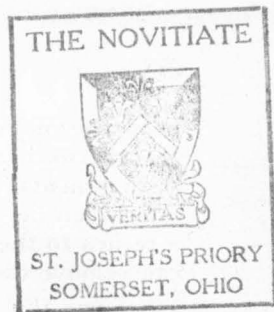


A NATIONAL PERIL

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HERE is probably no more serious problem today than the cancer of divorce and the failure to recognize its grave menace. Recent legislation has brought this fact clearly into the open and is leading serious-minded men to look to the future with grave apprehension. For all must readily admit that a nation's stability and permanence depend upon the permanence and stability of the nation's homes, and certainly nothing will bring about a national disintegration more quickly or more surely than the destruction of that which is the very backbone of national life.

Social thinkers recognize the fact that the prevalence of divorce in the United States arises from two causes. The first of these causes is the gradual change in the attitude of society towards women; in the recognition of their individual rights to their property and of their capacity to earn their own living in many vocations heretofore closed to them. The legal fiction that the identity of the woman was merged in that of her husband has given place to a growing recognition of her individuality of all relations of life. It is well to keep this fact in mind for this development of personality has weakened the dependence of women upon their husbands for support and has naturally affected the concept of the family relation. Then too we must remember that the theory of the Protestant bodies of the sixteenth century that marriage is but a civil contract devoid of sacramental character has been strengthened by the vicissitudes of modern life, while the facility with which divorce can be obtained has tendered to a constant increase of their number.

The second cause is the gradual increase and development of irreligion and materialism among the non-Catholic members of the community. On the screen, the stage, in the comic sheet, and on the air, marriage with its grave responsibilities is ridiculed and made to play the rôle of popular jest. All this tends to minimize, indeed to nullify, the Christian concept of marriage. But it is not probable that demoralization will be stopped

until the majority of Christian nations return to belief in the supernatural sanction of marriage and to a realization that it is a sacramental union, productive of grace, an indissoluble union which can be destroyed only by death. This means, of course, a return to the Catholic view of marriage, and this return alone can remove the national evil of divorce.

Since the beginning of this century over four million men and women have been divorced in this country alone. In fact we have now reached the point where American homes are being annually broken at the rate of one divorce to every 5.8 marriages. Let us for a moment consider the positive side, so to speak, of this startling revelation. Instead of four million broken homes we can picture four million potential families where love is the foundation of true domestic happiness. We can imagine thousands of future citizens who have been deprived of existence because of the selfishness of a few; eyes which should have beheld the beauty of God's creation; lungs and bodies which should have breathed the pure air of freedom and hearts which should have pulsed in union with the principles of Christian morality. This is not meant to be a rhetorical nor an idealistic exaggeration; this is merely a picture of what should be the normal outcome of true conjugal fidelity. But unfortunately the evils which flow directly or indirectly from the severance of the marriage bond prevent such a happy reality.

Certainly no one will deny that the social evils of divorce are so obvious that even a non-Catholic majority undoubtedly are in favor of at least a much stricter policy in the obtaining of a divorce. One of the most far-reaching evils is the encouragement of lower conceptions of the marriage state. For it is quite evident that when a person regards the taking of a new spouse as entirely lawful for a multitude of more or less unimportant reasons, his sense of obligation towards his present partner cannot be very strong or very deep. As a result respect for womanhood, wifehood, motherhood is greatly lessened. The dignity of woman and the nobility of man no longer serve as a bulwark for mutual love and confidence; and once that is destroyed, conjugal fidelity becomes difficult. Nor will it be denied that divorce gives an impetus to illicit relations between the unmarried, inasmuch as it tends to destroy in popular consciousness the association between sexual intercourse and the enduring union of one man with one woman. Another evil is the increase in the number of hasty and unfortunate marriages among

persons who look forward to divorce as an early remedy for present mistakes. Then there is the injury done to the moral character generally. For while indissoluble marriage is one of the most effective means to maintain self-control and mutual self-sacrifice, divorce destroys any guarantee of self-discipline; indeed it rather opens the way to self-indulgence. In marriage many salutary inconveniences are endured because they cannot be avoided, and many imperfections of temperament and character are corrected because the husband and wife realize that thus only is conjugal happiness possible. Divorce, on the other hand, gives no sufficient motive for this perfect love and understanding which should exist between husband and wife.

But perhaps the crowning menace of divorce is the fact that our criminal classes are being recruited from the children of broken homes. Whereas fifteen years ago or more it was the experienced law-breaker between thirty-five and fifty years of age who was being tried in our courts, today in all manner of crimes mere youths from seventeen to twenty-five are the accused persons. A conservative estimate reveals the fact that of these young criminals over seventy per cent are the children of divorced parents. How could it be otherwise? If the bond is severed, how can there be unity in the household? We are paying an awful price for the folly of divorce.

The majority of crimes committed throughout the country are either crimes of greed, crimes of lust, or crimes of anger. Now greed, lust, and anger are human passions, and to train the young in the mastery of the passions is a paramount function of the home. But where there is no home, where mother and father no longer live together, when the child has no place to turn but must seek the streets for his training, is it surprising that he finds himself the victim of tragic circumstances? Any constructive training on the part of parents can hardly be expected in a home where disruption has severed the family tie. The violation of the great law of Jesus Christ, "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder," has produced the bitter fruits of broken homes, broken hearts, and broken lives.

