

# Shy Irish Bachelors

JAMES J. WALSH, M.D., PH.D

THE dying echoes of St. Patrick's day are dimmed very seriously by the figures of the Free State census of population, volume V, which has just been issued and confirms impressions previously held with regard to the serious failure of the Irish to marry. The *Irish Independent*, commenting on these statistics, says that "Ireland is the island of bachelors." There are more unmarried men proportionately in Ireland than anywhere else in the world. The editor says that it is evident from the statistics that young Irishmen are shy and afraid to tackle matrimony. The worst of it is that the number of unmarried, both males and females, is increasing every decade. There are many thousands of eligible young men, but still more thousands of eligible young women most of whom would surely not require very much urging to marry, but they do not marry. An English critic has been unkind enough to say that the fault lies with the Irish girls, because, he says, it is well known that while men conventionally and eventually do the proposing, it has been made perfectly clear for some time before what their duty in the matter is. But this sounds very much like a man's shifting his responsibility onto the shoulders of the woman.

Of course Thackeray once said "any woman unless she has a positive hump can marry positively whom she likes." He added: "Let us thank God that the pretty creatures do not know their own power and so like the beasts of the field we are able to manage them." Whosoever fault it may be is a question, but there is no doubt at all about the almost incredible tendency to celibacy of the Irish race. This has often been called to attention before but without sufficient statistical backing to make it absolutely certain. Now there is no possible doubt left, for with the census figures before us it is clear that the Irish Free State has a far higher percentage of unmarried men than any other country in the world. It has many more unmarried women also, but many of the other nations, especially since the War, have such a large percentage of unmarried women that the contrast between the Irish figures and those of other countries is not so startling in this respect.

Indeed some of these statistics with regard to the celibate Irish are almost incredible. Up to the age of thirty over eighty per cent of Irishmen are unmarried, that is to say, four out of five of the young men of that age are bachelors. One Irishman out of every four never marries, continues his old bachelorhood on until the end. Northern Ireland has a much better marriage rate for the men than the Free State, though it too has such a high percentage of bachelors as to make it very clear that there is something in the Irish nature which tends to keep it from marriage. It has been suggested that the real reason is economic, but it is not always in the poorer districts that there are the fewest marriages, and there are actually a number of well-to-do Irishmen who find it

impossible for personal or other reasons to secure a mate.

Both Ulster and the Free State have a very large number of unmarried women. It must not be thought that these women are thus by preference. On the contrary, there is probably no country in which a woman feels her unmarried state so poignantly as in Ireland. I shall never forget on my first visit to Ireland many years ago meeting a good old Irish lady who had been very kind to the younger members of our family years before and for whom we hoped to be able to do something in her old age; I asked her if she were a widow. She answered me without a moment's hesitation just as frankly and candidly as could be: "Oh, I'm the worst kind of a wudda, I'm an ould maid. There are entirely too many of us in Ireland of that same kind of wuddas. I wish there were fewer."

It is sometimes said in extenuation of this tendency of the Irishmen to remain bachelors that a great many of them during their susceptible years under thirty-five—if that may be taken as a sort of upper limit for susceptibility in men—if they are at all enterprising are thinking about the question of emigration rather than marriage and therefore keep putting off all thought of it until they are more settled in life. As is noted by the editor of the *Irish Independent*, however, "emigration is not the chief factor in preventing marriage, for although the rate of emigration has in general been decreasing, the percentage of unmarried in this country [Free State] has been rapidly increasing in recent years." The editor cites the statistics of previous censuses to demonstrate the truth of this. For instance, in 1841 the percentage of males unmarried between the ages of twenty-five and forty-five was forty-two. In each decade since, the percentage has increased until at the present time it is seventy-two. If this increase in the unmarried continues in the future as it has in the recent past, there will be by 1950 twice as many men unmarried at the age of thirty-five as there were a hundred years before. In 1861 there were only eleven per cent of males who did not marry, but in 1926 the percentage of unmarried Irish over the age of sixty-five was twenty-six. As the proportion of males who marry after sixty-five is infinitesimal, more than one-fourth of all the men in the Free State shun marriage.

The rural districts in Ireland are particularly the brooding places of unmarried men and women. Up to the age of thirty the percentage of women unmarried in the Free State at the present time is sixty-five per cent in the rural areas and fifty-seven per cent in the towns. At the same age for men, the percentage unmarried in the rural areas is eighty-seven, and in the urban areas, sixty-eight. Actually there are more than one in five marriages more in the towns than in the country. In our own pioneer days in this country living conditions in the settlements were very discouraging; the raising of children and the incurrence of all the risks of maternity at long distances

from medical aid and even from neighbors must have proved very discouraging for matrimony. Yet our American young folks married and there was never an unmarried problem to be faced, though there were one or two to bear the brunt of the deprecation of their non-marital status in nearly every little community.

