

CHATS WITH YOUNG MEN

MISUNDERSTANDINGS

They seem as very trifles, yet they have a pow' malign; They enter, oft unnoticed—as it were, without design; They creep, like Eden's serpent, pushing beauteous buds aside; They poison Friendship's flower which the strongest blasts de-

DEVELOPING MEN OF CHARACTER

What sort of men do we want our children to turn out?—that is the first question a hundred people would give a hundred answers according to the limited standpoint of each. The business man would say: "I want my son to become a successful merchant;" the cultured man would say: "I want my son to become a perfect gentleman;" the religious-minded man would say: "I want my son to become an upright Christian;" the Catholic would say: "I want my son to become a model Catholic."

This is a fairly good summary, but it does not quite meet our requirements. What we want is something more radical—some sterling thing or other which lies at the root of the best in human nature, and embodies it. Our boy may become a very Hercules of physical health and strength, and yet a perfect dolt. He may be as clever as the devil—and yet as wicked. He may be as good as gold and as pious as a saint, and yet a flabby, pink creature. He may be the pink of aesthetic refinement and yet a sensual libertine. He may be a perfect genius and yet as fantastic as a goblin.

The first thing, therefore, we look for is a certain balance of parts—everything in its proper weight and measure. There may be coruscations of excellence besides—now in this direction and now in that; but these do not count for much unless there is a substantial building up of the main structure proper to a man. There must be no glaring deficiencies, at least so far as training can prevent them. We look first for the substantial in each department—a fair equipment of knowledge, a fair intelligence, a fair judgment, a fair amount of moral strength and stamina, of energy and enterprise, of refinement and culture in due proportion to the status to which our family belongs—a golden mean, at least, in every part. This is so far pretty obvious, but it does not go deep enough. The thing we really want is character.

But the word needs defining. In common parlance we speak of all sorts of character—some of which we certainly do not want. We speak of good and bad character, strong and weak character, stable and unstable character, odd character and no character. In this we are quite etymological without knowing it. For originally the world meant merely the mark impressed on a coin or seal, indicating its nature and value, and distinguishing it from others; and thus in its applied sense character comes to mean marked individuality. Experience shows that people can be both good and bad, weak and strong, with or without a marked individuality—and therefore with or without character. Now the end and aim of our training is not merely to make our children good and strong, but to ensure and develop in them a character which shall be good and strong. Parents and trainers of the young are of course fully alive to the idea of turning out their subjects good and strong; but often enough they plaster goodness and strength on from the outside in the hope that it will stick, quite regardless of the structure underneath. Plastering will last no longer than the wall which it overlays; if the wall be of mud it will be preserved for a time by the veneer; but before long it will crumble away, and down comes the house, plaster and all. What we want is not a mere plastering business, but strong walls of substance which need no plaster, and will stand till the day of doom. And this solid cut-stone structure spells "character."

I define character (in the sense required) as life dominated by principles. The terms are pregnant. Life comprises thoughts, words and actions; but the question is, how are thoughts, words and actions determined? Directly and immediately they spring from the spontaneous vitality of the organism; but what is the ulterior cause which sets the organism going, and determines its direction and results? The man of no character thinks, speaks and acts just as the impulse seizes him, whether for good or bad; or, if there be anything of reasoned

motive behind, this is determined by chance or circumstances rather than by any reflex and stable purpose. If there is any consistency about his life, this is due simply to the fact that his impulses or his circumstances are more or less the same all the year round, or because he has got into a groove, and lacks initiative and originality. The life of such a man may be good or bad according as good or bad impulses happen to predominate externally. Possibly he may do nothing very wrong, either because he has not enough spirit to be really wicked, or because he is afraid of being caught, or simply because he feels no inclination that way. He may be an innocent creature enough, but he will not rise to anything worthy of the name of virtue, still less to anything like eminence in virtue. He is, in short, more or less what he finds himself—the passive instrument of his internal dispositions and his outward circumstances, and their comfortable (or uncomfortable) slave. His life consists of a succession of thoughts, words and actions following each other more or less at random—a series of phenomena strung together loosely, or not at all, and so promiscuous that they cannot be reduced to a unity or summed up as a whole. Such is the man without character.

On the contrary, the life of a man of character is a decided unity—something knit firmly together into a consistent whole; not rigid or unelastic necessarily, but still a unified structure. The man of character has his impulses, and his circumstances too, both of which try to dominate him just as in case of the "other fellow." But his attitude towards both is different. It is the attitude of a master, not a slave—a dominating, ruling, directing attitude, which uses both impulses and circumstances as amenable to his own purposes, and makes them his tools. There is a calculation, a deliberateness about him which the creature without character has not got. He may be a good man or a bad man, but he will be masterfully good or bad. He may indulge his evil impulses as the "other fellow" does; but if so, it is with deliberation and set purpose. He may also restrain his impulses; but if so, this will not be with the weak fear of being caught, or a dread of unpleasant consequences, but out of deliberate policy and set purpose, because he has an object in view. In other words, the man of character is a man ruled not by impulse or circumstances but by internal motives—in short, his life is dominated by principles. These principles may be good or bad, right or wrong. But there they are; and it is due to their presence that he is what he is, and consistently what he is. That is what we mean by a man of character.—Rev. E. R. Hull, S. J.

OUR BOYS AND GIRLS

BABY JESUS

First I kiss the eyelids sweet— Little eyes that soon shall know All the dark of human woe— Peace that comes when sorrows seize us, Fill the dreams of Baby Jesus. Then I kiss the little feet— Hard you may say, and sharp and fierce Little feet that shall pierce; Hope that lifts and Faith that frees us, Guide the feet of Baby Jesus.

