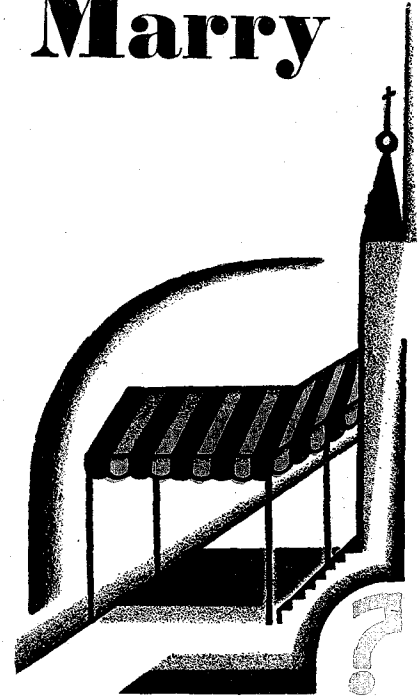


# What it Means to Marry a Protestant

THIS ARTICLE is the best of several dozen submitted by readers in reply to "What it Means to Marry a Catholic," by "One Who Did" (June, 1929). In that article a Protestant woman drew upon her own intensely personal experience to prove that mixed marriages are likely to be unhappy marriages. And now a Catholic who married a Protestant paints his side of the picture. He starts with different assumptions from those of our Protestant writer; he challenges nearly all of her "facts"; and yet, curiously enough, he arrives at practically the same conclusion as hers.

by  
**THOMAS  
QUINN  
BEESLEY**



Drawings by Lloyd Coe

ARGUED WITH strict logic, and on the plane of spiritual relationship, the ideal state is either celibacy, or, as a compromise, the non-cohabitant marriage, such as that of Joseph and Mary. Neither, however, can be recommended to those who are children of their generation, for whom marriage with its attendant physical consummation seems to be the most satisfactory arrangement. I think it is wise to decorate its biologic and economic purposes with the conventional orange blossoms of sentiment, but the intensely practical and permanent business of living, which St. Paul must have had partly in mind when he wrote, "he who giveth his virgin in marriage doth well, and he who giveth her not doth better," should not be obscured or excluded. Marriage is not easy, even under the best circumstances. It depends on the character and mental attitude of the two persons whether they will live in a state of grace or a state of disgrace. Mixed marriage merely introduces a special set of complications to be met, special adjustments to be made.

This the author of *What It Means to Marry a Catholic* does not seem to recognize. To her, mixed marriage is the cause of all her troubles. That is, marriage between a Protestant and a Catholic, for apparently she does not admit the possibility of mixed marriage between two Protestants — an error which leads her to as-

sume that when two Protestants unite the chances for a successful partnership are better than if either had married a Catholic. The truth is that it is no greater strain for a Catholic and a non-Catholic to live in matrimony than it is for a devout Presbyterian and an earnest, "hard-shell" Baptist, a high church and a low church Episcopalian, a Unitarian and a Christian Scientist, or any similar combination of explosives that might be devised and which one meets frequently. All of these are potential dynamite, as is attested both by the doctrinal conflict which constitutes a large part of their history and which has nullified all efforts at church union, and by their current attitudes toward each other. Therefore it is not unlikely or improbable that the Protestant plaintiff might have made a complete failure of marriage with a Protestant of some sect other than her own, and that her difficulties therein might reduce her present mountains to mole-hills. I have known it to happen. And as for marriages between members of the same church — I can recall pitched verbal battles over sermons, trustees, and church society offices, between husband and wife, sharers in an otherwise placid household, which lead me to believe that even denominational unity is not necessarily productive of sweetness and light.

The Protestant lady has revealed every de-

tail of her domestic situation and somehow she gives a disturbing picture of sectarian bias and a tinge of mental snobbishness. I say this not unkindly but only to clarify the issue. She describes her husband as one who "adheres to a religion belonging to a bygone age." She grieves for her children because "there is no way they can escape paying the price of their parents' ignorance." She disparages "Romanist habits of mind" and sets up instead her own criteria as a "modern-minded person." Did she really intend to give such a picture of her husband? Surely she must have realized that in regard to Catholic practices and doctrines, her facts, as well as the deductions she bases upon them, are all second-hand and valuable only as such. Her private life, however, she renders first-hand, and it is impossible for me to reply to her without doing the same — or at least rendering enough of it to illustrate my points.

