

University of Notre Dame

Religious Bulletin

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A Pain-In-The-Neck Gentleman.

Dear Son,

Years ago, as I've often told you, I had to work my way through Notre Dame. My father in those days couldn't afford to foot the bill and keep the rest of the family in shoes and beefsteak; but he was wise.

The night I left home he took me aside and said in his simple, honest way, "Son, go to Notre Dame with the idea of making the most of it. Don't be the kind of weakling that will let anyone cheat you out of that. All the hard work you will have to do will be worth your efforts and the sacrifice that your mother and I must make if you will remember what I have told you."

The fact that you don't have to work your way only puts more responsibilities on your shoulders. After all, there's only a generation, they say, between shirt sleeves and shirt sleeves. In writing to you I can't improve much on the advice of your grandfather: in that male environment, dress neatly; keep your speech as decent as if you were speaking in your mother's presence; get everything possible out of Notre Dame.

I have always admired Newman's definition of a gentleman, which Father Charles O'Donnell used to talk so much about, but I have learned that a gentleman must often inflict pain. He must be a pain-in-the-neck to show-offs and to hypocrites and weak saplings that want to look like oaks.

If I know anything about it, a gentleman is one who has disciplined himself in the school of self-control so that his chief enjoyment comes not from crudeness and from obscenity but from the cultivation of his own personality along noble, Christian lines. Quite naturally, such a man will be a pain-in-the-neck to dull and blah blah fellows who bring themselves up on movies and lewd magazines and cocktails, who want to seem wise about the filth and weaknesses of the world but don't mind being dumb about religion and the refinements of a truly educated man.

To be a real gentleman you don't need to be a sissy; in fact, you have to be really tough. This last summer I noticed for the first time that you were beginning to acquire a considerable swagger and a vocabulary of profane words. Remember, I called you once out on the golf course. I couldn't help thinking that that was your idea of toughness. Well, it isn't mine. And I don't think it is the idea they have out there.

They will urge you to be a daily communicant. I was, and still am, as you know. They "pass the buck" as I do. They let Christ do most of the work. I like to think that a gentleman, a Catholic gentleman, who kneels and receives his God daily should certainly never cheapen his lips with a curse, nor contaminate his mouth with blasphemy, nor corrode his tongue with filthy, immoral jokes and words.

The flannel mouths that I have met are always suckers out of place except perhaps selling fish at Billingsgate. They spit out volleys of cheap profanity to cover up their lack of manhood. There's a lot of truth to the old saw that the hard-boiled egg really has a yellow center. I hope that you'll always cultivate refinement of speech and let your toughness assert itself, when necessary, in being a pain-in-the-neck gentleman to anyone who challenges your ideals.

Your Aunt Bessy is almost finished knitting your sweater and will send it on soon. I know that when you want something you won't be too bashful to write. Love from your Mother and your brothers and sisters, and from---

Your Dad

PRAYERS: (deceased) friend of Mike Layden; father of Paul Doherty, C.M.C.; father of Louis E. Wagner '18; friend of Ed. Dalton (Lyons); James Walker (Detroit); Bud Cassidy. Ill, father of Tom (Sorin) and Joe (Zahm) Mulligan; Bob Murphy (Cav); Ed Rorke (Sorin); Bill Brinkner (Cav); Four Special Intentions.