

THE YOUNG LADY SAYS “NO”!

To a Mixed Marriage

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Nuala is a young lady of my acquaintance—and her name is about all that is really fictitious in what I shall tell of her. Here, in part, is a letter she sent me a week ago:

“My dear Father,

“For some time past I have been friendly with a very nice young man of about my own age and social standing. But alas, Father, how tragic; he is not a Catholic.

“From the moment we met we felt drawn to each other. In all our likes and dislikes, all our ideals and ambitions, in everything you might say, we are eminently suited. We have everything in common—everything that is, but the one thing that matters most to me: Religion.

“Recently we talked it over, and I am glad to say that he, no less than I. is no believer in Mixed Marriages. We think they are too difficult to work. If we married as we are, he is a devout Anglican, and I a pick-this-adjective yourself Catholic, there would be forever too much holding us apart.”

“So we agreed that it is not quite fair to God or to ourselves to continue a courtship under these circumstances, and for the time being we have broken off the friendship.

“Fortunately, the might-have-been-my husband is friendly with a kind Jesuit priest, with whom he can talk religion easily, so I am not without some hope that he may become a Catholic. If he did, I fancy the happy ending for both of us would be only just round the corner. He said he would not dream of turning unless he were fully convinced that ours is the true religion revealed by Christ—and for that, as for so much else, I admire him more than I have a mind to say.

“He promised to pray daily that God may guide him in the way of truth and give him grace to do His Will in all things, and—need I say it?—I also am praying my knees off for him, and trying not to be too selfish in. doing so; I am going to daily Mass and Holy Communion in the hope that I might help to merit for him the spiritual comfort of a conversion that would be at the same time a very emotional and earthly consolation to my own so matrimonially minded heart. I know I can count on your prayers also, Father dear, and I feel sure that if we all pray as we ought God will be generous with His graces.

“Finally, lest you still be in any doubt about it, a Mixed Marriage is altogether off the menu! I could do without a ‘white wedding,’ and I could dispense with the bridesmaids, the trainbearers, the pews packed with relatives and friends, the soprano singing Ave Maria, the organ thundering out the Wedding March, the confetti, the photographers, the ‘happy-making’ reception, and all those other refinements that I’ll surely have if I can, but never and for nobody will I marry without all the spirituality and blessings to which my Baptism has entitled me; never will I wed without the happiness of a Nuptial Mass and the joy of kneeling with my husband to receive Holy Communion; for while I am woman enough to know what I want, I flatter myself also that I am Catholic enough to know what God wants, and God’s Will is more important than mine. . .

Readers of a romantic disposition will probably be horrified by Nuala’s letter and will feel little sympathy with the young lady herself. Those who have grown up on novels of the type entitled: “Love is the Law,” “Love, the Devouring Flame.” “The World Well Last for Love,” will say of this letter: “This isn’t love. It’s too cold and calculating. It’s too lighthearted, too much at ease. If this pair really loved each other, they couldn’t break it off as they did. If they are properly in love, they should let nothing come between them: they are fools to go against Fate: they will be sorry when it’s too late.”

But I, who know Nuala, know how to read between the lines of what she has written. I know how loath she is to grumble and how well she can as a rule keep her heartaches to herself. Religion is so real for her that she can sacrifice herself and her own will when religion seems to demand this, but holiness hasn't desensitised her, or hardened her woman's heart against the piercing of pain, or dried up the fountains of tearfulness in her. Her sacrifice has been very far from easy, and indicates no want in her love. One doesn't "pray one's knees off" for somebody to whom one is indifferent, or enlist the aid of others in petitioning God for something about which one cares little or nothing.

With her swift feminine insight and her sound Catholic instinct Nuala knows that pure love is a gift and grace of God, designed to protect the soul from sin and safeguard it against selfishness. She realises that true love leads to God for it has come from God, and that it leans on Him for it finds in Him the strength it needs to make firm, its native frailty. Therefore, she is right in refusing to gamble with her happiness, right in terminating a romance that does not seem likely to ripen into the reality of her dreams, right even in breaking her heart while repair is still possible, instead of waiting until it has been shattered into so many fragments that a lifetime of tears will not suffice to cement it into a fair semblance of what it once was.