My father was converted to Catholicism by the influence of the Oxford movement, during the lifetime of his first wife, a Protestant, and shortly before he met and later married my mother, a Catholic girl. Although my brothers and sisters took their stepmother into their hearts and affectionately named her "Aunt Mary," they remained true to their several varieties of Protestantism. My Catholicism they attribute to "Aunt Mary's" influence; they cannot comprehend its being a reasoned belief for either our father or myself, and they are frightfully irritated by my bland air of religious equality. (This self-confidence is, I suppose, one reason why a Catholic husband is likely to be more than the usual husbandly trial to his Protestant wife: he seldom has an inferiority complex, and thus outrages the accepted domestic and religious conventions.) My first wife was a Catholic, and after her death I married, following a four-year interval, a Protestant Episcopalian; it was her second marriage also, her first having been with a Protestant of the same denomination. Propriety restrains me from any description of the results other than to say that we both reject Disraeli's cynical jeer that "second marriage is the triumph of hope

over experience." We merely rediscovered what I have already stated — that a successful marriage depends largely on character and attitude.

#### MIXED UNIONS ALWAYS PRECARIOUS

WE DO NOT "to the marriage of true minds admit impediments," for we realize that such a condition is the chief justification for a mixed union. But we do advise marriage within the circle of your own religious belief, if heart interest is encountered there. We believe that the chances of harmony, happiness, and success are far greater from the start when the husband and wife have like religious views. There is nothing startling in this joint opinion: it is taught by every philosopher and theologian of first rank who ever considered the problem, and is sanctioned by the regulations of every religious code ever formulated. To those who hold me illogical in marrying a non-Catholic and then saying, "Do not thou go and do likewise," I have but one answer: "Each marriage is an individual case, and the chances are one hundred to one that where a particular mixed marriage is a success, the next ninety-nine will result in the domestic picture revealed in 'What It Means to Marry a Catholic.'"

I base my pessimism on an analysis of the meaning and purpose of marriage as outlined by the Catholic Church. It means, or should mean, a solemn, irrevocable step, not to be undertaken lightly. The church does its best to make sure of at least a three-weeks interval for reflection by requiring a triple publication

of the banns. Furthermore, only death can terminate the marriage contract. In short — and this is the foundation of the Catholic procedure in mixed marriages — *marriage is a sacrament*. St. Paul, the noblest Roman of them all, a man of the world who was not dictated to by theologians and catechists, understood this when, in his famous first letter to the church at Corinth (where marriage conditions were no different than they are to-day in Chicago or New York), he wrote: "If any brother hath





a wife that believeth not, and she consent to dwell with him, let him not put her away. And if any woman hath a husband that believeth not, let her not put away her husband. For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the believing wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the believing husband; otherwise your children should be unclean; but now they are holy." Thus for Paul, as for Catholics today, marriage is a sacrament, an outward sign of an inward grace, instituted by Christ.

This view is not shared by most Protestants and therein lies one of the most prolific sources of misunderstanding of the Catholic attitude. So important a sacrament is marriage that its administration is wholly outside the powers conferred on the priest: it is the only one of the seven sacraments which the laity alone administer and the only one which a baptized non-Catholic validly receives without first becoming a Catholic. The bride and groom administer the sacrament to each other. With the physical consummation of the union, the sacrament is complete. The priest, even the Pope himself, is merely an authorized witness, serving the dual purpose of providing legal ratification under civil law and preventing clandestinity.

#### WHAT GOD HATH JOINED

**I**F MARRIAGE did not partake of this sacramental character, how could there be any point in entering into such a relationship? How, too, could there be any point to Christ's famous reply to the Pharisees when they asked him, "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife?"

And he answered and said unto them, What did Moses command you?

And they said, Moses suffered to write a bill of divorcement, and to put her away.

And Jesus answered and said unto them, For the hardness of your heart he wrote you this precept.

