

FIVE-MINUTE SERMONS.

DANGEROUS COMPANIONSHIP. Walk (transcendently; not as unwise but as wise. (Ephes., v. 15-16.)

To-day, my dear brethren, I propose to make a few remarks on the dangerous occasions of impurity, so common in these times.

The danger of which I wish specially to speak is that which comes from the familiar acquaintance which now exists to such a great extent, and is taken so much as a matter of course, between young persons of different sexes. This undue familiarity is too common everywhere in this country; and more than anywhere else in a city like that in which we live.

To take a flagrant instance. A priest being a man educated according to the rules of respectable society, is unexpectably surprised when he for the first time hears some young woman, apparently of a careful conscience, ask him if it is a sin to flirt.

Why, outwardly and at the first appearance, the act is not very different from that of an abandoned woman seeking to attract those whom she thinks will notice her. The intention, of course, in your minds is often comparatively harmless, it is true; but by outward standards, the act is simply despicable.

This seeking to form unknown acquaintances of the opposite sex or to attract special attention among them is, then, a thing which no Catholic girl should think of, if she has any sense of shame. But when such acquaintances are formed by an introduction in itself proper, they should be very carefully considered.

For a young woman to make one of the other sex her friend or familiar companion, as she will may one of her own, is a thing which should be unheard of. She should have but one such friend, and he should be one who has acted honorably to her by proposing to her to take the honorable part of her husband, and whom she has before God and in her conscience felt to be worthy, and accepted by a binding engagement.

Before that, and to all other men, politeness with proper and modest reserve should be the constant rule, affection and familiarity out of the question. And yet we find girls keeping company, as it is called, and that without any sort of serious guarantee of the purposes of the other party, not only with one after another, but even with more than one at once.

For the reasons, plain enough, on which these directions rest, promiscuous assemblies of both sexes, such as those to be found at certain gatherings, now unfortunately so popular, are full of danger, and had far better in all cases be avoided. A freedom of manner prevails in them—to say nothing of direct temptations to the senses—and an ease of making acquaintance, which opens a free door to sin. I do not wish to be too severe, but, as a rule, I do say, leave such places alone. Young women, respect yourselves; demand the respect of others. There is the moral in a nutshell.

Tennyson on Spring. We have the word of Alfred Tennyson for it that in the spring the young man's fancy is lightly turned to thoughts of love. It is singular that the great laureate omitted to mention the fact that it is in the spring that a considerable portion of the human race turns to taking Hood's Sarsaparilla. Probably nothing but the difficulty of finding a good rhyme for that invaluable remedy deterred him. Certain it is that the old-time domestic remedies are generally discarded in favor of the standard blood purifier, Hood's Sarsaparilla, which has attained the greatest popularity all over the country as the favorite Spring Medicine. It purifies the blood and gives nerve, mental, bodily and digestive strength.

A LITTLE WHITE DRESS.

By MARY CATHERINE CROWLEY.

This information was received with-out comment, but it aroused in some foolish little hearts a feeling of envy, and in others a desire of emulation. Eugenia Dillon was the richest girl in the school. Her father, a plain, sensible man, who had lacked early advantages, had within a few years amassed a considerable fortune, which he would gladly have enjoyed in a modest, unpretentious manner.

This, however, did not suit his wife at all. Mrs. Dillon, though a kind-hearted, charitable woman, was excessively fond of style, lavishly extravagant, and inclined to parade her wealth upon all occasions. She did not realize that the very efforts she made to attain the position in society which would have come to her naturally if she had but the patience to wait, caused her to be sneered at as a parvenu by those whose acquaintance she most desired. Unconscious of all this, she pursued her way in serene self-satisfaction—a complacency shared by Eugenia, who delighted in the good fortune and had taste which permitted her to wear dresses of silk or velvet to school every day in the week, and caused her to be as much admired as a little figure in a fashion-plate by those of her companions who were too unsophisticated to know that vain display is a mark of vulgarity.