THE REAL EXPLANATION.

The real explanation of Nuala's letter is Nuala's past. To understand her longing for a good Catholic husband you should have lived and grown up as she did in a model Catholic household, and have had such ideal Catholic parents as she had, simple, industrious, deeply religious folk, intensely devoted to each other and to their children, yet, in no wise extravagantly ostentatious of their affection.

A picture of the Madonna and Child hung over Nuala's cradle, and her mother prayed over her as she rocked her to sleep. No sooner did Nuala learn to lisp than she was taught to form the holy Names of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and to fold her baby hands in prayer. Among her earliest recollections are those of being brought each afternoon by her mother to the nearby Catholic Church, with Christmas visits to the Crib as the highlights of these little excursions.

When old enough she joined her elder sister as a pupil at the local Convent school, where she was educated not merely to knowledge, but to holiness. First Confession, First Holy Communion. Confirmation, these were, the milestones of her journeying through childhood, and all her life long she will remember the happiness of kneeling with Daddy, Mummy and her brothers and sisters at the altar rails every Sunday morning. Sometimes, too, at breakfast after the family Communion on a Sunday, there would be a discussion on the parish priest's sermon, the lessons of which would be interpreted and paraphrased for the little one's benefit.

Needless to say, the nightly recitation of the Rosary was part of the invariable routine of Nuala's home. Only for some really big reason might anybody miss being present at this, and there was no false shyness about inviting visitors to kneel and take part in it.

'She recalls the happiness of her childhood being but once overshadowed by sadness. Daddy fell dangerously ill with pneumonia, that came on so suddenly that he had to be nursed through it at home. A hush of most fearsome apprehension descended on all when the doctor came and told Mummy to send for the priest, while he himself made arrangements to have nurses come to look after the patient. Nuala and her sister went for the priest, who hastened to the sick man, heard his Confession, anointed him, and gave him Holy Viaticum. How consoled they were by the thought that Our Blessed Lord Himself had come to visit them in their distress! And how privileged they knew themselves to be when, each day while the danger lasted, the priest brought the Saviour again to Daddy, and all the family knelt about his bed in tearful thankfulness. People used to say to Daddy afterwards that he owed his recovery to the way his children prayed for him while he was sick, for when they were not praying for him at home they were praying for him before the Blessed Sacrament in the church.

In due course Nuala outgrew the local school and had to join the elder sister again, this time as a boarder in another Convent, a secondary school, some distance from home. Leaving home was a dreadful wrench, but she soon settled down to the simple discipline, which, after all, wasn't so very different from what she had known at home. The girls were nice

and friendly on the whole, and the nuns, she thought, were darlings, to whom one could talk easily and in whom one could confide without difficulty.

Schooldays over, she took up nursing as a career: it held some appeal for her unselfish nature: it would be a useful preparation for the more ultimate career as wife and mother that she ambitions.

THE CONTRAST.

Nuala stands now at the parting of the ways, but her face is turned towards Heaven. She has the star of faith to guide her in her journey through life. She is too wise to risk the good things of eternity for the trifles of time, too shrewd to barter everlasting happiness for the joy that is reckoned in days and weeks and years, the joy that must some day come to an end.

Nuala has lived too long “in Arcady” to be attracted more than momentarily by life elsewhere. She has lived too long with the best to find full enjoyment in the second-best. She has known how perfect can be the happiness and peace and content of the Catholic home, and she wants such to be the atmosphere of the home that would be hers.

Her dream is to follow in her mother’s footsteps, to marry a good Catholic boy, to mother his children, and to rear them in all the traditional practices of religion in which she was brought up herself.

