

WHAT TO DO ON A DATE

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The Bradley twins had rolled up their sleeves, gritted their teeth, and done a thorough job of tearing into young people—theirself included. Queer, thought Father Hall, but nobody else in the world can knock young people like young people can.

Dick and Sue were savage about the tearing. They painted a picture of the social life of the younger generation that made that generation look like a movie gangster in the last hundred feet of his film career.

Outside, the pleasant autumn breeze was rustling the parchment-like leaves of the trees—it was a surprisingly cheerful sound, considering that it was immediate prelude to winter. Father Hall sat back in his comfortable old chair in the book-congested study of his rectory at Lakeside, nursing his pipe and watching the fire. It was a luxurious fire, rich in warmth, deep in lights. The pine log snapped and exploded in tiny little volcanoes of resin and sent about the room warm, friendly smells and flashes of yellow, scarlet, and surprisingly blue flame.

Alas for Winter

The twins continued their diatribe. Father Hall let a particularly rich cloud of smoke assemble around the Olympus of his head, and in its mystic secrecy he smiled a quick and sympathetic smile. The twins' antiphon of woe reached a point of exhaustion and gained a climax of summary.

"I honestly dread to see winter come," said Sue, waving her hands in magnificent despair.

"Summer's swell," added Dick, "There's so much to do . . ."

"Tennis, golf, swimming, hiking . . ."

"Then along comes winter . . ."

"And what is there to do?" Sue's tone was almost a wail.

Father Hall, from the protective shelter of his smoke screen, said mildly, "It seems to me that winter's precisely the time when dates . . ."

The twins broke in with overlapping voices.

"Winter's the time when it costs a fortune to take a girl out. Night clubs, hotel restaurants, cover charges, sky-high prices for a ham sandwich . . ."

"And the young male of the species . . . , not knowing how to entertain himself, starts to grow amorous . . ."

Summary

"It's club dances with corsage and taxi and a five-dollar . . ."

"And every floor-show is like every other floor-show and all dances are like all other dances . . ."

"Or, if you have already invested your entire allowance in a one-night splurge, then you have to be satisfied with some cheap joint . . ."

"A tavern with low lights for low company . . ."

"A road-house infested by road-hogs and road-hags . . ."

"A dance hall where the band or orchestra makes noises that it calls music and where jitter-bugs get St. Vitus's dance. . . . Poor St. Vitus!"

Then, by some coincidence, they hit the final word together and left it quivering in mid-air:

"And drink!" they said, together, and then stopped.

Nothing to Do?

Father Hall brushed aside the heavy cloud of grey-blue smoke in which he had been lurking and eyed his young friends with kindly sarcasm.

"Dear, dear! It's hard to be a young person these-a-days."

Dick winced, lit a cigarette, and scowled into the fire.

“If you’re going to go sarcastic on us . . .” he began, as he snapped the match into the hearth with an angry flick of his wrist.

“Honestly,” protested Sue, “this is a problem. What in the world are we going to do on a date? It looks like a choice between two things: dine and dance, or . . .”

She hesitated, but Dick picked up his cue.

“. . . park and neck.”

Father Hall declined to be jolted by the dilemma and the deliberate shock of the phrase. He merely shook his head regretfully and murmured to himself in a clearly audible voice, “Neck . . . neck . . . I wonder whether any other nice word ever developed a more vulgar meaning than that one?” He puffed twice on his pipe and went back to the word that still hung in mid-air.

The Social Blues

“Drink?” he repeated.

“Drink,” they said, firmly.

“Sad, isn’t it,” said the priest, “that nice, healthy young people, filled with the joy of life and the exuberance of their untouched vitality, need to draw on the stimulation of drink, which was meant for old people who’ve lost their pep?”

“Well,” said Dick, “they drink. They sit and drink because they don’t know what else to do. Ain’t that a lot of fun, though? A couple of supposedly intelligent young people pouring liquor down their gullets at half a dollar a highball and getting woozy in the process.”

“And telling blue stories,” said Sue.

“You’re colour blind, sis. Blue’s a nice friendly sort of colour. The stories are a dirty purple shot through with seasick yellow.”

Father Hall sucked his pipe meditatively. He loved young people, his beloved twins in particular. But it seemed amazing that with all the world of modern entertainment around them and with their own well-stocked minds and fine social background on which to draw, they sat fuming and moaning like two illiterate sailors tossed up on a desert island a thousand miles from the nearest grog shop and with not a deck of cards closer than Port Said.

What To Do?

“Well, what do we do? I mean what should we do on a date? And believe me, padre, there are thousands of young people just like us who don’t know what to do on a date.”

“Amazing!” said the priest. “And amazing to find you coming to a priest to find out how to act on a date.”

Sue shook her finger severely at the priest.

“Now if you dare to act coy on us . . . she said. “You know you were graduated from college . . .”

“. . . before you even thought of being a priest.”

