good may come out of evil, that light may shine in the darkness. Never lose heart, never lose hope. The greater your difficulties the greater should be your efforts by prayer, kindness, patience, example, and frequent Communion to secure

your happiness and the happiness of your partner in life.

Think Prayerfully

To those who are thinking of marriage we would say again: think calmly. Think prayerfully, think of the future, of your happiness in the years to come and in eternity. Think of your faith. One false step taken impulsively has often ruined a whole life. You will be happiest with one of your own faith; you both will think alike, take the same view of life, regard the saving of the soul as paramount, have the same idea of married life and its obligations, the same sense of sin, the same conception of responsibility for your children's welfare. And, we assure you, all this is needed to spell your happiness.
