

ECONOMICS, MOTHERCRAFT AND LEAKAGE

II: MODERN SOCIAL CONDITIONS AND THE ART OF MOTHERHOOD

THE social conditions of our times which we have briefly examined in our previous article have seriously impaired the art or craft of motherhood. The principal reason for this has been economic insecurity together with the contributory causes already referred to, the 'dissipation of life' and the diminished population of the home.

The economic security of the home and the stability given by the indissoluble marriage bond are ordained to the end of parenthood and especially to that of motherhood, and any deterioration in these two conditions must inevitably tend to destroy the home as the medium of Christian education.

It is of supreme importance, therefore, if the art of motherhood is to be preserved, to safeguard the economic security of the home; and if the leakage from the Catholic Church in England is due in large measure to the failure of the home as a means of Christian education, then the first remedy for such leakage is economic.

The second cause of the destruction of the art of motherhood is the dissipation of life due to the influence of the machine and the various inventions of physical science. This has inevitably tended to destroy the character of the home, as we have been at pains to show.

The remedy for this state of affairs can only be moral. No other power in the world can restore the woman to her home environment in these conditions but the Catholic Church. To stand aside from life for a definite vocation and ideal till conditions are more favourable to the mother and the fever of progress and movement abates can be done only under the influence of religion.

The third contributory cause in the destruction of the art of motherhood has been the diminished population of the home. This is indeed an effect of the two previous causes. Or in more familiar terms, we say the numerical

decrease of the family is due to lack of means and to selfishness.

We are not directly concerned here with the morality of this diminution but merely with the fact, and to show that this fact has done more than anything else to destroy mothercraft.

But let us be more precise.

What is meant here by the craft of Motherhood? The craft of Motherhood we would define as the deliberate skill employed by a woman in the making of children. This 'making' is manifold, but for immediate practical purposes may be said to fall into three categories: physical, intellectual and moral.

'Marriage,' in the words of Pope Leo XIII in his *Arcanum Divinae*, 'not only looks to the propagation of the human race but to the bringing forth of children for the Church, fellow citizens with the saints and the domestics of God.'

Motherhood, then, is an art and not merely an instinct or natural aptitude. This distinction is of profound importance. A woman instinctively loves and feeds her child but she does not instinctively know how to bring up her child; this pertains to the art of motherhood which, like every other art, has to be acquired, though it is rooted in a natural aptitude. That is why we are puzzled to find good women who make bad mothers; their instincts are true but they have not learnt the art and must, alas, experiment upon their own children.

And how is a woman to acquire the art of motherhood unless she be taught? In the natural order of things this training is given at home. The girl, in the normally populated family, helps her own mother in her craft and is, as it were, apprenticed. She will nurse her own smaller brothers and sisters; she will learn how to deal with the difficult child and have the wisdom to accept growth as inevitable, knowing that it is fatal to allow love to restrain natural development and spoil the child All this and very much more is traditional in the natural economy of

things; it is the accumulated experience of years handed down from mother to child.

But now this wisdom has been lost and the craft of motherhood destroyed; and the chief reason for this is family limitation. The well-populated family is the school for mothers; the 'controlled' family is unnatural and inefficient as an educational environment and destructive of the finest and most sacred qualities of home life.

That is why the eugenist is dissatisfied with the modern limited family for which he is partly responsible: as a family it does not function; the modern mother is incapable of bringing up her own child. What is the result? The home is condemned as a relic of the past and the biologist would quite seriously advocate State institutes to conduct the business of bringing up a child along approved scientific lines.

As the traditional craft of motherhood is being destroyed by family limitation, which in many cases is due to economic stress and insecurity, and is sometimes free from all moral blame, what can be done to restore it?

'We wish to call your attention in a special manner to the present-day lamentable decline in family education,' says the Holy Father in his Encyclical on the *Christian Education of Youth*.

'The offices and professions of a transitory and earthly life, which are certainly of far less importance, are prepared for by long and careful study; whereas for the fundamental duty and obligation of educating their children, many parents have little or no preparation, immersed as they are in temporal cares. The declining influence of domestic environment is further weakened by another tendency, prevalent almost everywhere to-day, which, under one pretext or another, for economic reasons, or for reasons of industry, trade or politics, causes children to be more and more frequently sent away from home even in their tenderest years.'