“And you keep on thinking of us young people . . .”

“So there’s our problem, and what’s your answer?”

Father Hall knocked the ash out of his pipe into the hearth, filled the bowl with fresh tobacco, leaned back in his chair, and struck a match that put a red glow on the tobacco and high lights on his intent, lean face.

On a Date

“On a date? Well,” he said, “I hope you’ll laugh a lot—happily and cleanly; and dance considerably—with real gaiety; and sing plenty of good songs—that’s the grandest social cementer in the world; and meet charming people—as many as possible; and be as happy as innocence should be and as mirthful as the children of God have a right to be. . . .”

Sue shook a reproachful head at her twin.

“He’s going to give us general principles,” she sighed, “and what we need is things to do on dates so that the boy won’t start running after cocktails and the girl won’t start wondering whether she’ll be able to make him behave much

longer.”

Father Hall looked at them in mock severity.

“General principles come before particular practice,” he said. “Anyhow, I’m just thinking aloud. I wonder whether the clearest place to judge a civilized man from an uncivilized man, a cultured woman from a female boor, isn’t on a date. By the way, the word date is relatively recent. When I was in college, a date was 1492 or 1066 or 1776. We never dreamed it would come to mean the charming girl or the polished chap with whom you were going out. We would have been amazed to hear that it meant going to the opera with a beautiful young lady or to dinner with a gentleman in evening clothes.”

“Well, right now it means . . .” Dick began to explain, but the priest waved that aside.

Dates for Life

“I know. It’s any social engagement, big or little. Well, truth to tell, a date’s a lot more than just the transient engagement of an evening. You’re going to have a continuous date with the man or the woman you marry. Later on, you’ll have dates with your growing son and daughter. Really, you’ve brought up a most important problem. It’s mighty important to know how to spend a date when you’re young because I suppose that will determine how you spend your social life for the rest of your days.

“Yes; learning how to spend a date correctly looks like a very, very important matter.”

Dick snorted.

“And we trek to the hamburger stand and drag a girl to a movie, and dress up and arrive late at a formal party that puts us in the red for a month, and save up and go to the Empire Room of the Hotel Nouveau Riche, and wish somebody would plan our dates for us . . . or tell us what to do with them.”

Planning Dates

Father Hall speared one phrase from this lugubrious moan.

“Plan our dates,” he repeated. “There’s a smart phrase, my lad. A date can be a hit-and-miss thing, something like a minor accident, or measles, or a fire in the old homestead. I’m afraid a lot of dates just happen. Imagine your social life drifting into the same class with accidents, measles and a fire.”

“Only more so,” said Sue, “if I may indulge in reminiscences about my social past and the partners that have tossed me about their fevered social lives.”

Father Hall tamped his pipe with his thumb.

“I suppose if there is anything typical of a really civilized man it is the fact that he tries to plan his life all his life. He does not like it to be dominated by accidents; and he regards his social life, his dates, as a very important part of his life, a part that must be pleasantly, thoughtfully organized. I imagine that the more civilized and cultured a man is the more he plans his dates and what is going to happen on them, just as a skilful hostess plans her dinner party or the chairman of the prom. committee plans for the biggest college dance of the year.”

Background

“Sounds awfully formal,” mused Dick. “Why, sometimes I’ve run into a girl just by accident, and without anything being planned we had a grand time.”

“A civilized man, Dick, plans his general social conduct and plans the particular date towards which he looks. You had a good time in the company of this girl because you are a civilized fellow after all, and despite your protests and moans you know a great deal about social conduct. Civilized man knows a lot about how to deal with his fellow human beings. Savage people meet and start swinging war clubs. Barbarous people retire into shy comas. Highly cultured people meet and know exactly what to do to start a conversation and fill the hours they must spend together.”

Marriage as a Date

“Check!” said Dick, and Father Hall went on.

“Married life,” he said, “is a kind of long, continuous date.”

“That sounds odd,” mused Sue.

“But true. Now, when I see a young engaged couple together, I’m always interested in one thing: How far are they planning for that lifelong date? If they are completely off their heads about each other, I worry a little about their future.”

Sue was wide-eyed. “Oh, I thought that love was terribly important.”

“Certainly it is, but, oddly enough, it isn’t the only important thing. If love is the sole interest the young couple have, I’m sorry to say that their path is likely to be rough. Right now everything is fine with them. He just wants to sit and hold her hand and see how beautiful she is. When she hears him say, ‘I love you’, any other conversation is a positive impertinence.”

“Mushy!” said Dick, a little like Grumpy.

“Sweet!” corrected Sue, flaring a little.

To Bar Monotony

“Well, mushy or sweet, they marry, these two. After a time they find that holding hands comes to be a rather monotonous indoor sport. Pretty though the phrase is, ‘I love you’ has only eight letters, three short words, and when it has been said often enough they both believe it; and so what about it? Now, if their sole interest is love, their sole recreation affection, they’re in a bad way. They are likely to grow bored. They need interests to talk about, enthusiasms outside of themselves to flare up into quick flames. Otherwise, marriage comes to be a flat, level stretch of uneventful monotony.”

