



I. Subjects are not placed in obedience for the advantage of their rulers, but rather the rulers are placed over the subjects to look after them, to protect them from their enemies, and by wisdom and prudence to secure to them peace, harmony, and prosperity; therefore, subjects owe their rulers far more gratitude, on account of the charge that God has laid upon them, than rulers owe their subjects for services rendered, and honors shown. That a master is bound to give sufficient board and lodging to his servants, according to the general custom; that he must attend to their wants with Christian charity when they are sick, and do his best to restore them to health, although they cannot work nor earn anything for him while in that state; that he is bound by the law of justice to pay them their full wages at the proper time—these duties are recognized all over the world. But the necessary care does not consist in that alone. I speak now to you, Christian masters and mistresses, and I tell you that there is a far higher obligation incumbent on you. You must be Apostles in your own households; you must act as preachers and priests to your servants, and take the greatest interest in their eternal salvation. Your servants are subject to you and must obey you; but, as you must confess, they are not more subject to you than you are to God. Now, God will not exercise any authority over you unless on the condition that he has imposed upon himself, of furthering thereby your eternal salvation. To this end, his plans are directed; for this, he has pledged his own divine word. Is it not, then, only just and right for you to use your authority in the same way, that is, to take a deep interest in the eternal welfare of your servants?

But why should I look for arguments to convince you of this duty, when it is so clearly explained? If divine providence has placed some of you in such a position that you must give your liberty and your service to another man, be not afflicted on that account. Be subject to your masters, and true to them; obey them readily in all that is not contrary to the law of God. You have much to expect from them; not only are they bound to give you food and wages, but something far more precious. And what is that? “For they watch as being to render an account of your souls” (Hebr. 13: 18). If they are careless in doing so, God will demand your souls at their hands on the last day.

II. There are three things, principally, in which a master must attend to the spiritual welfare of his servants. He must give them *good example, instruction* and *correction*. Good example, so that he may never scandalize his servants or lead them into sin. Good instruction, by which he must often exhort them to good. He must chastise them, with charity, when they sin against God, or when they are idle and lazy, or when they are in dangerous occasions or company, so as to save them from sin and vice. If he is wanting in any of these three things, he does not perform his duty, and will be punished by God as an unfaithful steward.

Oh, in how many modern Christian households are these important duties overlooked or negligently fulfilled! Men and maid-servants certainly have just reason to complain now-a-days, as the disciples of Christ unreasonably did long ago, when they were on the point of perishing in the storm: “Master, doth it not concern thee that we perish!” (Mark 4: 38.)

Master, mistress, is it nothing to you that we are leading a bad life and will be lost? Truly we might say of such masters and mistresses what God says: "Oh, shepherd and idol" (Zach. 11: 17) for they stand like graven images and let themselves be waited upon and served by others for whom they do nothing. They have heads, and understand not; they have eyes and see not; ears and hear not; mouths and speak not; hands and feet which they do not make use of. That is to say, their whole idea is to be waited upon by their servants, and to get as much work as possible out of them. But they never try to find out the moral faults and failings of their servants; they have no eyes to watch over their lives and conduct, no mouths to exhort them to serve God, no hands to chastise them when necessary, no feet to go before them with good example. Nay, in place of watching over their salvation, they rather help them to eternal ruin; in place of showing them the way to heaven, they lead them to hell. In place of being the shepherds of their souls, they are thieves and murderers who kill the souls and destroy them!

For, what kind of teaching is sometimes given to servants? What use is made of the servant, who is already indifferent enough about pleasing God, so long as he can satisfy his temporal master? He is simply the tool, the instrument of his master's sin. He is made to carry sinful letters, and help to keep up an improper correspondence for his master. He must learn how to lie and cheat, to get drunk, and to be vindictive and unjust. What use is made of that maid-servant, who is already little inclined to learn her catechism? She must help in everything that an idle, worldly life and wicked desires suggest to her mistress; or she is made an accomplice in the sin of her master. How many girls there are who go into service innocent, pure, and leave it disgraced and dishonored!