If she married a non-Catholic, could she have religious pictures in her home? Could she have holy water fonts in the bedrooms and beside the front door? Could she have the nightly Rosary, with her family and friends kneeling around her? Could she present herself with her husband and children at the altar rails to receive her Lord? Could religion be freely discussed at table for the benefit of the children? Could she be sure that it would please her husband to have the children educated in Catholic schools where religion is given the place that rightfully belongs to it—for that matter, could she even be sure that her husband and she would see eye to eye on the fundamentals of married life; what if he, following his false religion in its equally false moral teachings, wished to have recourse to most unethical methods to limit the size of the family to what he thought his means and her health would justify? If she were ill, would her husband lead the family in praying for her? Would he send somebody for the priest and welcome the latter’s visits to her? If he should outlive her, would he see to it that the prayers of the Church and the Sacrifice of the Saviour would succour her beyond the tomb, and would he be so faithful to her after her death as to set a promise to her above his own religious beliefs by continuing to rear the children in a religion that he regards as false?

Nuala is wise in wishing to build for happiness on a basis of religion. Catholicism must occupy the foremost place in her home; it must not be relegated to second place, kept hidden away, a dangerous topic that might offend her husband or his friends, a thing to be ashamed of, a septic focus in the household, a continuous threat to her married happiness.

In her own home she had seen every-thing beautified by religion. Their mutual Catholicism welded her parents’ love into a, bond stronger than death. Their common acceptance of the moral teaching of the Catholic Church intensified their trust in each other, and served to ensure their faithfulness to their marriage vows. Nuala, now old enough to appreciate all this, wants love such as this in her own married life; she wants religion to bind her to her husband and him to her; she wants no conflict between them on the moral basis of matrimony, no danger that, in line with his co-religionists, he may come to believe in birth prevention, or divorce, or free love. She will have Christ Himself come sacramentally to bless her wedding, as of old He blessed a marriage in Cana of Galilee; she looks forward to seeing Him come as guest during the Nuptial Mass into the hearts of herself and her life’s partner, so that henceforth they may beat as one in His Love, and so that during all their life together their Lord may ever be their Light, whether in the thrill of happiness or the tearfulness of sorrow.

TRADITIONAL CATHOLIC OUTLOOK.

I have dwelt at what to some may appear too great length on Nuala’s letter, but I have done so very deliberately, for I see in it the traditional Catholic outlook on the Sacrament of Matrimony, and the traditional Catholic mistrust of mixed marriages.

From the very beginning, the Church laid to her heart that sentence of Scripture: *There was a marriage at Cana of Galilee, and the Mother of Jesus was there: and Jesus also was invited.* As Our Blessed Lady was welcomed at Cana, Holy Mother Church wants to be welcomed at Catholic weddings, and she wants Jesus, too, to be invited. For that reason, she has surrounded the marriage rite with most impressive ritual, and, like the ordination of a priest, she has linked this Sacrament to the Mass, interrupting the liturgy at a most solemn moment, while Christ is really present on the altar, to pray over the newly-plighted couple. She goes even further. Marriage being a sort of permanent Sacrament, she permits the Nuptial blessing to be given long afterwards to those who were unable to receive it on their wedding day, because, for example, they had been married during Lent.

This desire of the Church to see marriage solemnised by Holy Mass and the lovers pledge themselves to each other in the reception of the Body of Christ dates away back to apostolic times. St. Evaristus, a Pope of the Second century after Christ wrote: "It is a tradition coming down to us from the Apostles themselves that marriage should be celebrated at the time of the Holy Sacrifice." And about a hundred years later we find Tertullian, an outstanding early Christian writer, noted for his skill in argument and his facility of expression, confessing that he is "unable to find words in which to express the beauty of that marriage that has been performed by the Church, strengthened by the Holy Sacrifice, sealed by the Nuptial blessing, proclaimed by Heaven's angels, and ratified by God Himself, the Father of us all."

All through the centuries the Church continued to assert the tremendous sacredness, and the profound religious significance, of matrimony. In Christian Marriage it sees a divine symbolism. As the Church perceives it, there is between the marriage of two Catholics and that of two pagans, a difference that might well be termed a consecration. Christian wedlock signifies Heaven upon earth. It symbolises the union of the divine and human in Christ. It betokens all the angelic beauty of faithfulness and chaste love set like a jewel in the biological bonds and bodily urges that unite husband and wife on the material plane.

PIUS XI ON MARRIAGE.