Where should this education for Motherhood begin? Surely with the girl in the school. But this in practice,

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some may object, is not easy. Many problems arise. In the first place, at what age should we begin? The time when such teaching seems practicable is usually at the school-leaving age. As the child will very often learn next to nothing in her home does not this make the provision of some after-school training for girls almost a matter of conscience within the Catholic body?

Catholic girls must be given the opportunity of learning the domestic arts—all that pertains to home-making and Mothercraft.

Another obvious difficulty is that nowadays girls must be prepared by education for two eventualities, motherhood and that of an independent wage-earner. Many of those who will afterwards embrace the married state will have had a complete commercial education and nothing else, and will be ignorant of the very rudiments of mothercraft. Can it be wondered that such mothers give their children a very poor start in life and that they are now gradually beginning to look upon education and even the upbringing of children as the normal function of the State?

The reason why so many of our children leave the Church when they leave school is because the school has too great an influence on their education and the mother too little.

After-marriage training should also be given to the young Catholic mothers in every urban parish. In some districts Catholic clinics are being opened with a Catholic doctor and nurse in attendance. In one particular parish known to the writer the clinic is opened once every week, when simple practical advice is given to each mother on the management of her children; babies are weighed and suitable food is sold at wholesale price; then Benediction in the Church. This scheme has been so successful, thanks to a devoted Sister of Charity who assists the mothers in their homes and invites them to the meetings, that the authorities of the neighbouring Borough Clinic are making discreet enquiries.

III: CONCLUSION.

We said at the beginning of this article that the problem of leakage is mainly due to the failure of the Church to cope with the crisis of puberty, and the reader may now be wondering what all this has to do with the problem under discussion. Let us arrange the argument more clearly and precisely.

The first truth to be stated is that the leakage from the Catholic Church in England is the problem not of adult apostasy but of the apostasy of children between the ages of fourteen and eighteen. In some town-parishes it is estimated that about sixty or seventy per cent. of the children who leave school never afterwards come to church.

It follows in such a state of affairs that the homes in which such children are brought up are worthless as centres of Christian education. To what is this failure due?

It is due in the first place to the scandalous example of parents who themselves have ceased to practice their religion. This factor in the leakage is not peculiar to our age.

Secondly, the failure of the home as an educational environment is the result of the profound change introduced into modern life by the machine and scientific inventions which tend to dissipate life and disintegrate the home by separating it from work and interest. This has made womenfolk restless and dissatisfied and has destroyed in them the mood for motherhood. Everyone who wishes to make and to create must stand aside from the world.

Thirdly, economic insecurity which has settled upon national and domestic life has given rise to anxieties which like thorns choke the growth of the Word. This, with other causes, has led to the limitation of family among all classes of society.

Fourthly, family limitation combined with the causes of home-disintegration, *i.e.*, the dissipation of life and economic insecurity have destroyed in the urban population the traditional craft of motherhood which is largely responsible for the upbringing of the child.

Fifthly, if mothercraft is to be resuscitated it must first of all be recognised as an art—the supreme art—and be taught; and the conditions of home-life must be suitable for the practical application of such teaching. Houses and towns must be planned *for children*.

That is a brief summary of the foregoing pages. It now remains to establish the relationship between the craft of motherhood and the crisis of puberty, and to show that a good deal of the irreligion of modern youth is due to mismanagement in early childhood.

Puberty is a crisis to which every adult can bear witness, and a crisis which is beset by graver dangers to-day than at any other time in the world's history. This difference is not physical or biological but is due to the parlous state of the world into which the children are born.

'It is not hard to prepare a child for the trials and obligations of life,' says Rudolf Allers in his *Psychology of Character* (p. 278) 'and to teach that success is not an easy thing and greatness of no account. It is hard to prepare him to live with those who crave only for success, who regard their fellow-men only as means to their selfish ends, whose ways are dark and devious, who have no understanding of frankness and kindness but believe everyone's conduct to be dissimulation, who regard the people in their environment as enemies instead of as fellow workers, who are unable to conceive of any values that are absolute and not relative because they are the centre of their own cosmos, who therefore know of nothing more worth striving for than self-exaltation and exhausting the transitory possibilities of pleasure. Despite all counter-efforts this type is enormously on the increase.'

The modern mother is bringing up a family which in adolescence will be rudely awakened to the raw realities of life, and this throws upon her a grave responsibility. She has to prepare the child for the world as it is, and much will depend upon her influence during the earliest years.