And what kind of example do they get? Do they see their masters, if not in the morning at least in the evening, kneel down with them to say their prayers? Do they often hear their masters speak of God and holy things? Do they see in them an example of Christian humility and meekness, of peace and unity, of resignation to the will of God, of the frequent reception of the Sacraments? That is the way in which a Christian household should be governed. All the servants must follow his good example, if the words of the Gospel can truly be applied to their master: "Himself believed, and his whole house." But, oh, Christians, how terrible is the force of bad example, especially when given by one whom we must honor and respect! Tell me, now, how will it be with simple, uneducated, ignorant people, as most of those are who must earn their bread by waiting on others, when they see that their masters and mistresses, with whom they are in daily contact, lead bad and wicked lives; that they have little taste for piety, but much for vice; that they are constantly quarrelling with each other, and cursing and swearing at their children; that they are prone to back-biting and calumny? What, think you, must be the effect of example such as this on souls that are already inclined to evil? Is it not natural to expect that in a short time they will resemble their masters and mistresses, that they will learn from them to speak ill of others, to curse and swear, and to be slothful and lazy in the service of God? Certainly, if they were innocent and virtuous when entering into service, they would leave it full of vice and wickedness.

And how are they corrected of their faults? If the manservant, through mere carelessness, is not in his place at the proper time; if the maid-servant forgets a message, or breaks anything by accident, then the master or mistress is angry enough. There is no end of cursing, swearing and abuse. The poor servant is turned away or deprived of a part of the wages agreed upon, so that such a fault may never be committed again. But if the manservant misses Mass on Sundays and holydays through sloth, and is given to cursing and swearing; if the maid-servant runs out at night and frequents dangerous company, very little is thought of that, so long as they do their work in the household. Nay, no account at all is taken of such faults; masters do not even wish to examine into them for fear of disagreeable consequences, until at last there is a public scandal, and the only excuse is: "I knew nothing about it; if I had heard of it sooner, I should have prevented it." And how does it happen that you knew nothing about it? Was it not your duty to have known of it? Should you not have kept a watchful eye on your servants? It is indeed a strange thing that sins are committed in your own house, almost under your eyes, and you are the last to hear of them! You know very well how your servants attend upon you, and whether they are lazy or diligent. You cannot be too sharp in seeing whether they ever take anything out of the house by stealth. You are sure to find that out; for you spy about with lynx-eyed vigilance for faults of that kind; nay, if you have any grounds for suspecting them of dishonesty, you lay traps for them, in order to prove their guilt, thus tempting simple souls, and placing them in the occasion of sin, for according to the proverb, "Opportunity makes the thief." See how careful you are to correct the faults that your servants commit against yourself; but you know nothing and care to know nothing, of the sins that are committed against God by those subject to you, over whose souls God has placed you as shepherds and guardians.

It seems to me that I hear many say in their own minds what the high-priests said to Judas, when he repented of having betrayed to them the innocent Jesus: "What is that to us? Look thou to it" (Matt. 27: 4). "What is that to us?" thinks the master or mistress sometimes. "What have I to do with the consciences of my servants? What difference does it make to me whether they lead a good or a bad life? If they wish to go to heaven, it is their own affair. They are old enough to understand what they are about. If they are lost forever, it is their own fault. I have not to look after their souls; I have made no agreement to instruct them, and lead them on to virtue. I give them food and wages if they serve me properly; they cannot expect anything more from me." But what sort of talk is that? Christians, is the salvation of your servants, then, nothing to you? Is it a matter of indifference to you whether they are lost or saved? What becomes of the law of Christian charity which binds every one to promote, his neighbor's salvation as much as possible? (Ecclus. 17: 12.) Hear what St. Paul writes to the Romans, and learn from him what an important matter it is for you: "A servant," he says, "to his own lord standeth or falleth" (Rom. 14: 4). Have you made no contract with him to look after his soul? Woe to you, indeed, if you forget that duty! The Almighty God, the Sovereign Master of all, has made that contract with your servants in your name, and he will, one day, require their souls at

your hands. Not only your own sins, but the sins of your servants which you could have prevented, will be the cause of your damnation. Therefore, your own advantage requires you to take care of their spiritual welfare. To make this clearer to you, I will now speak of