"Marriage", said Pope Pius XI, "has a sacredness that is intimately bound up with religion and everything that is holy. It is sacred in its *origin*, since it has God for its author, and has been, even from the beginning, a foreshadowing of the Incarnation of the Word of God. It is sacred in its *purpose*, which is the begetting and educating of children for God, and the binding of man and wife to God through Christian love and mutual support. It is sacred in its very *nature*, for wedlock finds its explanation in the far-seeing providence of God, that made it the means of transmitting human life, and that constituted the parent's, the ministers, as it were, of the Divine Omnipotence. Add to this the further element of nobleness that the *Sacrament* confers on Christian marriage, dignifying and elevating it to such a degree that it appeared to Saint Paul as a great sacrament, honourable in every way.

"This religious character or wedlock, the sublime way in which it signifies grace and the union between Christ and the Church, quite obviously demands of those about to get married that they approach the Sacrament with a holy reverence, and spare no pains to make their union resemble as nearly as possible its most perfect model, the union between Christ and the Church."

PIUS XI ON MIXED MARRIAGES.

"There are some who, contract marriages rashly and without due consideration. The Church, loving her children as a true mother, and being full of concern for their welfare, tries to dissuade them, but to no purpose. By so acting they fail conspicuously in the reverence they owe the great Sacrament of Matrimony— sometimes, alas, with danger to their eternal salvation.

"One may find the Church's attitude to mixed marriages stated in more than a few of her documents. These are synthesised as follows in the Codex of Church Law:

"Everywhere and with the greatest strictness does the Church forbid marriages between baptised persons, one of whom is a Catholic and the other a member of a schismatical or heretical sect. If it should also happen that there is danger

that the Catholic party will lose the Faith, or that the children will be perverted, then, as well as being forbidden by Canon Law, the marriage is banned by the Divine Law.”

“Circumstances are sometimes such that the Church does not refuse to dispense in this strict prohibition. It does so only where the marriage is not also forbidden by the Divine Law, and only where the dangers inherent in all mixed marriages are provided against by suitable safeguards. *But even when it does dispense, it is unlikely that the marriage will not be in some way detrimental to the Catholic party*

“Experience shows that mixed marriages frequently lead to deplorable defections from religion among the offspring, or at least to a headlong descent into that indifference that is intimately allied to impiety.

“One must also remember that in mixed marriages it becomes much more difficult to imitate by a lively harmony of spirit that mystery we spoke of already, namely, that close union there is between Christ and His Church. As this concord of spirit is the sign and mark of the Church of Christ, so should it also be conspicuous in Christian wedlock as its glory and ornament. But where there is diversity of mind and outlook and feeling, the close union of spirit and heart is likely to be broken, or, at the least, weakened.”

MOTHER CHURCH.

Perhaps the most significant sentence in this long quotation from the most famous document dealing with marriage that has appeared in modern times, the great encyclical of December 31st, 1930, is: “The Church, *loving her children as a true mother, and full of concern for their welfare*, tries to dissuade them from mixed marriages.”

Far too many people, even some who love old Mother Church, think that she is strangely severe in her attitude to mixed marriages and would like to see her relax the stringency of her regulations in this matter. “After all,” they say, “you can’t streamline love. Catholics will continue to fall in love, even though they may not want to, with non-Catholics. Few people are so foolish as to marry outside their own religion unless they are tremendously, in love; and the Church ought to make things easy for and give a little motherly consolation to such .of her children as have been smitten by affection for some- black sheep outside the fold, instead of terrifying them with gloomy forebodings of the difficulties that lie ahead of them in marriage, and making more problems for them before they can get married, and denying them the blessing and religious ceremonies which they need maybe more than those marrying fellow-Catholics.”

People who argue thus about the Church’s attitude to mixed marriages are richer in sentimentalism than in sound reasoning. They are so anxious to be kind that they are being too kind; forgetting that one can be cruel by being over-kind; as might be a father, who, rather than see the tears and hear the wails of his baby, would let the infant play with a naked razor.