"Oh children, children!" exclaimed Sister Agnes, who caught the drift of the conversation as she came into the room. "Do not be troubling your precious little heads about the fashions. We must all trust something to the good sense of your mothers that you will be suitably gowned. Certainly it is eminently fitting that one should be beautifully attired to honor the visit of the King of kings. Considered in this light, no robe could be too rich, no ornament too splendid. But, lest a small thought of vanity should creep in to spoil the exalted motive, the custom is to adopt a lovely simplicity. If you notice, we never think of the angels as weighed down with jewels. Bestow some of this anxiety upon the preparation of your hearts; see that you are clothed in the royal robes of grace; deck yourself with the jewels of virtue—pearls for love, emeralds for hope, rubies for contrition, diamonds for faith and purity. It was with gems like these that the holy maidens, Saints Agnes, Philomena, and Lucy, chose to adorn themselves, rather than with the contents of their trinket caskets."

Thus the nun continued to speak to the band of little girls, who had eagerly gathered around her; thus she went to teach them lessons of wisdom in a sprightly, gay, happy-hearted way, as if generosity, unselfishness and self-denial were the most natural traits imaginable, and the whole world fair because it is God's world, and we are all His children. Was it this spirit of joyousness which attracted young people especially to her, and gave her such an influence with them?

"Somewhat," when Sister Agnes talks to me," even so lightly a little personage as Lillie Davis said one day, "I feel as if I could make any sacrifice quite as a matter of course, and without a speck of fuss about it." "Yes," agreed Connie. "She seems to take your hand in her strong one and to lead you up a stony, hilly path; and then, when you come to the roughest, steepest places, she almost carries you onward, and you are ashamed to complain that you are tired, because, though she is so gentle with you, she does not mind such trifles at all herself."

"She makes me think," interrupted Lillie, "of the pleasant, sunshiny breeze that comes up sometimes on a cloudy morning, and chases away the mists through which everything looks so queerly, and lets us see things as they really are." Lillie's quaint comparison was an apt one, as was proved in the present instance.

When Sister Agnes had gone the subject which the girls had been discussing presented a different aspect, and the keynote of her character which always impressed them—"Do noble deeds, do not dream them all day long,"—caused them now to feel dissatisfied with themselves and to cast about for something to do. This reminded Constance again of Annie Brogan and the white dress that Lillie had regarded with so much scorn.

"Girls," said she, "wouldn't it be nice if we could give a dress and veil, and whatever is necessary, to some poor child who is to make her First Communion on the same day as ourselves? Perhaps, too, we could arrange to have her make it with us. Don't you think this would make us happy, and do a good way to prepare?" "How could we do it?" asked the quiet girl, coming to the practical question at once.

"By giving up some of our ribbons and candies and knickknacks during the next few weeks, maybe," continued Constance earnestly, thinking it out as she went along. "Suppose we all agree to get the pretty dresses the nuns wish us to wear on that day, instead of the showy ones we want? They would not cost as much, and our mothers would, I am sure, let us use the extra money in this way."

With much animation, but the bell rang before any decision had been arrived at. Later, however, after a consultation with Sister Agnes, who promised her cordial co-operation, the children concluded to adopt Connie's suggestion, if their mothers would consent.

"I must acknowledge that I am disappointed," remarked Mrs. Davis to her husband that evening. "To-day I ordered the material for Lillie's First Communion dress—an exquisite tulle. But she came home from school with a story about furnishing an outfit for a poor child, and she assures me that her companions are to wear plain dresses for the occasion." Thereupon the lady proceeded to give the details of the plan as she had understood it.

"A very creditable determination," said Lillie's papa, approvingly. "I endorse it heartily. If it is really the children will not be distracted by the thought of their gowns, while at the same time some deserving little girl will be provided with an appropriate costume. I advise you to send back the tulle by all means, my dear, and apply the difference in price between it and the fabric agreed upon to the fund the children are trying to make up."

"Well, I suppose it will be best to do so," decided his wife. "Anyhow, tulle is so delicate a tissue, and Lillie is such a heedless little creature, that it would probably be badly torn before the end of the ceremonies."

"I am sorry," soliloquized Connie's mother when she heard of the project. "Connie's First Communion will be so important an event for her that I feel as if I could not do enough in preparation for it. I should like to dress her more beautifully than on any other in her life. If she were grown and about to enter society, or if I were buying her wedding dress, I would select the handsomest material procurable—why not now, for an occasion so great that I ought hardly mention it in comparison? But, after all," mused she, later, "the children's arrangement is the best. I am happy that Constance is so free from frivolity, and has shown so edifying a spirit."