Then the kisses I repeat On the hands in slumber curled— Little hands that hold the world— Love whose circling arms appense us, Cradle softly Baby Jesus.

THE MOUSE THAT LOOKED OUT FOR NUMBER ONE

Once upon a time a mouse, having come of age to leave home, started out to seek his fortune. The first thing he came to was a tall tree, up which he nimbly climbed, and at the top he found many large nuts. "Here is food plenty," he said, "if I can only get inside." He gnawed through the rough husk, but then came to the hard bark of the nut. "Perseverance will overcome all difficulties," he said to himself; and soon he found a small soft place in the bark, and quickly made his way through it. There before him lay a most delicious feast of milk and sweet white coconut meat. Now, this mouse might have hurried out and told his relatives and neighbors of the feast he had found, enough for all for many days, and invited them to join in it; or he might have stood in the hole and passed out meat to his friends, who could carry it to other mice that lived at a distance, many of whom might be in hunger. But our mouse did neither of these things; he said, "Look out for number one," and, "First come, first served," and repeated some other similar proverbs that he had been careful to remember. So he stayed inside the nut and ate and ate and ate, till he had eaten it all up; and then he said, "I will now take a good sleep, and then go out and find another nut for tomorrow." But alas! when he would go outside, he could not possibly squeeze through the hole, his stomach had grown so big; and he could not gnaw the hard shell, he was so weak from overeating; so he had to stay inside till he died. And when the coconut gatherers came they found one nut too light to be good; and, cracking it open, lo! it was the tomb of the unfortunate, selfish mouse. It is quite a common thing to find large coconuts with nothing inside

but dead mice. This is the way the poor things get there. And this is the lesson that they teach; we may keep everything for ourselves, or we may share things with others, especially those in want. But if we follow the mouse's example, we shall meet with misfortune in the end.—Ave Maria.

USING THE PIECES

Some years ago, a great artist in mosaics lived and worked in Italy. His skill was wonderful. With bits of glass and stone he could produce the most striking works of art—works that were valued at thousands of dollars. In his workshop was a poor little boy whose whole business it was to clean up the floor and tidy up the room, after the day's work was done. He was a quiet little fellow, and always did his work well. That was all the artist knew about him. One day he came to his master and asked timidly: "Please, master, may I have for my own the bits of glass you throw upon the floor?" "Why, yes, boy," said the artist. "The bits are good for nothing. Do as you please with them."

Day after day, then, the child might have been seen studying the broken pieces found on the floor, laying some on one side, and throwing others away. He was a faithful little servant, and so year after year went by and found him still in the workshop. One day his master entered a storeroom little used, and in looking around came upon a piece of work carefully hid behind the rubbish. He brought it to the light, and to his surprise found it a noble work of art, nearly finished. He gazed at it in speechless amazement. "What great artist could have hidden his work in my studio?" At that moment the young servant entered the door. He stopped short on seeing his master, and when he saw the work in his hands a deep flush dyed his face. "What is this?" cried the artist. "Tell me what great artist has hidden his masterpiece here?" "Oh, master," faltered the astonished youth, "it is only my poor work! You know you said I might have the broken bits you threw away."

The boy with the artist-soul had gathered up the fragments, and patiently and lovingly he had wrought them into a wonderful work of art. Do you catch the hint, little people? Gather up the bits of time and opportunity lying about, and patiently work out your life mosaic—a masterpiece by the grace of God.—Catholic Transcript.

FAITH OF OUR FATHERS

Let us seek an illustration of what our fathers did by taking the persecution and death of four martyrs. The first martyr was St. Stephen, who was stoned to death. Then we turn to St. Bartholomew, who was stripped of his skin. Can we realize the terrible agony which he must have endured by this awful form of suffering. Next we have St. Lawrence, who was not burned but roasted slowly to death, on a gridiron. So too we remember the lingering torments of a St. Sebastian; and then we turn to the early Christians—men, women and children, who were placed in the arena to await on their knees, praying to God for help the horrible death which confronted them, by being torn limb from limb by wild beasts. These are only some of the persecutions which our forefathers had to suffer for their faith.

What was it that gave them strength to face these dangers? It was the Blessed Sacrament. Such was the faith of our fathers. Now let us come to our own day. We have no persecution to dread, we have no spies to fear or death to face for our faith. Our churches throughout Christendom are open all day. In every Catholic church Mass is celebrated, yet how few—and I speak especially of week-days—how few there are who fully appreciate the great privilege which the gracious God has bestowed upon His people! I have travelled over a great part of the world, and as I constantly go to Mass on week-days, I cannot fail to observe the small attendance, and the very few who go to receive Communion, and of this number the smallest proportion are men. Why should we stay away? Are we so much better than the women that we do not want spiritual help to carry us through the day? Is religion an effeminate practice, that must be left to the opposite sex? We are the heads of the family, and we are responsible for our wives and children. We have a great question before us in these days, and that is education question. We must leave no stone unturned, but remember that the stone which the builders rejected became the corner-stone of the edifice. It is to that stone that all must look. It requires no physical force to remove it, it will fall back easily to disclose to us a great treasure—the treasure of treasures—the Blessed Sacrament. The Almighty implores us to accept this wonderful proof of His love for us. Our only remedy for the wounds caused by sorrow and affliction, and the only help we can rely upon in our conflict with the powers of evil is the Divine Redeemer.

By this devotion to the Blessed Sacrament we shall learn to live in, and so be prepared to die for, the faith of our fathers.—Sir Charles Santley in The Sentinel of the Blessed Sacrament.

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