The Church is not wanting in affection for her children. She loves them all tenderly and truly. But neither is she wanting in intelligence. She is *insanely* fond of nobody, never *blindly* in love with nation or individual. You may think she is the less human for that, but if you can bring yourself to realise that reason and the ability to regulate, actions by prudence constitute the greatest glory of humanity, you will soon agree with me that the Church in her attitude is supremely wise. The more one renounces, or lacks reason, the less noble and the less enlightened are one’s motives.

It is precisely because the Church loves her children that she uses every device to dissuade them from marrying outsiders. The keen, searching light of reason and the dispassionate wisdom of her many centuried existence have shown her what frightful risks there are in all mixed marriages, and she knows that she would be unfaithful to her children’s trust in her if she mitigated in any way the strictures she pronounces against these dangerous unions. She knows that, at the worst, they lead souls innumerable to Hell; for if the Catholic is careless in the Faith or if the non-Catholic asserts himself with regard to the education of the children, then these children and their posterity are lost to the Church.

At best, Mother Church knows, mixed marriages are, as marriages, only a poor second best; they are a most risky gamble; and the dangers in them are not necessarily lessened by the fact that the parties love each other very intensely.

Mixed marriages are only a poor second-best because the best things in married life, the procreation and education of children and the enabling them to grow up into healthy members of Christ’s mystical body, are not regarded with unity

of outlook by both husband and wife.

Mixed marriages are a risky gamble, because the stakes are so much greater than whatever return success could bring; for the stakes are immortal souls, the souls of the Catholic party and of his children and of his children's children; and the return, even where the mixed marriage proves successful, is only a few years of earthly happiness and the very remote possibility of converting the non-Catholic.

The dangers are not always lessened by the fact that the parties are very much in love with each other, because love leads so naturally to self-sacrifice and self-surrender. The more one loves, more eagerly one longs to give. The more one loves, the more one seeks to spare the beloved all pain. This means that the more the parties in a mixed marriage are, attached to each other, the more likely the Catholic will be to repress his religion, the more ready will he be to permit the misuse of matrimonial rights and the more certainly will he not insist on the Catholic education of the children. No, indeed: love will not exorcise the evil spirits that haunt the mixed marriage. Love will not protect the cradle from the dangerous aura of affectionate unbelief: it will not save the child from the sinister attraction of a heretical and fond father or mother. Love can by no means ensure that the Catholic will be any more faithful to his religious beliefs, or any less accommodating in them, than the non-Catholic.

IN LOVE WITH AN OUTSIDER?

"But Father!" you may say, "you haven't answered that remark about Catholics continuing to fall in love with non-Catholics even against their will. Surely mixed marriages are sometimes necessary."

No; they are not really necessary. I can't see that they are much more necessary than divorce. Granted that people may fall in love even against their better judgment, they can still use their reason and deliberately fall out of love. It may sound frightfully cold and unromantic, but it is no more than the bare truth. Love can be "streamlined," and love affairs sometimes *have* to be broken up; and, if they really want to, and try hard enough, people can fall out of love—I know the novel readers won't agree; and if their ignorance is bliss, I pray they won't live to find out its folly.

Love, like any other emotion, can and must be controlled. It has been done. It is still being done, day after day, even by persons who have not the help and consolation of Sacrament and Sacrifice as Catholics have. How often has it happened that hearts have outstripped heads, and persons have found themselves in love with other persons' husbands or wives, or with individuals equally as "unattainable"? If reared in the schools of romance, such unfortunate persons might spend the remainder of their lives in a foolish, perhaps, sinful, day-dream in brighter-than-daylight technicolour of a most improbable "what-might-have-been." If they are wise they treat the whole occurrence as a mental infection to be eliminated as rapidly and as completely as possible from their emotional system. This is a process quite likely to rival in pain and unpleasantness its physical counterpart, and, unlike the latter, it has to be achieved without anaesthetics.

BREAK IT OFF IN TIME.

To any friends of mine who are so unfortunate or so foolish as to have love-affairs with non-Catholics I always give one piece of advice: *Break it off in time: it's seldom too late and it's never too early to do so!* As to the value of this counsel I shall only say that all who acted on it succeeded in it, and without exception, were ultimately far from sorry to have made what sacrifice it involved.