“Just what’s the connection with our type of dates?” asked Dick.

“Marriage is only a prolonged date. If the young couple haven’t planned for that date, they’re in a bad spot. When passion cools off and love loses its edge, what then? They have no interests to keep the date alive. They have no fresh elements to make their social life a success.

“That’s why I always encourage young couples to establish as many interests in common as possible—and before they marry. It’s marvellous if they like books, enjoy music, have fun playing games together, start developing hobbies. Of course, in the ordinary processes of nature God sends them the new and absorbing interest that is their children. But even without children their love is bolstered up by the variety of things they can do together, discuss together, see and hear together. All of that makes the date called marriage much more likely to be a happy, successful one.”

Adolescent Love-making

He paused and the twins waited with genuine interest.

“Two young people go out on a date,” he continued, after a moment. “They have no intention, or at least, no immediate hope of getting married. But since they are boy and girl, they have the natural physical and mental attraction for each other. Well, they can go off on an unplanned date with nothing in particular to do. Result? He finds at the end of the date that he has spent a lot of money on a lot of things that didn’t give either of them a great deal of fun. She finds that she is expected to accept or is forced to resist, a vigorous effort on his part to fill out a flat, unplanned date with adolescent love-making.”

He wrapped his tongue around those last two words in some mysterious fashion that made them sound just a little sickly and more than a little silly. “Adolescent love-making,” he repeated, and the twins looked with self-conscious fixity into the fire.

Haphazard or Charming?

“Well, if young couples have to plan for the prolonged date that is marriage, they are smart if they plan for even the brief date that is a day or an evening together. A marriage without interests or things to do is dull and dangerous. A date without interests or things planned to do is flat—and often very dangerous. Social life on a large scale or a small scale can be, you see, either haphazard or planned. If haphazard, it’s poor stuff. If planned, it runs a fine chance of being charming and delightful.

“So, before the date the boy plans for things to do. The girl smartly accepts his lead in that and follows along. The

girl plans for things to talk about, and the boy will, if the girl is smart enough, follow along without knowing she is giving him leads; and if they find they have interests that can fill, not one evening, but a series of evenings, their dates are not the slightest problem.”

Expense

Dick shook his head.

“Ah! there’s the point. All that means expense; and I’m one of the poor on-a-narrow-margin-of-allowance boys who could plan great evenings if they had a bank roll. No bank roll, no plans.”

It was Father Hall’s turn to shake his head.

“How in the world did fun and money get all mixed up? What makes a bank roll the essential of a good time? Time was”—and he fairly intoned the words—“when young people needed only to be together and almost everything in the world was fun. A crowd of four or eight or twelve put their heads together, and to the off-key strumming of a ukulele or guitar sang away a delightful evening. The woods called. There was excitement in just walking through the brightly lighted shopping districts. Young people could play games. . . .”

Dick’s restraining hand went up. “Listen, Father: the modern girl expects to have money spent on her. She wants to go to ritzy places and do expensive things. She’s a cultivated luxury, and if any boy suggested that she sit at home and listen to him strum a uke or a guitar, he’d find himself on the family doorstep with his hat firmly, but unexpectedly, in his hands.”

Proud Spending?

“I think that’s not true,” protested Sue. “Girls, halfway nice girls, don’t expect a man to spend the national income on them. They don’t expect to be dragged to the Ritz all the time, or to grand opera at five dollars a seat. . . .”

“Well, a boy likes to be known as a free spender. We have our pride.” Dick was emphatic.

“Of course, if this is going to develop into a matter of pride, if the young fellow thinks he has to prove he has money by spending money he doesn’t have . . .” Father Hall left the sentence suspended in air. “As a matter of fact, I read that the young women at the Students’ Spiritual Leadership Convention said that boys were wrong in thinking girls always had to be taken on expensive dates. The girls were perfectly satisfied with a movie and a soda or coffee. They didn’t mind riding the street cars, trains, trams, or buses. They didn’t expect a seven-course dinner with a swing band when the boy was able to buy only hamburgers. In fact, they advised boys to swallow their pride and invite the girls to do inexpensive things.”

No Entrance Charge

“Like what?” demanded Dick.

“Like any of those simple enjoyable things that don’t take a lot of money. Walking is coming back into style, and so is bicycling. The European countryside is full of parties of young couples out having a grand time. In our own country hiking is back. So are the winter sports, like skating and ski-ing.

“Just what use do you make of your own city?”

“Aside from the theatres, the movie houses, the restaurants, the hotels . . .”

Father Hall stopped him.