But from the beginning of the creation God made them male and female.

For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and cleave to his wife;

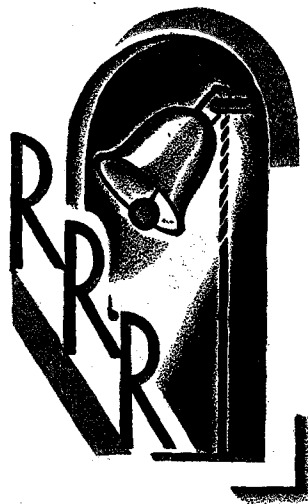
And they twain shall be one flesh: so then they are no more twain, but one flesh.

*What therefore God hath joined together, let no man put asunder.*

That concluding sentence profoundly affects the Catholic's view of marriage. Looking to no civil or ecclesiastical authority for grace or salvation in the married state, he must depend entirely upon supernatural grace and natural wisdom to sustain him in those sometimes terribly heavy obligations and difficulties which he encounters in the vow — "for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part." To him marriage is a spiritual as well as a physical union. Moreover, either the sacrament has been received or it has not. For this reason "trial marriage" and "companionate marriage" are, to a Catholic, hilariously funny contradictions in terms. As well speak of a bigamous celibate or a set of three twins.

This entire philosophy of marriage is built to withstand — and anticipate — "worse" and "poorer" and "sickness" and the rest. Certainly this attitude is to the advantage of the wife. The church insists that marriage is a vocation to which one is called, not a legalized social, sexual, and economic experiment. The rule that only crime, ill-treatment, or adultery justify even so little as separation from bed and board, may be austere, but it is an excellent preventive to hasty and intemperate action, and it elevates the virtues of hope and faith to an equal place with that of charity, while at the same time subordinating the large amount of the animal in human nature to the lesser but more important mental and spiritual qualities. The Protestant lady can hardly take exception to the church's insisting, within the realms of its jurisdiction, on the safeguards and restrictions which make possible this better and more permanent state of matrimony

when other faiths have done the same — the Protestant Episcopal in its Twenty-third Canon, which forbids a minister of any other denomination officiating at *any* ceremony within a Protestant Episcopal edifice; and the Lutheran,





which at a recent synod called for "a halt in the social breakdown in which marriage has become a matter of convenience, to be discarded at will."

### BIRTH CONTROL

AND NOW to consider some of the specific complaints of this Protestant wife. First she mentions the church's attitude on birth control. Materially viewed, the purposes of marriage can be only biological and economic. It is quietly ceasing to be the latter in the United States where more than eight million women hold jobs. The procreation of children remains one of its primary aims, as well as one of its usual consequences, and the fact that, with this in mind, Christ included it among His sacraments, is, for me, one of the surest proofs both of His divine nature and of His humanity. Perhaps it is the good Protestant example of my ancestors who brought forth sturdy and numerous flocks of vigorous parentage, which causes me to wonder whether this primary idea of marriage is not all right, and only the overstimulated bodies and enervating tendencies of our time that are wrong. For I am fully aware of how agitated are most women of fashion and education concerning birth control. Yet I also know that they are still subject to misgivings and hesitations. They are not entirely comforted by advertisements of various prophylactics or by the more explicit birth control information given out at clinics staffed principally by widows and spinsters. They appear, these agitated women, to be hampered subconsciously by their racial inheritances or by their early religious training, however diluted either may be.

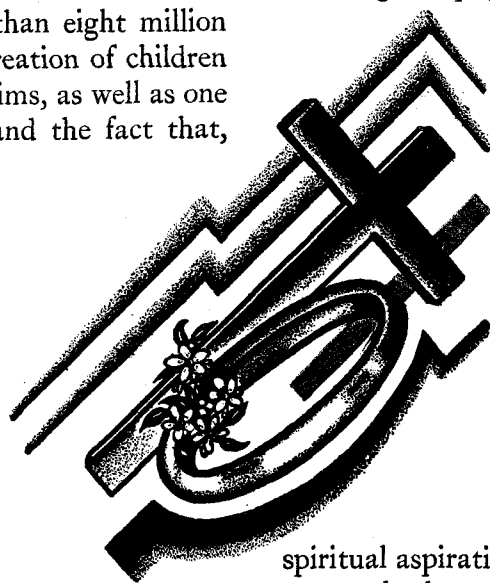
What really troubles them, I think, is that having children apparently is coming to be regarded as an entirely animal process, selective and occasional; and that the spiritual factor has disappeared. Now if this were true, why marry? Make procreation a state function, as the extreme Communists contend. To continue