You may ask how is one to go about terminating the dangerous friendship. To do so involves three resolutions, each of which has both negative and positive aspects.

Resolution No. 1—Part Physically.

Before dealing with this resolution in detail, I may remark that courtesy and the length of time you have been friendly with a non-Catholic would seem to demand that you write or send word otherwise, stating the fact that and the reasons why you are "calling it all off." One should avoid paining the other party more than is necessary; that would be neither kind nor Christian.

Negatively, the first resolution demands that after this final letter you will avoid all correspondence with each other, that you will answer no telephone calls from the non-Catholic, and refuse to be drawn into further “dates” to discuss the matter. One friend of mine had to get an escort home from her place of business to save her from the attentions of a Protestant, with whom she had been friendly and who had been hoping to marry her.

On the positive side, you should keep yourself thoroughly occupied. Throw yourself into your work. Cultivate your other social contacts. Go out with your other friends. Be satisfied at first to go on from day to day, leaving the future to solve its own problems as they arise.

Resolution No. 2—Part Mentally.

Negatively, this means that you should cease to dwell deliberately on the thought of the other person. There should be no brooding, no day-dreaming, no time for unprofitable self-pity. You shouldn't adopt, even mentally, a directly aggressive attitude towards the non-Catholic, by trying to *crush* your affection for him, or by trying to work up a hatred that may be dangerous as it is ungenerous. Be satisfied, especially at the start, to keep your affection from externalising itself or from compelling you to go against your better judgment.

This second resolution indicates, positively, that you get rid of souvenirs, letters, photographs, gifts, the lock of hair, the varied assortment of keepsakes. Forgetting will be difficult enough without having to cope with reminders such as these, with all their poignant and tender associations. You should be ruthless here. A trifle is sometimes the key to a human heart, and some paltry trinket saved from the sacrifice might later on undo many months of heroic self-denial. Fill your mind with fresh interests, reawaken your dormant ambitions regarding self-improvement and the development of your personality, and in this way you may succeed in bypassing into harmless channels the potentially injurious repressed emotion.

Resolution No. 3—Don't Take Yourself Too Seriously.

You mustn't mope, or allow yourself to drift into an unhappy melancholia. Your sacrifice will not be painless, your heart will feel no pleasure in tearing itself violently away from somebody to whom it was firmly attached, but, a little patience, and peace and joy and happiness will return. Don't lose your sense of values. Your sacrifice will not be in vain. God will not be outdone in generosity. He will reward you for your whole-heartedness. Therefore, on the negative side, waste no time in moaning and lamenting. Don't be a “sob-sister,” a “loony crooner” anguishing in self-torture. Face up to life bravely and frankly. You are doing for God and from the highest motives what others have done for parents' sake or for the love of money. Anybody with a reasonable experience of life knows several people like you, who have succeeded in deliberately breaking off an *affaire de coeur*, and admires them when, like soldiers that remain brave and smiling amid the horror of battle and the agony of wounds, they mask with cheerfulness the sorrow and grief they cannot but feel. One always honours such ill-starred lovers for their endurance, and one feels, too, that God will bless their bright courage both here and hereafter.

Keep your sense of proportion—and your sense of humour! See how silly it is to drown your grief in drink (as if God would be honoured by an “alcohol holiday”) or to rush headlong into marriage with somebody else just because he is a Catholic, or worse still, to plunge into professional celibacy by rashly embracing the religious life or the priesthood from some sentimental notion of being faithful till death to your beloved. Sometimes, it is true, an emotional tragedy is the prelude to a genuine vocation to the religious state, but only when it shows one the emptiness of all human love as compared with the surpassing love of God. Convents and monasteries are no scrap-heaps for misfits. Life is too vigorous and real in them for love-lorn spinsters or desolate dawdlers. If *marriage* is your real vocation, you have indeed served the right novitiate for it, for marriage is most likely to succeed when the parties have practical realisation of the meaning of self-sacrifice. Pray, then, to God, to preserve you from yourself, to strengthen your faith, to support you in sadness: and ask Him that if it be His Holy Will, He would comfort your heart by sending you somebody worthy to occupy a place with Himself in, your affections.