The comparison between the marriage statistics of the United States and of the Irish Free State is very striking. Sixty-two per cent of the Irish women are unmarried at thirty, that is, nearly three out of every five; only twenty-three per cent of the women in the United States, that is, less than one out of every four, are unmarried at that time. The percentage of men unmarried up to thirty-five in Ireland is sixty-two per cent. Once more three out of five, while it is only twenty-four per cent in the United States, once again less than one out of four. Comparison with the United States under these circumstances is quite unfair for many reasons, but even Ulster has an ever so much better record in the matter of marriages than the Free State. The percentage of women unmarried in the Free State at each age up to fifty-five was fifty per cent greater than in England and Wales and nearly three times as high as in the United States of America. The eastern part of Ireland marries a little younger than the West, but the west of Ireland marries off more of its men eventually. A large number of Connaught men delay their marriage until fifty and even beyond it, and yet they go under the yoke before the end.

Compared with other countries in Europe, Ireland has on the average twice as many unmarried men at various ages as the average in the other countries. After Ireland in this bad eminence comes Sweden and Finland and Norway and then northern Ireland. Switzerland and Scotland follow these in the high percentage of unmarried and the comparatively advanced age at which they marry, though England and Wales are twenty-first on the list, showing a very healthy number of marriages at ages that are not too advanced. The United States has the largest proportion of the married at the various years.

Now that Ireland has become a nation—if we may say that, *pace* those Irish who are not inclined to admit such a development—it is extremely important that the race shall perpetuate itself. The custom of remaining unmarried until the forties and fifties is birth control not in the accepted usage of the words in our time and without any stigma attached to it, but in very reality actual birth control. The International Eugenics Society at its last meeting here in America insisted that what is needed in our time is not so much the reduction of the birth rate as the assurance that the better family stocks shall perpetuate themselves and have an increased number of children. If we Irish feel that we are in possession of elements for the benefit of the human race that are important, and this our history would seem to demonstrate amply, it would seem to be incumbent on us to safeguard their perpetuation. Unless the marriage rate in Ireland itself increases, but also the marriage rate among the Irish here in the United States, for as I have shown in previous papers it is very low,—the Irish are inevitably destined to extinction. At least as the result of marriage with other

stocks, the women of which prove more attractive for the Irish men than the fair colleens of whom we hear so much in Irish song and story, they are doomed to such dilution of nationality as will be equivalent to practical extinction.

## East Meets West in Liturgy

P. VOSTOCHNY

THE renewed interest in all things Russian is encouraging. Not least among these points of interest is the liturgy of the Eastern Church, which is very rich, especially in the various hymns to be chanted or read at the different Divine offices. The greatest number of them is contained in the offices of Vespers and Matins.

Let us take, for example, the office of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin, the first great festival of the Church calendar, which begins with the month of September. In the pompous language of the Orient the Feast is entitled "The Nativity of Our Most Holy Sovereign-Lady *Theotokos* and Ever-Virgin Mary." Besides psalms, litanies and prayers, which are stationary for Vespers, the Little Vespers of the day contains ten hymns in honor of the Feast and the Great Vespers has seven hymns. The cardinal part of Matins and Lauds is the so-called canon consisting of eight odes with approximately 100 little hymns in all.

The liturgical hymns contain not only lyric and epic poetry but they treat among other matters also on dogmatic theology. The exposition of the entire Nicene Creed may be found in the various parts of the Festival and daily services of the liturgical year.

In his recent Encyclical on the Feast of Christ the King, the Holy Father among other things speaks of "the wonderful harmony which exists between our rite and that of the Eastern Churches, so much so that the axiom *legem credendi lex statuit supplicandi* ('the law of prayer determines the law of belief') takes on a deeper truth. . . ." "Since ancient times," continues the Pope, "it has been customary to bestow upon Christ the title of King because of His Lordship over all created things. . . . The Church, the Kingdom of Christ on this earth, and by Divine command spread amongst all nations, proclaimed Him, Her Founder, in the annual cycle of Her liturgy, as Sovereign Lord and King of Kings. In affectionate veneration for Christ she multiplies the titles of honor which she bestows upon Him."

This "wonderful harmony of rites" is very clearly manifested, according to His Holiness, in the "constant praise of Christ the King" in the Oriental liturgy. It is, indeed, quite true that the Easterns love to bestow the title of King upon Christ Jesus. If we study the course of our Blessed Lord's life on earth, or even beginning from the moment of the birth of His Queen Mother, as it is reflected in the liturgical writings of the East, we shall find that the title of King, although occasionally given to the First and Third Persons of the Holy Trinity, is preeminently the prerogative of the Son of God.

On the Feast of the Nativity of the Most Holy *Theo-*