“Stop that litany,” he cried; “it annoys me. Your city is full of places to go and things to do that don’t cost anything except the bus fare. I have a priest friend who takes young people around the city and shows them a grand time. They visit the police courts; they drop in at the city hall, the county gaol, the chamber of aldermen when it’s in session, the fire departments, the city’s water works . . .”

“The morgue,” said Dick, ironically. “That was a fad for a time; after a late party everybody stopped in and visited the morgue. Please excuse me.”

“Brrrr!” shuddered Sue.

High-browism

“Why go to the morgue?” demanded the priest. “How about the city’s art museum? How about taking your date through the science exhibits, if you have a scientific museum? The art room in the public library is an interesting place. The—”

“Listen,” protested Dick; “if you suggested that sort of a thing to a girl, you’d have her thinking you’d gone high-brow on her.”

Father Hall sighed plaintively.

“And suppose she did? Since when is a person dull company just because he happens to like beautiful things and enjoy something beyond a swing band and a wrestling match?

“What a lot of pleasant things youngsters miss just because they’re afraid of being thought high-brow! What’s a high-brow? Apparently it’s anyone with a developed mind. A high-brow’s a chap who’s advanced beyond the pygmies of Africa. He knows a good picture when he sees it, and he really likes to see it. He is curious about what’s new in the world of science—the latest discoveries of the explorers, the relics dug up from a recently opened tomb in Egypt, explosions by the atom-busters, the new planetarium that makes the heavens seem chummy, friendly, and intelligible.

“I guess a high-brow is merely a civilized man who, when he takes her out, pays a girl the compliment of pretending, even if it’s not true, that she is civilized too, that she likes to see and hear really beautiful things and has a wide-awake mind that wants to know what makes the world go round.

It’s Fun to Be High-Brow

“Honestly, Dick, if I were a young fellow and asked a girl to go on a date to a museum, art or science, and she was cynically amused, I’d know what sort of mind she had. Probably she’d think the world’s greatest artists draw for the funny pages; that the Smithsonian is full of old junk like an old-fashioned attic, and that art galleries are for loons with long hair and flowing ties.

“It’s really lots of fun being a high-brow, you know, if you can be one in the right company. I confess that I’ve spent some very happy hours wandering with some pleasant companion through the Metropolitan, the Chicago Art Museum, or the Corcoran Gallery in Washington. I’ve browsed with relish through the Field Museum, the Smithsonian, the museum of natural history. I didn’t feel a bit self-conscious about it, and my companions were far from Ph.D. degrees.

“And I know this, that we had a lot more fun than we would have had if we’d paid ten dollars for a brace of tickets for some road company that was loafing through a soiled version of last year’s Broadway musical hit. That word soiled, by the way, has a lot of importance in that connection.

Run-of-the-Mill Night Clubs

“As for the expensive night clubs, I wonder whether there is a more standardized form of entertainment in the world.”

“I know,” agreed Dick. “A band that sounds like all other bands.”

“A tap dancer with eight girls for the chorus,” added Sue.

“A blues singer—and boy! it’s a toss-up between the tenors whose voices never changed and the women singers whose voices certainly did.”

“A crooner or a broken-down soprano . . .”

“And don’t forget the ballroom dancers who have a lot more expression in their hands than they have on their faces.”

Father Hall laughed at this summary, a lot better than he, in his inexperience with the shows that go with dinner and cover charge, could have given. But he went on.

Interesting Spots

“Yet young couples pay high for just that sort of stereotyped entertainment, while all the time their city is full of

the most interesting and exciting places. Girls as a rule can't, or wouldn't be likely to, visit them alone. But they're marvellous as expeditions on a date.

"Many cities still have ghettos, a pushcart market, the foreign colonies where people of some European nationality cluster around their old customs and habits of life. Did you ever see their shops? Stop by their photographers' windows? Did you, for that matter, ever visit the civic centres for which, as a citizen, you'll be paying good money some of these days?"

Dick and Sue had no answer to that.

"On the outskirts of one of our big mid-western towns there's a marvellous church. It was built by Catholic Slavs, and one of their greatest painters crossed the ocean to paint the murals. Those murals are simply magnificent. Around the walls is a thrilling history of the Slavic Church. Every detail of the building is in the artistic spirit of a great people. Artists come across the continent to look at the church. Yet I couldn't find, in that neighbouring city, a single young man or young woman who had bothered to travel the three or four miles that would have brought him to a Catholic church that any Catholic could be proud of, any artist would envy."

Out of the Routine

"I'd never have thought of a place like that," murmured Dick.

"No boy I know would think of asking to take me there," said Sue, in quite regret.

Father Hall shrugged his shoulders.

"Movies, dancing, some place to go to eat—usually the same place to which everyone goes until everyone starts to go to some other place—a most unimaginative routine you young people swing in. It might pay you to pretend a little high-browism."

"It might at that," agreed Dick.