TOLERATED.

It is a recognised principle of right conduct that one may counsel evil when it is the *only alternative* to greater evil. One would seem to be justified in urging a broken-hearted husband to seek forgetfulness in drink rather than to persist in a purpose of committing suicide. One might urge a highwayman to take a traveller's wealth in preference to his life (or his wife!). In these cases one does not really approve of the evil one advises; one approves only of the fact that it is better than the other alternative; one gives it only a very relative and qualified approval.

This is the sense in which the Church tolerates even those mixed marriages that are celebrated by dispensation. She is greatly pained by them. She is utterly disgusted by them. She is intensely disappointed in those who contract them. But to avoid greater evils, such as might arise through the inability of a Catholic man to find a Catholic partner of approximately his own social standing in a district with an overwhelmingly Protestant population, the Church will reluctantly consent to the union of a Catholic with a non-Catholic, and she will give this unwilling consent only when she is certain that every precaution has been taken to prevent the marriage from being harmed by the outsider.

She will have nothing whatever to do with the wedding unless the non-Catholic promises, in writing, to abstain from interfering with the Faith of the Catholic and to allow all the children, without exception, to be brought up as Catholics. But, even when these promises have been made, it is only with tears in her eyes and a heart unable to be eloquent for mourning that the Church comes in the person of her priest to see one of her own loved ones join in wedlock with a person who, consciously or unconsciously, is on the side of her enemies and playing false to the divine truth that is dearer to her than life itself. Like any loving mother who sees her child marry misery, and wed the danger of dreadful disaster, the Church assists at a mixed marriage grieved in heart and almost mute for sadness that it must take place. She prays in silence that her worst fears may, by the kindness of Providence, never come to pass. She has no desire to prolong the ceremony, and surely it is intelligible that she is loath to add to it the fullness of ritual that is the expression of her happiness, the sign of her glad approval, and the token of Heaven's blessing.

CONVERT IN ADVANCE.

Once in a while a Catholic girl will say: "Yes, I am going with a Protestant, but I am hoping to convert him when we are married." Such a remark is paralleled, I think, by: "Yes, I am going with a man who drinks like a fish from morning till night, but I am hoping to reform him when we are married"; and there is almost as much likelihood in the one case as in the other that the vague expectation will ever be accomplished.

Lovers are notoriously optimistic. Their hope is matched only by their love—which, no doubt, is but another way of saying that love is blind and therefore more liable than detachment to drift into danger. Blind hope, however, does not alter hard facts; and experience has shown it to be a very definite and unalterable fact that it is far easier to convert the non-Catholic before the marriage than afterwards. Early on in the courtship, while love is growing, and the parties believe so eagerly in each other, that is the time to invite the non-Catholic to see a priest and to examine the evidence for the Catholic faith; that, too, is the time when he or she will be most willing to accept invitations to come to Mass or other Catholic ceremonies.

A CASE IN POINT.

If the non-Catholic is worth marrying, he is surely worth making an all-out effort for his conversion, and if that fails before marriage, the chances are slender, indeed, that will produce results afterwards.

I know a middle-aged Catholic man, versed far above the average in the philosophy and theology of our holy religion, whose mixed marriage must to outsiders appear absolutely successful. His children, now grown up, seem as careful as their father of their Catholicism. He and his wife are entirely devoted to each other, she welcomes his priest friends to their house and makes them feel very much at home, shows no resentment at the fact that her husband devotes most of his leisure to Catholic activities, and never interferes when he goes off every now and again to bury himself in some monastery for a week's meditative retreat. Here is a man whose married bliss is the envy of many, but I know, *beyond the*

shadow of doubt, that in his heart he is one of the saddest of mortals. You see, he has never forgiven himself for the folly of hoping that he could achieve after marriage the conversion he failed to effect in the far-off days of his courtship. No Pope or prelate could hold mixed marriages in such abhorrence as he does, and few lovers could have such ground for optimism as he had.

PARENTHESIS TO THE FOOLISH.