Perhaps the best summation of the menace of divorce is that stated by Leo XIII in his immortal Encyclical *Arcanum divinae sapientiae*, published some sixty years ago, and of which the late Holy Father in his own encyclical on Christian Marriage says: "We hereby confirm and make our own, and while we wish to expound more fully certain points called for by circumstances of

our times, nevertheless We declare that, far from being obsolete, it retains its full force at the present day." Leo XIII says: "Truly it is hardly possible to describe how great are the evils that flow from divorce. Matrimonial contracts are by it made variable; mutual kindness is weakened; deplorable inducements to unfaithfulness are supplied; harm is done to the education and training of children; occasion is offered for the breaking up of homes; the seeds of dissension are sown among families; the dignity of womanhood is lessened and brought low, and women run the risk of being deserted after having ministered to the pleasures of men. Since, then, nothing has such power to lay waste families and destroy the mainstay of kingdoms as the corruption of morals, it is easily seen that divorces are in the highest degree hostile to the prosperity of families and states, springing as they do from the depraved morals of the people, and as experience shows us, opening out a way to every kind of evil-doing in public and private life alike.

"Further still, if the matter be duly pondered, we shall clearly see these evils to be the more especially dangerous because, divorce once being tolerated, there will be no restraint powerful enough to keep it within the bounds marked out or presumed. Great indeed is the force of example, and even greater still the might of passion. With such incitements it must needs follow that the eagerness for divorce, daily spreading by devious ways, is like a flood of water bursting through every barrier. These are truths that doubtless are clear in themselves; but they will become clearer yet if we call to mind the teachings of experience. So soon as the road to divorce began to be made smooth by law, at once quarrels, jealousies, and judicial separations largely increased; and such shamelessness of life followed, that men who had been in favor of these divorces repented of what they had done, and feared that, if they did not carefully seek a remedy by repealing the law, the state itself might come to ruin."

Repeatedly the words of the great Pontiff have been verified. To cite one example, the Holy Father declared that "divorce once being tolerated, there will be no restraint powerful enough to keep it within the bounds marked out or presumed." Today legalists have been loosening the ties of homes and multiplying the grounds for divorce, until with our forty-eight different codes on marriage and divorce, and our fifty-two causes for sundering the bond we have shown ourselves in this

country more lax and shameless in this regard than any other civilized country in the world. And the tragic thing about it all is that nowadays divorce is considered no longer a cause for social ostracism because the world has lost its sense of sin and of decency. It is not merely tolerated; it is now set forth as a mark of social distinction. It is well to remember that the reason for this attitude is, to repeat, the nation's loss of the sense of sin.

The evils that flow from divorce cannot be checked until there is a return to a realization of the supernatural character of marriage. Demoralization will not be stopped until we have thoroughly understood and accepted the words of Christ: "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder." Crime will inevitably be on the increase until the Christian law of the inviolability of marriage is upheld and sustained. Certainly for the maintenance of family integrity and for the best interests of society, if not for the salvation of immortal souls, the Christian ideal of holy matrimony must be unswervingly adhered to in contemporary American life.

Let us listen as final word to the counsel of the late Holy Father in his Encyclical on Christian Marriage: "It is hardly necessary to point out what an amount of good is involved in the absolute indissolubility of wedlock and what a train of evils follows upon divorce. Whenever the marriage bond remains intact, then we find marriage contracted with a sense of safety and security, while, when separations are considered and the dangers of divorce are present, the marriage contract itself becomes insecure, or least gives ground for anxiety and surprises. On the one hand we see a wonderful strengthening of good will and co-operation in the daily life of husband and wife, while, on the other, both of these are miserably weakened by the presence of a facility for divorce. Here we have at a very opportune moment a source of help by which both parties are enabled to preserve their purity and loyalty; there we find harmful inducements to faithlessness. On this side we find the birth of children and their tuition and upbringing effectively promoted, many avenues of discord closed amongst families and relation, and the beginnings of rivalry and jealousy easily suppressed; on that, very great obstacles to the birth and rearing of children and their education, and many occasions of quarrels, and seeds of jealousy sown everywhere. Finally, but especially, the dignity and position of women in civil and domestic society is reinstated by the

former; while by the latter it is shamefully lowered and the danger is incurred 'of their being considered outcasts, slaves of the lusts of men . . .' No one can fail to admire the divine Wisdom, Holiness, and Goodness which, while respecting the dignity and happiness of husband and wife, has provided so bountifully for the conservation and propagation of the human race by a single, chaste, and sacred fellowship of nuptial union."

EXPOSITION

Untabernacled now at last,
God is monstranced in a manger;
An ox and ass, His acolytes,
Stand nigh the sudden Stranger,
While hosts of Angels pour their praise
Down aisles of stars from glory's choir;
Mary's soul's a fragrant censer,
Aglow in joy, with love afire.

Lost in peace and wonder,
Wrapt in adoration,
Joseph is the silent,
Reverent congregation.