

WHAT IS MARRIAGE ?

TO Catholics marriage is a Sacrament. Wealthy persons treat it as a settlement in life. For ordinary people it may spell a career in the man's case, and to the woman an emancipation from family ties. Doubting souls may call it a vocation. As regards the 'masses,' the only 'classes' which really count in these Labour days, marriage appears to be a lottery in more ways than one. Catholics, and I speak of adherents to the 'old-established firm with its headquarters at Rome'—the expression is Henry Labouchere's—have a very definite conception of marriage. '*Hoc est magnum sacramentum,*' exclaims St. Paul. And he adds the proviso: '*Dico autem in Christo et in Ecclesia.*' It is the life-long union of man and woman indissoluble as the union of Christ with His Church.

Marriage implies children. Catholics adopt this principle as their own. In Catholic countries the birth-rate remains at high tide. Their women accept child-birth as a natural incident of married life. Therefore, they are not afraid of it. Birth control is anathema to Catholics. And by this I mean artificial birth prevention. The Church does not forbid control by abstention. She insists on the Pauline precept of each party according to the other its due rights. But if both parties agree to live for a space as brother and sister, either to limit a family or for any other such reason, the Church does not say them nay. So far the Catholic standpoint. It is held wholly by High Churchmen, and partially by other religious bodies. With these exceptions, and it is common knowledge that the majority of English working people never seriously practice any religion, the attitude towards marriage is a purely materialistic one.

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The primary result of this is that to them marriage is a purely civil contract dissoluble, if means allow, by divorce. It becomes also practically nullified by one or other of the parties forming irregular unions elsewhere. Many working girls enter into marriage with the same light-heartedness as they would dive into water, and perhaps with even less forethought. Most divers make sure of the depth they are plunging into. But how many—or how few—take this reasonable precaution in marriage? A working girl, whether clerk, cashier or waitress, has often a far better time as a spinster. She works for certain hours, earns a fair wage, and can usually afford enough to satisfy a normal desire for dress and recreation. And she remains absolutely a free agent. In many cases she remains in her home circle, and has all the necessary comforts, to be found there. For her there is not the same urge to marriage as in the case of a man. He is probably sick of living in rooms, with their attendant loneliness, and his thoughts will naturally turn to the satisfaction of having a home of his own and a woman to look after his material comforts. So he begins to look out for the desired mate. She, if she is in love—or imagines she is—will give up her life of comparative freedom and ease. The two get married. Very soon the wife begins to regret leaving her former occupation, and finds that the excitement of keeping house and cooking meals has its limitations.

In many cases the pair are reluctant to have children, or the wife, as happens more often, is afraid of the pain and inconveniences of child-birth. Also the expense is a difficulty. Far more amusing to invest in a small car. The husband is necessarily away from home from early morn till dusk. Thus a young wife finds herself lonely at times, despite the attractions of a picture-house round the corner. She misses the variety and companionship of the young people she

was constantly thrown amongst before marriage. The amount of money her husband supplies her with each week is insufficient for more than necessary outgoings, and she knows it may be years before this sum can be materially increased. At times she finds it practically impossible to make ends meet. She shrinks from a visit to the pawn-broker, the only 'forgiving relative' of her poorer or richer sisters. She begins to reflect, and her thoughts lead to dissatisfaction, if not regret. Possibly in order to please his wife, and also to improve the family exchequer, a husband will agree to a temporary separation. The wife secures a post away. The results need not be—but too often are—disastrous to both.

The present writer can cite a case in point. The wife, an exceptionally attractive girl of twenty-two, married two years to a very respectable motor driver of the same age. Before marriage the wife earned good money as a waitress. She takes a temporary post in a large West Country seaport. Being very pretty and fond of dancing, she is much sought after by young men of the town. Having heard that married women are at a discount, she foolishly removes her ring, and is in consequence much in demand. A very decent young fellow is much attracted by her, and the girl finds herself in a difficult position. This is accentuated by the fact that she is not insensible to his attractions. Fortunately, she eventually declares her married state, and the result will probably follow that her dancing proclivities in the town in question will come to an untimely end. So far so good, provided the acquaintance ceases. But the affair has unsettled the wife, especially as she knows her husband will by no means approve of her escapade. The only thing that will save the situation is a speedy return to the husband. Added to this a not long deferred occupation of the empty cradle.

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It is practically certain that in such cases child-bearing is the only way to preserve the union. In the new and absorbing interest of a child to love and cherish the maternal instinct will obliterate all save itself. Thus the future happiness of a home typical of a thousand others will be assured. For the beginning and the end of marriage is, and always will be child-birth.

JOSCELYNE LECHMERE.

THE FRIENDS OF BLACKFRIARS

PROBABLY very few of our readers need telling that THE FRIENDS OF BLACKFRIARS indicated by this title are not simply those courageous folk who take a friendly interest in this review, who even sometimes read it, and occasionally subscribe to it. THE FRIENDS OF BLACKFRIARS to whom we refer—a very considerably smaller band than our little group of readers—are those persons who have formed themselves into an association of helpers towards the maintenance and endowment of the Dominican Priory of the Holy Ghost, Blackfriars, Oxford.

On Trinity Sunday, the 24th of June, the FRIENDS held their annual general meeting in the small lecture room at the Blackfriars Priory, Oxford. The bulk of the party came from London; there was a group from Oxford itself; and Cambridge and other parts of the country were represented. After a preliminary committee meeting the room was thrown open to all the Friends and to members of the Dominican Community. Mr. Edward Bullough presided, assisted by the Honorary Secretary, Miss M. M. C. Calthrop, and the Honorary Treasurer, Mr. George Bellord.