III. The great merit which you acquire to your own souls, Christian parents and housekeepers, by being co-operators and helpers of Jesus Christ in this important duty. There is nothing more God-like than to work for the salvation of souls that have been redeemed at such a great price. And what a splendid opportunity you have of doing so! I will consider merely the temporal advantages you may derive from that. The quiet, peace, unity, security, industry, profit, and prosperity of your whole household depend on the care you take of the souls of your dependants. Let me prove this by your own complaints. How often do you not bewail the trouble and annoyance your servants cause you! I do not mean to say that your complaints are groundless. I grant, even, that you have grounds enough for them. One servant is a quarrelsome, ill-humored fellow, who can leave no one in peace. Another is slothful and lazy at work, but quick enough in coming to his meals. You must be always looking after them; if you turn your back, they will idle their time. The maid-servant is obstinate; she will do nothing at the proper time, but takes up now one thing, now another, just as it suits her humor. She must be told to do a thing ten times before she obeys. If you venture to speak a serious word to her, she has twenty answers ready. You have reason to suspect another of being unfaithful to you, as she keeps company with people of doubtful honesty. You cannot leave anything in her hands. Whatever occurs in the house, she tells the whole neighborhood. My children, too (complains a mother), sometimes say things they cannot understand, as they are so young; I do not know where they learned them; there must be some one in the house who indulges in improper conversation. Such are the daily crosses that one has to bear from one's own servants. Masters and mistresses will tell you that their servants are the cause of all their uneasiness, chagrin, impatience, cursing, and sinfulness. How fortunate, they add, are people who have good and faithful servants! I agree with you, dear friends, that it is a most intolerable, vexatious, and wretched thing for servants to be so unfaithful to their duty. But do you know whence the whole trouble comes? They do not lead pious and Christian lives; they do not fear and love God as they ought; they have no inclination for piety, and are not encouraged nor exhorted to it by any one. If they go once or twice a year to confession and Communion, and hear a short Mass on Sundays and holydays, that is all that their masters ask them to do for their souls, or all that they, through want of encouragement and instruction, care to do for God and for heaven. In other things, it seems almost as if they were excommunicated. They never hear a sermon, never come to Catechism, and so never have a chance of learning how to fear the Lord, or to acknowledge their own faults. Is it, then, any wonder, that since they are so lazy and unfaithful in the service of God, they are also wanting in fidelity to their earthly masters?

Do you wish to mend matters? Yes (you answer): And to that end must I send away my present servants, and hire new ones? No, I can give you far better advice than that. See to it only that those who are now in your service lead pious and Christian lives. Then your

complaints will cease at once, for if they are good Christians, they will live in peace with each other, and there will be an end to quarrelling and disputes; they will be ready to help each other, and will vie with each other in readiness to help you.

Fathers and mothers of families, see, then, to it, first of all, that you yourselves are good and pious, and after that, see, with all possible diligence, that your children and servants also lead good and holy lives. Often call to mind that God has placed you over them as the pastors of their souls, and that you must one day render a strict account of the manner in which you have performed that duty. If this thought does not move you, then remember that your welfare and that of your whole family depend on whether you all lead holy lives or not. Take as your example that wise woman, of whom the Book of Proverbs says: “She hath looked well to the paths of her house;” (Prov. 31: 27) that is, she knew everything that occurred in the house, and what her dependants were doing. So great, indeed, was her watchfulness that it sometimes interfered with her night’s rest: “She hath risen in the night and given a prey to her household, and victuals to her maidens” (Ibid 15). And not only did she provide sufficiently for their bodily nourishment, but also she looked after their souls: “She hath opened her mouth to wisdom, and the law of clemency is on her tongue” (Ibid 26). That is to say, she opened her mouth to teach her dependants true wisdom, to give them instruction regarding their eternal salvation and the practice of virtue; and thereby, she gained great fame, and was looked upon as the most fortunate woman in the world: “Her children,” and her servants, “rose up and called her blessed” (Ibid 28). Imitate her example, Christian fathers and mothers, and happiness will reward your zeal for souls, if not here, at least hereafter, where master and servant, mistress and maid, will differ only according to their different merits; where we shall all be masters, since we shall have everything we desire and wish for; and where we shall all be servants of our great God, in whom we shall also have a most loving Friend, in his eternal household, the kingdom of heaven. Amen.

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