reasoning in this strain, every argument of economics is in favor of large families, for they will provide cheap labor, more farm hands, and increased distributional outlets. Are these statements cynical and materialistic? No more so than the aim of the Brush Foundation for Birth Control at Cleveland, Ohio — "to contribute to the betterment of the human stock, and to the regulation of the increase of population, to the end that children shall be begotten only under conditions which make possible a heritage of physical health and a favorable

environment." Animal husbandry agencies have said the same, in slightly less lofty words, concerning the improvement of Holsteins and Durocs.

But this is not the way human beings improve. It may be his handicap, but man is set off from his fellow brutes by his intelligence and

spiritual aspirations, and his improvement will come only through them. Periodic continence is practiced by animals higher up in the evolutionary scale; surely it ought to be acceptable to man. It is practical: it is imposed on athletes training for contests; priests are considered excellent insurance risks. This, then — abstinence at and for stated intervals — is the method of birth control advocated by Catholic philosophy. I believe it to be the only sound and advisable method. Mechanical limitation does not reach the class whose children should be limited, as is proved by the ascending curve of venereal disease the world over. From the purely human side, a husband certainly ought to conserve his wife's strength during the periods of gestation and lactation. For these reasons, the economic and personal arguments in favor of contraceptives sound to a Catholic suspiciously like an admission either that the parties are unwilling to live within their means, or else want to eat their cake and have it too. If one marries with a mental reservation to avoid or limit the birth of children, there is no element of true consent to the contract as a sacrament, and the marriage is of no value.



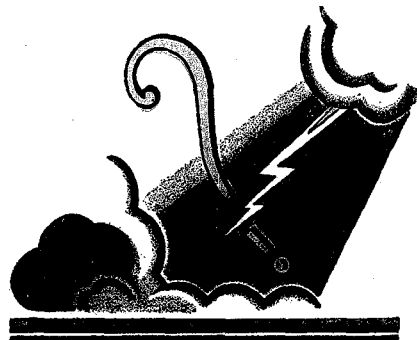
There can be no compromise on this subject between the Catholic and the non-Catholic parties.

As for the Catholic schools, the Protestant author inquires, "What on earth is a sectarian school for if it is not to thwart independence of thought, at least in matters of dogma?" I should say, offhand, that it is largely for the purpose of giving a good education. I admit that parochial institutions drill terrifically on elementary fundamentals, but, being a business man, this is rather refreshing to me. And in regard to the catechism, the Baltimore version seems about on a par with some of the Protestant catechisms with which I am familiar. Let me say in concluding with this particular phase of the argument, that the lady is hopelessly uninformed when she asserts that "the economic burden imposed by the parochial school is greater than the Catholic population can safely carry." Is she aware that the voluntary tax per head which Catholics in this country impose upon themselves for their schools is only *sixteen cents a month*? The 1926 official figures show that 18,605,003 Catholics spent \$35,592,300 on their educational system. Like all such taxes, the bulk is paid by those who can afford to. I dislike to rebuke a lady publicly, but I am compelled to characterize as sheer nonsense the assertion that "thousands of children are deprived of proper food, clothing, and recreation" because of contributions exacted from their parents for the parish schools. I cannot sympathize with her even when she speaks of "the difficulties of any person who marries a Catholic without considerable means." It is my observation that these difficulties, for Protestants as well as Catholics, are not matters of religion but of management.