For Eugenia Dillon, the giving up of the white silk was, as the girls generously agreed, "the biggest act of all." At first Mrs. Dillon would not hear of it; "though," said she, "I am quite willing to buy the dress for the poor child myself, if you wish, Eugenia." But Eugenia explained that this would not do, unless she carried out the plan like the others. In fact, she found that one of the hardest things in the world is to argue against what we want very much ourselves. At last, however, her mother good-naturedly yielded the point, saying, with a laugh, "Oh, very well, child! But I never before knew you to object to having a pretty dress." And Eugenia was very sure she never had.

The great day finally arrived. To picture it, or to describe the joy which filled the soul of each of our first communicants, is not the purpose of this story. But as the white-robe band entered the convent chapel, to the inconspicuous throng of fashionable people there assembled their appearance was the strongest possible sermon against vanity. Their soft white gowns were as simple as the most refined taste could make them, and as beautiful; their fleecy veils enfolded them as with holy thoughts; their wreaths of spotless blossoms signified a fairer crown. They numbered seven originally, but now among them walked another. Which little girl was the stranger, however, only one mother knew—a humble woman, who, as she knelt amid the congregation, silently knelt and a blessing upon the children who by their thoughtfulness had made possible her pious desire that her child might be appropriately and respectfully attired to welcome the coming of Our Lord.

The first communicants remained at the convent till dusk. During the afternoon somebody noticed, indeed, that Eugenia's dress, though of mull like the rest, was more fanciful, and her satin sash twice as wide as that of any one else. But the discovery only caused a smile of good-humored amusement; for it was hardly to be expected that Eugenia would conform absolutely to the rule they had laid down for themselves.

After Benediction, as they prepared to go home, they said to one another: "What a truly happy day this has been! How often we shall think of it during our lives!"

Charity.

When you meet with one suspected, Condemned unheard for some sin, By fair weather friends rejected, The world's approval to win, Speak no word of heartless blame, For the slandering's vile detraction Yet may soil thy goodly name.

When you meet with one pursuing Ways the lost have entered in, Working out his own undoing, With his reckless and sin; Think, if placed in his condition Would a kind word be in vain? Or a look of cold suspicion, Win thee back to God again.

There are spots that bear no flowers, Not because the soil is bad, But the summer's genial showers Never make their bosoms glad. Better have an act that's kindly Treated sometimes with disdain, Than, by judging others blindly, Doon the innocent to pain. —ANON.

CONFESSING SINS TO A PRIEST.

The Stock Protestant Argument Humorously Refuted.

An acquaintance of ours, who frequently went to and from Philadelphia, was often teased by some of his associates about being a Catholic. He was a German comparatively uneducated, but well instructed in the doctrines of the Catholic religion. Withal, too, he was naturally gifted, witty and sarcastic. One evening one of his associates asked him, 'Lewy, you confess your sins to a priest, don't you?'

'Yes,' was the reply, 'I do.' 'Why do you confess to a priest? He is only a man. How can he forgive you your sins?' 'Yes,' retorted L., 'he is only a man, but Almighty God conferred on him the power to forgive sins.' 'Oh, but why don't you go directly to God to confess your sins? I always go to headquarters when I have to do anything, said the objector. 'I deny it, you don't,' was the rough and ready reply. 'How do you know I don't?' asked L.'s questioner. 'Prove that I don't.'

'Well, I'll soon do it,' said Lewy. 'You ride in this car, and so, too, sometimes, does Mr. —, the president of the railroad. Some day, when the president and you are in the car, the conductor asks you for your ticket. You won't give it to him and tell him, I always do my business at headquarters.' The conductor says 'just try it.' You then go to Mr. —, president of the railroad, and say, 'Mr. —, I won't give my ticket to the conductor, I give it to you; I always do business at headquarters.' The president says—well, just exactly what he says had better be left to the imagination. In vigorous, if not elegant language, however, he tells him to give the ticket to the conductor or get off the train.' There was a universal shout of applause from the listeners, and it was acknowledged that Lewy had the best of the argument.—Catholic Standard.

The Catholic faith is the religion that is faithful to the Cross. It insists on self-denial. It teaches that nature must give way to grace. It idealizes suffering endured for love of God. It opposes the maxims of the world. It acts up to the warning of the Lord: 'Unless a man denies himself and takes up his cross daily and follows me, he cannot be my disciple.' No other claimant to the title of Christian Church so loves poverty, chastity, obedience and mortification. Christ and Him crucified is its model and master.—Catholic Review.

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