Rudolf Allers refers to this responsibility (*Ibid.* p. 283):

'Since the psycho-characterological faculties of a man have a special "time of manifestation" as is clearly shown at the period of physical puberty, it may be that something hitherto completely unnoticed appears as something quasi-new; but this novelty can influence only something that is already present.

'These considerations help us to establish the truth of the decisive importance attaching to the earliest years of life, and consequently . . . for the whole later development of character, the experiences of the first six years, the period before school, are all-important. Therefore those people to whom the small child is entrusted bear the very greatest responsibility for his later characterological disposition.'

This explains the regrettable and startling development noticeable in many boys when they arrive at the age of puberty—a development which is not so much a change as a manifestation of something already there, and is traceable to the influence of home environment during early childhood.

We are driven, therefore, to the conclusion that the failure of so many adolescents to survive the change of puberty is attributable to the fact that the mother is either unworthy of or unskilled in her craft, and that the leakage is largely a problem of reinstating the mother and providing her with suitable conditions of life. This duty devolves upon the psychologist, social reformer and priest each in his proper sphere, under the direction of the Church.

Even when this change has been effected, certain constructive influences will have to be exerted outside the home. These will centre round the school, and the rôle of the teacher—*in loco parentis*—will be of first importance. The chief influence of the school according to Christian values will be the sympathy and example of the teachers, and their ability to understand and direct the individual child. The child has to be built up and not fitted into a

scheme. It is one of the difficulties inherent in the school system that the numbers are too large for individual attention. Children differ, and, although much of a level intellectually, they are often at different stages of development. The teacher will know the general principles of child-psychology and the factors that contribute to the behaviour of the children under his care.

Especially will care have to be taken not to make religion distasteful. A great deal of harm will be done if religion is considered merely part of the school curriculum, if the children are marshalled for church and the sacraments in the same way as they are assembled for class and if the behaviour in church is too much constrained by the presence of the teacher.

Insistence must be laid on the interior life in an endeavour to lead the child to love its religion. Religion must be real and alive; Jesus Christ a hero and loving Lord; prayer sacred and personal.

If a mother begins to speak of 'Jesus' to her baby as soon as he can understand—even before he can speak—and if he sees in her, as it were, the living interpretation of Christ, when such a child goes to school he will already have the seeds of the interior life in his soul. This the teacher may easily develop, but if he is merely a pedagogue he may as easily stifle and destroy it.

And so we would suggest that the approach to religion be liturgical rather than catechetical, that Holy Mass be the centre of the child's religious life. Children should be interested in the action of the Holy Sacrifice and taught not only to be present but to *assist*; not driven into His Presence under threat of punishment but induced to *want* to go to him, so that the school, fulfilling its function as 'complement' to the home, may render invaluable assistance in the formation of character.

Then finally, in the case of the awkward growing lad who has lost the graces of childhood but has not yet emerged into full maturity, the saving factor will often be the authority and example of the father. If he is a man

of prayer and has knelt with his children before the altar from their earliest years, the manifest integrity of his life will win their souls for Christ.

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CHARLES LAMB AND ST. THOMAS AQUINAS.

A strange juxtaposition! Yet a perfectly warranted one.

On 25th March, 1829, Charles Lamb wrote to his friend, Bernard Barton, the Quaker poet, telling him of some books he had purchased and then he went on to say:

And also one of whom I have oft heard and had dreams, but never saw in the flesh—that is, in sheepskin—the whole Theologic Works of Thomas Aquinas! My arms ache with lugging it a mile to the stage; but the burden was a pleasure . . . O, the glorious old Schoolman! There must be something in him. Such great names imply greatness . . . How I will revel in his cobwebs and subtleties, till my brain spins.

Seven months afterwards—on the 26th of October—he hears of the illness of Coleridge and he seems to have thought that the reading of St. Thomas would do him good, for he wrote to Mr. Gilman on that day:

How grieved I was to hear in what indifferent health Coleridge has been and I not to know of it! A little School Divinity well applied may be healing. I send him Honest Tom of Aquin, that was always an obscure great idea to me. I never thought or dreamt to see him in the flesh, but t'other day I rescued him from a stall in Barbican and brought him off in triumph. He comes to greet Coleridge's acceptance, for his shoe-latches I am unworthy to unloose.

The volumes, however, were not a gift. Lamb could not spare them and during the following month we find him writing again to Gilman:

Pray trust me with the *Church History*, as well as the *Worthies*. A man shall restore both. Also give me back Him of Aquinum. In return you shall have the light of my countenance.

DUDLEY WRIGHT.