"There is no such disparity in marriage as unsuitability of mind and purpose," Dickens said in *David Copperfield*. Assuming that situa-

bility, the mixed marriage still remains one of the most delicate of marital obligations. The problem will not be solved if the non-Catholic embraces Catholicism merely as an effort to remove a barrier. Unless conversion is a matter of absolute and unshakable conviction, then in God's name remain as you are and marry as Catholic and non-Catholic. If you wish to go with your husband or wife to church, that is for your conscience to decide — but unless you can go in a spirit of reverence and honest inquiry, stay away. One of the difficulties of mixed marriage is the question why father or why mother does not accompany the rest of the family to church. This is an inescapable hazard that must be faced and, sooner or later, met. Other hazards, too, must be met. For one thing, you promise to carry out during the lifetime of your Catholic husband or wife the work which both of you began on your wedding day, when you took a solemn vow in the sight of God to educate and rear your children as Catholics. And should death leave you, a non-Catholic, alone, you must fulfill that vow made in the enthusiasm of a living love — even though you should afterwards marry a member of a Protestant denomination.

If a mixed marriage demands from one party an abrogation of important parental rights in the fundamental matter of the religious training of the children, it also requires of the other party more than the usual tolerance, sympathetic consideration, and forbearance. On both sides one is faced with a complicated situation, a barrier, and a difficult requirement, known in advance and accepted in free will and presumably in good faith. Once accepted it becomes a moral obligation, binding on conscience, and to be carried out willingly and with love. The only road through the obstacles is to adopt and live up to this pledge from the very start — "We expect, and will respect, our differences."



# Aztecs of To-morrow



by **FRANK W. CREIGHTON, D.D.**

*Episcopal Bishop of Mexico*

**T**HE VISITOR to Mexico City who takes a Sunday morning drive on the beautiful Paseo de la Reforma to Chapultepec Park and Castle, is mildly amused when he sees Juan and his family, in from the country for a holiday, firmly stationed at some prominent corner, oblivious to the fact that they are blocking traffic and making general nuisances of themselves. Juan, holding his balloon; his wife, carrying the bottle of *pulque*; his grandfather, entranced by a pinwheel — they and the numerous offspring are all happy; so what matter if they are, as one is constantly told, *muy bobeados* (very boobish). The men will probably be drunk by night and in the gutter, but that will make no difference — the women and children will sit on the curb and wait patiently for morning, when they will all return to the country after a happy holiday.

*Bobeados* — a perfect description. One day a friend of mine and his wife overtook an Indian carrying a heavy crate of berries to the city market. He had struggled on for many miles and his back was bent under the burden. The lady wanted berries for preserving, so they negotiated for some and put them in their car. Then as the Indian was starting off again, his load somewhat lightened, my friends decided that they would take his entire stock. But to their amazement he would sell them no more. "No," he said, "if I let you have all my berries, I will have nothing to sell when I get to the city." So on he labored for many more miles. "The prize boob," as my friend said.

With every dawn in Mexico City a wretched horde of filthy, diseased, vermin-infested Indians emerges from unspeakable hovels —

sunless slums, shacks along the railroad — to prey upon the city. Tattered women with emaciated, sore-skinned babies, dirty, red-eyed men simulating every type of deformity — they block your path, offering lottery tickets and *dulces*. One wonders how a city claiming to be civilized can tolerate such specimens. Yet these are the descendants of the once proud Aztecs. They remain on the scene of their ancestors' perfidious betrayal of their own great Cuauhtemoc, whose nobility and bravery against overwhelming odds are at once their only boast and their everlasting shame.

For more than three years I have lived in Mexico. My home is in Mexico City, but I have spent much time in the country — visiting Indians, living with them, listening to their quietly expressed hopes and aspirations, observing their habits and their potentialities. I feel that I know at least something about these people. I know, for one thing, that what is true of the unfortunates in the city — and all the city's Indians are not unfortunate by any means — is not true of the Indian in the *campo*.

I have sometimes heard travelers in Mexico say that it would have been better if the Spanish had wiped out this race. Quite true, they did not. But they did sow the seed of intestine war, burn the forests, and introduce cruelty on a large scale. They let the Indian live because they needed him in exploiting the country; and he did live — in a condition of servility which for four centuries has plagued and thwarted him and which in itself would have been fatal to a less virile people.

There were advantages, of course. Conscien-