"What do you know about your city's interesting industries? Visitors are taken through the industrial centres. Did you ever take a date there? Yet they are often the things that make your city important. Out-of-towners think them the things that make your city absorbingly interesting; and, really, a young man and a young woman ought to know a little about the industries that have created our modern world and the luxuries and conveniences that we use so easily."

"Gosh!" said Dick, "I'd be afraid to ask a girl to go to visit a steel mill or a stockyard or a manufacturing plant."

"And probably if you had the nerve, she'd have the time of her life and remember it as a red-letter day."

"Father's probably right at that," said Sue, sagely.

Art Can Be Free

"I wonder whether you have ever stopped to catalogue the free things that a city of any size offers to the people who enjoy music or art or good lectures. The city spends a lot of money these days on just that sort of thing, and then has to beg for audiences.

"Do you see why a young couple shouldn't go to the park for a free band concert on a date?"

They both hesitated.

"The very gay life of Vienna was built up around just that sort of free band concert," said Father Hall. "They're great social affairs in the English parks. But we Americans don't think anything is worth listening to unless we pay a lot of money for it.

"The W.P.A. orchestras furnish a surprising number of free concerts. There are concerts in department stores, in various churches. . .

"As a visitor in New York I know I was simply delighted one day to be standing in the Grand Central Terminal when, suddenly, the daily organ concert began to boom across the grand concourse of the station. Later I was amazed, when I took the terminal elevator up to one of the finest small art exhibits I'd ever seen, to find that of the hundreds of thousands who pour every day through that great station, there were not half a dozen who had bothered to let an elevator take them up to see beautiful paintings and exquisite sculpture. I had the place practically to myself."

In the Groove

“Frankly,” said Dick, “I hadn’t thought of that sort of thing for a date.”

“Certainly no one ever suggested to me. . . .” And Sue’s voice sank into a whisper and then silence.

“That,” the priest repeated, “is because young people’s recreation has slipped right into a groove. If I were a girl, I think I’d be delighted to realize that the young man who asked me out was interested in doing something else besides what the mob does. If I were a boy, I’d be agreeably impressed if I found that a girl had an adventuring spirit, liked to do things she hadn’t done before, and didn’t care how much or how little money I spent on her, provided we had an amusing, intelligent, agreeable time together.”

Dick shook his head sceptically.

“You’d have to know a girl mighty well before you could expect her to enjoy a cheap date like that with you.”

Father Hall leaned forward in his chair to knock the ashes out of his pipe and into the hearth. Then he clamped his teeth on the stem of the pipe and sat back, nursing the cooling bowl in his palm.

Honesty About Dates

“I thought you young people prided yourselves on your honesty,” he said.

They both looked up in surprise.

“You do, don’t you?” They nodded slowly, wondering to what this led. “Well, what’s the use of pretending you’ve a lot of money when you haven’t?—of splashing for one big night and then going without anything for a brace of weeks? Can’t young people be honest about the fact that they haven’t a lot of money to spend?”

“If young people are just a little honest, they can plan for plenty of fun without spending a great deal. Of course, a boy can invite a girl to go to the theatre and can spend top prices for seats, but if he really trusts the girl, he can say with perfect candour, ‘I’m going to see such-and-such a star in such-and-such a play. All I can afford is to sit up among the real theatre-goers—top balcony. How are you at climbing mountains? I’d love to take you along if you don’t mind heights.’

“Or the opera is coming to town, and the main-floor seats are five dollars. He pays the girl a compliment if he says, frankly, ‘The true music lover, I’m told, sits about a quarter of a mile from the stage. That’s where I expect to sit to hear Melchior in “Lohengrin”. Would you take a chance on scaling the heights with me?’ “

Trusting Your Date

Dick shuddered.

“I’d never in the world have the nerve to ask a girl to sit in the gallery. That’s what used to be called ‘nigger heaven’, isn’t it?”

“I think it isn’t called that since the word ‘nigger’ went out of nice people’s vocabularies,” said Father Hall, snubbing Dick a little. “But I can tell you that in my youthful days I sat up there many a time and oft; and I think you’d be surprised to see the ecstatic young couples that sit up there, leaning forward in appreciative companionship to drink in great art with real joy.

“Frankly, I think it’s a lucky young man who likes a girl and trusts her enough to ask her to share great music and important drama with him—from the heights of cheap seats. I think any girl should feel complimented when an honest young fellow asks her to share his love for fine things when that love triumphs over pride and a slim pocket-book.

“A girl who has to have a lot of money spent on her before she has a good time on a date will make a nagging, money-digging, selfish sort of wife. A boy who won’t ask a girl out unless he has a pocketful of money is a show-off who’ll furnish the family with chickens today and feathers tomorrow—and that was my old Irish grandmother’s deepest damning of a husband.”

Just Talk

Father Hall sank deeper into his chair and went on.

“It takes planning to make a successful date, but it really doesn’t take the ingenuity of a genius.

“Recently I had the opportunity to ask a number of young men and young women what they most liked to do. I got

a lot of answers, of course, but recurrently an answer was given that made all the other heads nod in approval.”