This pamphlet may perhaps fall into the hands of some Catholic who has committed the hateful disobedience of taking the law into his own hands, who has married “outside the Church,” that is, without dispensation, in a registry office or before a non-Catholic clergyman. Passion is proverbially headstrong, and will not abide the formalities of law, or brook the reprimands of superiors. It may be that the years have brought remorse, that, perhaps, as the fires of passion have died down the thought of the eternal fires of hell has begun to trouble the sinful conscience. But when the subject is mentioned to the non-Catholic husband or wife, and the suggestion made that the marriage be rectified in the eyes of the Catholic Church, the peace of the home is shattered for weeks or months on end. The children, too, are now in Protestant schools and the non-Catholic party would never agree to having them removed and sent to Catholic schools.

In these circumstances can nothing be done for the Catholic? Must he or she live on in sin, a prey to a dreadful expectation of the just anger of God when He shall come in Judgment?

It is not so. Nobody need ever live on in sin. While, in such matters as marriage problems, one cannot easily formulate a set of rules that will solve every case that could arise, one may say with confidence that no problem is insoluble. The Church is kind as Christ the Saviour, above all, to the repentant sinner; and she will facilitate his return to grace in every way possible. If the marriage can be set right, even without the knowledge of the non-Catholic—and sometimes it can—she will repair it, and will then re-admit the repentant Catholic partner to the Sacraments.

If, then, you have contracted any such illicit, sinful marriage, and are sorry for your folly, have recourse to some priest for advice. Be very candid with him, and he will guide you again to happiness and peace of soul.

THE TRAGEDY OF ERROR.

Please do not think that, for all our denunciation of heresy, I, or any other Catholic priest, would regard all those outside the Church as deliberately deaf to Christ’s teaching, or believe that they are guilty of maliciously falsifying the Gospel. I know too many non-Catholics for that. But while I admire the integrity of these good people and pay tribute to the devoted way they follow their principles, I pity them, just as I would pity a blind child who has not yet realised from what beauty and experience its condition- cuts it off; and my heart goes out to them just as it would to any unfortunate that I might see in blissful ignorance of the tragedy that is near to him as his very being.

What a misery never to drink in the life-giving stream that flows daily on our altars in the mystic Calvary of Holy Mass! What a horror to hug to one’s soul the foul error that Christ’s Church might fail in its mission, that His Vicar in the watch-tower of the Vatican might quaver as a quicksand when Christians sought the support of the Rock of Truth! What an objectively ungrateful and pernicious blasphemy to deny honour to the Blessed Mother of God, whom God Himself so honoured for our sakes, and who co-operated so closely in the work of our salvation!

For those born outside the Church, heresy is, of course, a misfortune not of their own choosing. It is none the less a ghastly thing; and the Catholic who contracts a mixed marriage knows that by so doing he is walking arm in arm with error, that he is deliberately courting tragedy and consciously choosing it for his partner in life against the advice of earth’s wisest of Mothers. Let him not be surprised if many are the griefs it will beget.

IN CONCLUSION

Like the good mother she is, the Church is nervous and unhappy when any of her children think to bind themselves in marriage to non-Catholics. She loves all men, even those who are most prejudiced against her, but she will not compromise with any evil or dangerous doctrines they may preach. Why blame her for loving her own deeply, and, mother-

like, for having a particular concern for their future? She sees clearly what a foul thing heresy is, knows from long experience that it is an infectious disease, a cancer and sad blemish in the soul which has been purchased for the Spirit of Truth in the Blood of Jesus Christ: and so she will ever seek by all the means in her power to discountenance mixed marriages, just as she will never repudiate that basic principle that a single human soul is a pearl above price, a gem far too precious ever to be risked, much less traded, for some few paltry years of earthly happiness. She is nothing if not faithful to the Truth.

And, by the way, I hope you now agree that the young lady, whose letter started all this, was right to echo the sentiments of the Old Lady, Mother Church, by saying a firm *NO* to a mixed marriage.

Nihil Obstat:

W. M. Collins,
Censor Deputatus.

Imprimatur:

* D. Mannix,
Archiepiscopus Melbournensis.