“What was that?” demanded the twins.

“ ‘We like,’ they said, ‘just to sit over a cold drink and a sandwich and talk’ .”

“The good old bull session,” Dick laughed.

“Girls have no convenient name like that for it, but the idea’s correct,” Sue agreed.

“So,” went on the priest, “a lot of successful dates could be built around that very normal love that both young men and young women have for good, youthful talk.” He smiled at both of them. “Girls aren’t the only talkers, you know.”

“Oh, aren’t they?” asked Dick, with irony.

“You very well know,” retorted Sue, “that girls have the reputation for being talkers and that boys deserve it.”

The Girl Plans

“Let’s call that a draw before it goes any farther,” said Father Hall. “It merely proves that both like to talk. Some boys like to talk more than some girls do, and vice versa. But they all, with rare exceptions, talk and want a chance to talk.

“So,” he continued, “a very simple date is one with two or three young couples meeting at one of the houses for cold drinks, sandwiches, and a talk session.

“Anyhow, talk is most important on the list of things to do on a date, and that is where the girl’s responsibility enters.”

“Oh,” sighed Sue, shaking her head, “the girls are going to get it after all.”

“Get the responsibility,” said the priest; “agreed.” He looked at Sue. “I think it is the job of the girl to plan the general conversational trends of the evening and to keep the talk interesting.”

“Meaning that she talks the poor boy’s arm off?” demanded Dick.

“Let Father explain,” commanded Sue, and her twin subsided.

Nothing Planned

“Behold,” said Father Hall, oratorically, “the young couple moving forth for the evening! They are going to some inexpensive restaurant; then they’re taking in a movie first, a bite to eat, and home.

“Now, let’s say that the girl plans nothing by way of conversational leads.”

“A planned conversation?” protested Sue. “What could be more deadly?”

“Where did you get that idea?” demanded Father Hall. “All really great conversationalists carefully rehearse the general line they mean the conversation to take. Oscar Wilde, the greatest conversationalist of modern times, planned his conversations like a skilled general. Then, when the moment arrived for his brilliant comment, he shot it forth and stunned the others with delight.”

“Oh,” said Dick, with slight irony, “Sue plans how she can blast the poor boy with her wit and epigrams, is that it?”

Two Pictures

“Let me finish, please,” said the priest, with mock strained patience. “The girl, we’ll say, has planned nothing for them to talk about. What happens? They sit through a dull dinner, trying to force conversation that can’t be forced. The boy rushes the meal and hurries himself and the girl off to the show. That may turn out fairly dull, too; a fair percentage of movies are. So they’re out from the movie sooner than they expected; they move towards home; the young man’s fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love-making. After all, he argues, the girl has not given him his share of entertainment in return for the evening he gave her. So he starts to take it out in affection.”

“I think,” burst in Sue, indignantly, “they have their nerve.”

“So do I,” agreed the priest. “But suppose we change the picture slightly. The girl has planned the conversational trends of the evening. She knows, in general, what all boys like to talk about; if she is smart, she knows what this particular boy likes to talk about. So she goes off on her date prepared.

“The boy and the girl sit down for dinner, and the girl throws out leads in subjects in which she knows the boy is interested. They talk easily and happily through dinner, and dinner is prolonged beyond the demands of mere food.

Subjects for Talk

“Every young person I’ve ever met likes to talk about the current motion pictures, television and radio programmes, sports. The girl is posted on these things and gives him the leads that make possible his talk. She is smart enough to know, for instance, that when conversation is dull she has only to bring up the subject of food, or of some current game, and presto! the conversation is off to another flying start.

“So she mentions something delicious that she ate at some new or old or interesting or unusual eating place. He caps it with his gastronomic (and isn’t that a grand word?) experiences. Or she mentions a game or an athletic star she’s seen, and he tops her experience with a half-dozen of his own.”

“You must think we men are easy to handle,” protested Dick.

“We are,” solemnly agreed the priest. “As a man, I admit that we are. Give a man a conversational inch, and he’ll talk a conversational mile.

“But let’s go back to the young couple out for the evening. . .”

“. . . whom we left,” interpolated Sue, “with the young lady snake-charming the young gentleman into a complacent display of his conversational charms. Go on, please, Father.”

“Listen,” her twin interposed, “if you ever start practising your conversational technique on me. . . .”

“I won’t until you start inviting me out to dinner and the theatre. Darling, you are absolutely safe.” She nodded to Father Hall. “May we return to the young couple?”

A Planned Evening

“Well, the young lady has made the evening pleasant. She has talked well and listened better. They have enjoyed their dinner together. It’s consequently a little later than schedule when they arrive at the motion picture. When they leave and head for home, she directs their conversation back into interesting lines. They reach home happily. He has had so much stimulus and pleasure from the girl that, though the physical charm and attraction is still there, he does not have the typical masculine feeling that runs this way: ‘Well, she owes me something for the evening, doesn’t she?’ She’s been charming and entertaining, and she has cut the need for adolescent love-making to a minimum. Indeed, if the talk has been brisk, the opportunity for love-making has been largely eliminated.”

“Smart girl,” admitted Sue.

“I shouldn’t mind knowing her,” added Dick.

“I wish she existed by the million,” said the priest. “Sue is made of the kind of stuff. Just a little planning needed, Sue, just a little ingenious foresight.”

“That gives me a very large idea,” she said, thoughtfully.

Four Are Better Than Two

But the priest was moving forward with his thought.

“Of course, talking is even simpler with a congenial foursome. In fact, the whole problem of what to do on a date is much simplified if there are four or six instead of only two.”

“That’s more expensive,” said Dick.

“Need it be?” demanded the priest. “If the infernal habit of treating holds, that may be the case. If each man has to match the expenditures of the other fellow or fellows, all of them will probably find double-dating a nuisance and a racket. But if they split expenses, it costs each boy exactly what it costs for two—and often less. One car carries four people as cheaply as it carries two, you know, even if the car happens to be a taxi.

“I’ll be frank to admit that I’m interested in foursomes or sixsomes largely because I think temptation is much less likely when there is a small crowd instead of an isolated couple; and that is important. I’ve often advised young people who found each other a temptation and danger not necessarily to give up dating, but very decidedly to add another couple to their dates. That’s self-chaperoning, and it often eliminates a lot of problems for both the boy and the girl.”

Greek for Talk

“Wise, sage advice,” said Dick, and he nodded solemnly.

“Listen to the expert,” said his twin.

“Simple application of common sense, my lass,” replied her brother. “Experience is not the only teacher—merely the most expensive one.”

“Anyway, with a foursome or a sixsome conversation becomes discussion, and that’s when a date becomes really interesting. It ceases to be a dialogue, or, worse, a monologue, and branches out into a modern equivalent of the old Greek symposium.”

“Nice word,” said Dick. “Remind me to name a Pullman after it.”

“A symposium was simply a crowd of people sitting down together, preferably over food and drink, and thrashing out questions of common interest. The Greeks had a word for it. We have the same natural urge; and two or three couples together make that urge a reality.

“Sounds good to me,” agreed Dick.

“Whenever we do have our dates at home, it’s great fun,” added Sue.

“With a little supper prepared by the girl and not paid for by the boy,” interjected her twin.

“I follow without protest,” Sue agreed.

Real Fun Is Doing Things

Father Hall pointed the stem of his pipe at them.

“Let’s remember,” he said, “that real fun is found, not on dates where a lot of things are done for us, but on dates where we are doing things ourselves. Young people like to perform. They like to sing. They get a great thrill out of acting. They want to dance.

“Fine! Then why make the mistake of thinking that a date consists in taking a girl someplace where the orchestra or band is professional, the singing issues from some husky-voiced vocalists paid for the effort that they really have to make, and the dancing is done by some tap dancer and a ballroom team, while the boy and the girl on the date sit as passive as two frogs on a stump and watch others do what they themselves should be doing?”

“You’re not far wrong there,” agreed Dick. “Get a crowd of young people around a piano, and even if their voices set their own teeth on edge, they’ll shout out their songs until the police bear down on them.”

“And if it’s an amateur performance, the list of volunteers is a mile long, and the applause is louder than that of a radio audience acclaiming a super-star,” said Sue, equally emphatic.

“So more dates at home?” Father Hall’s voice was uplifted.

“Right !” they both said.

Other Kinds of Dates

Father Hall sat musing for a moment.

“I hope young Americans will adopt more and more the European idea that a date is anything that two or more young people do together. In our country, we think of a date merely as a recreation quest—dancing, the theatre, the movies, going places. A date really is anything that two or more people enjoy doing together. So you see, a date takes in a lot of territory.”

The twins looked a little puzzled.

“I knew a young married couple who made a photographic trip across a section of the country,” explained the priest. “They came back with memories of a grand time and their car full of interesting pictures. They had a hobby, photography, and they made it the basis of a prolonged date.

Hobbies

“A great many young men have hobbies, things that they do extremely well, things they are interested in collecting. I don’t see why that sort of thing can’t enter into the schedule of dates. A girl is, or should be, interested in what interests the boys she likes. A boy probably gets more zest out of his hobby if he thinks that some pleasant girl is interested in it, too.

“But I’m merely throwing that out without much comment. All I want to stress is the fact that dates don’t

necessarily mean entertainment, recreation. They mean anything that people enjoy doing together; and what could be more fun than a hobby shared with a real friend?"

In Brief

Father Hall proceeded to summarize. "Dates lose their charm when we think they have to be expensive. Such an attitude is a real crime against the good times of young people. You can have more fun walking with someone you like than you can at a fashionable restaurant, paying a heavy cover charge and checking an expensive menu merely to impress somebody who may not even rate being impressed. Dates are successful when they are planned. That means that the young couple look around for unusual and interesting things to do, novel places to visit, pleasant things to talk about. All this takes a certain amount of ingenuity. But, my stars! what in this world of ours doesn't demand thought, planning, and some little effort?"

A Perfect New Year's Eve

He looked at them a bit diffidently and then said, quietly:

"Do you mind my telling you about a young couple who wrote to me some time ago? It was shortly before New Year's Eve that I got a letter from the girl. I know the couple well; if God is good and the laws of economics swing in their favour, they intend to marry.

"At any rate, the letter went something like this:

" 'It seems to me that New Year's Eve is usually an excuse for a lot of expensive nonsense and worse. So Fred and I have decided to spend it differently this year. We're blowing ourselves. It's tails and white tie, but first a quiet dinner with the family. Then we're hearing "Faust" at the opera; and then—that will be about eleven o'clock—we are going to the cathedral, make the public holy hour together, and stay on for midnight Mass and Holy Communion. What do you think?"

"I wrote her my most enthusiastic approval. I couldn't think of any other way of celebrating New Year's Eve that would have more elements of appropriateness. They were dining with the family, always a dear, intimate thing. They were going to hear great music that would beautifully present a classic of world literature. Then, dressed in their best, they were going to have a date with the Lord. They were going to spend the last hour of the old year and the first hour of the new in His company.

"It came close, I thought, to being a perfect date."

"I'd have loved it." said Sue.

"Not bad . . . not bad at all," agreed Dick.

The twins exchanged glances of complete approval.

With Him Along

"And that." said the priest. "leads me to make a rather obvious statement, a statement that should be particularly obvious to a Catholic boy or girl. When you're considering the question of what to do on a date, don't forget the place of the Lord in that date."

They looked up with the unaffected interest that they always felt when Father Hall spoke on a subject like that.

"It really is grand to realize that a decent Catholic young man and a fine Catholic young woman take Christ Jesus along with them on their dates. No young couple goes forth in the state of sanctifying grace but Jesus Christ is the unseen third with them.

"What's more, He is deeply happy to see them happy. He is glad of their good time; for if His younger brothers and sisters aren't happy, then who in the world can be? He is delighted when their date takes them to beautiful, happy, really enjoyable things. He is divinely grateful when, at the close of the evening, they still have Him in their company. For Christ hates to leave His young people. There is something terrible in the realization that, while sorrow often drives young people to the feet of Christ, good times are often occasions for driving Christ from their side. Christ is deeply hurt when, on a date, His young brother and sister order Him to leave them while they hold out their arms to evil.

Christ and the Date

“Yet I think you can see readily enough that Christ’s part in your date can be very important indeed. A young couple of your age go walking together. What more natural than that the two of them make a call on Christ in the tabernacle? You’re going to a party. A visit to Him before you go is by no means a remote detour.

“Mind if I hark back to that mysterious time that starts ‘time was’? Do you mind?”

They smiled at him.

“Well,” he said, “time was when young people thought that to go to church services together was a charming date. They made a date to go to Benediction, to go to the May devotions, to the novena, to a special sermon; and they did these things together as naturally as couples today go to a movie or to a dinner dance.

“Thank God that custom has not altogether passed out of youthful schedules. Thousands of young couples still make dates that include the young Christ. They make a date to go to Mass and Holy Communion together before they start off on their hike, their picnic, their day in the country. They think that a date for some special church devotion is quite as natural as a date for dinner. I hope that that aspect of dating will never disappear. I shall worry about our young people and their dates when it does disappear.”

Dates That Are Pleasant

Father Hall looked at them quizzically.

“I hope you have a lot of pleasant dates as life goes on,” he said. “I hope you’ll meet a lot of lovely people and have happy times together. I know that the people you go out with will be better because they were with you. I hope that you will not be touched by any of the things that make so much modern dating ugly and perilous—too much drink, rotten stories, disgusting dances, questionable taverns and road-houses, sin and all its smelliness. Your dates, please God, will find you shrewdly sinless, deeply joyous.

“But, remember that dates, like everything else that’s important in life, cannot be left to chance. They must be planned. The dangers that might spoil them have to be foreseen and guarded against. The old saying about idle hands and the evil that awaits them is never truer than it is on a date. A well-planned, busy date is a happy date.

“In rough division the planning of a date would perhaps run this way: The young man plans what to do: the young lady plans how to do it. Maybe that division isn’t too accurate, but I throw it out as something to be thrashed out between you.

“You’ll have dates all your life. But if you learn how to do things happily and sinlessly with others while you are still young, your dates when you are grown to manhood and womanhood will make you, and others, very happy and your lives surprisingly rich.

“And when you’re planning your dates, don’t forget that you have a standing invitation to date the pastor of Lakeside. He has found, and always will find, his dates with you singularly dear.”
