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THE FAMILY AND ITS PROBLEMS

ALTHOUGH the family is the smallest of social institutions, it occupies first rank in importance.

It is the primary unit in every civilized community, it is the first place of instruction in matters spiritual and material, it is the most closely-knit centre of social activity, it is the basic buying unit, and it is the stage upon which are played out the greatest joys and sorrows of human life.

Improvement of family living is not merely sentimental. It is a necessity for the smooth-running community, the sound nation and the vitality of democracy.

But the family is not escaping, any more than other treasured things, the turmoil of the age. Some disturbing influences are hold-overs from pre-war days. These have been intensified and new ones have been added by the experiences of the past ten years. Even in Canada, with all its resources and liberties and opportunities, there is an increasing tenseness in family relationships.

Romance is not Enough

In the opinion of some observers the fostering of romantic dreams by movies, radio, magazines, advertisements and newspaper strips is chiefly to blame for a lowered resistance to family difficulties. "More and more," said *Life* in a recent issue, "as the result of such highly coloured suggestion, young people have tended to rely impulsively on physical attraction and love at first sight."

Family life is not made up of romance, although that is one of its most important ingredients. There are hundreds of small, realistic problems to be faced every week, and both senior partners in the family must be prepared for patient and self-denying hard work. It is necessary to have companionship and friendship alongside the romance.

The Archbishop of York said at the marriage of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip:

> Love must always be unselfish, and unselfishness is the true secret of a happy married life. It must show itself not only in a great moment of heroic self-sacrifice but continually in all small problems and incidents of everyday life. It means thoughtfulness and patience, ready sympathy and forbearance, talking over and sharing together the special interests and cares which each of you will have.

Just as bad as leaning exclusively on romance for a successful family life is taking for granted that romance ceases after marriage. It is not sensible to imagine that the ceremony ends the need for that charm of manner, personality, courtesy, respect and esteem which were the basis of common admiration during courting days.

Perhaps certain German peasants have a good idea. Before the wedding ceremony the engaged couple are brought together and given a two-handled saw. In the presence of their neighbours they have to saw a log.

It is a test that can reveal many things: if one wishes to take the lead and do everything by himself, the rhythm is lost; if they tug against each other, the job takes twice as long and uses twice as much energy; if one leaves the work to the other, the saw wobbles and the cut is uneven. These German villagers have realized that co-operation is one of the greatest needs of a good marriage.

Many hasty, ill-considered marriages were entered into in Canada as elsewhere during the war, and the parties are now living above their emotional income. Time was not taken to appraise intelligently the qualities of prospective partners, to make sure that a harmonious family relationship could be founded on the marriage ceremony.

Helen Gardom gives some homely advice in her book *How to Marry the Perfect Man:* "Some flaws there must be, but make very sure they are the kind of flaws a little spit and polish will smooth out." It is hard to decide in a hurry whether defects are on the surface or deeply ingrained.

Romance obtained a rather low rating as the most important quality in marriage in a survey by the Canadian Institute of Public Opinion reported in the *Montreal Star* last May. In view of the way in which pollsters went off the beam in the United States election, most of us will add a grain of salt to our future readings of polls. However, if we use discretion, these polls can be taken as indicators to some extent of what people believe.

In the poll we are discussing, married women placed "Good provider" first on their list of most important qualities, with "Faithfulness" and "Patience, kindness, etc." following closely. Men to the extent of 40 per cent inscribed "Good homemaker" first on the list, with a long drop to the next most important quality, "Agreeable, good company", which took only 17 per cent of the votes. Only half the percentage of men felt the need of patience, as compared with women. "Loving" as a quality of first demand received the same vote from both sexes, three per cent.

What we have said indicates a sharp division between the thinking of those who are still in the throes of youthful wishing and those who have been through the mill of practical experience. Young people, led away by idealistic features they extract from their reading and entertainment, are misled into expecting that they can float through life on a cloud of romance; married people have found that the discharge of mutual obligations is the basis upon which love exists.

What is a Family?

The family is made up of a small number of persons closely and intimately bound together. If every family were suspended in a vacuum, family life would be much easier, but as it is every member is subjected to different influences outside the family circle, and the delicate mechanism of family harmony has to absorb many shocks.

Social scientists divide the family historically into patriarchal, small patriarchal, and democratic. The settlers who came to Canada from France, the British Isles, and other parts of Europe, brought with them the traditions and pattern of the patriarchal family: wife and children were subject to authority of the father.

This type of family was stable and settled. It had an enduring relationship with its fireside, it honoured traditions, and it established its children near the homestead so as to watch over and preserve them. The family lasted for many generations.

Today, most families have no abiding attachment to the hearth and no permanent root anywhere. A typical urban family rises and falls like this: marriage of the parents, increasing size as children are born, decreasing size as children marry and leave home, and disappearance with the death of the parents. During this cycle the family may have lived in twenty or more houses, each of which was temporarily, not significantly, "home."

The Family's Functions

It is well, before attempting to pass judgment on any type of family, to have a clear idea of the functions for which the family stands.

First and foremost is reproduction of the race. The human infant requires years to achieve maturity, demanding association with his parents until well into his teens. His education begins with his first training in behaviour, and continues, right up to the end, in advice and explanation.

The beginnings of formal religion are in the family. It is here that the spiritual and moral outlook of the adult are born. Political education, not having to do with transient things like parties but the lasting principles of citizenship, democracy, and duty to the state is a family function.

Knowledge of the industrial environment, the division of labour, the principles of individual contribution, the use of money, and a sense of responsibility: all these should be taught in the family.

And, finally, social behaviour is learned here or never. The principles of the Golden Rule and co-operation, of respective rights and duties in the community, must be learned in the family if the child is not to grow into a misfit or a social failure.

Size of Families

There were in Canada in 1947 about 3,042,000 families, an increase of 516,700 since the 1941 census. This increase ranged from 11 per cent in the Prairie Provinces to 47 per cent in British Columbia.

The average size of family last year was 3.7 persons, compared with 3.9 persons at the 1941 census.

There were, in 1947, the following number of families with the indicated number of children:

Number of Children	Number of Families	Number of Children	Number of Families
0	988,000	4	169,000
1	717,000	5	92,000
2	557,000	6	56,000
3	312,000	7 and more	91,000

Canada's birth rate per 1,000 of population was 23.9 in 1945. Other countries, for comparison, were: New Zealand 23.1; Eire 22.3; Australia 21.8; Sweden 20.2; United States 19.8; Scotland 16.9; England and Wales 16, and Belgium 15.5.

Parents Have Troubles

After this digression to discuss the statistical position of the family, let us return to consideration of the family as a part of our social life.

Parents are obliged to maintain themselves and their families in health and comfort, to pay their debts, to save, to increase their prosperity by increasing their efficiency. They try to give their children a better education than they had. And all through their children's lives, the parents must stand by with ready aid and guidance whenever called upon, no matter how strange the problem or bizarre the type of behaviour that caused it.

With the emancipation of women from the shackles of never-ending housework there may have come a lessened appreciation of just how essential they are in family life and child training. Neither physicians nor nurses nor any other professional group can furnish daily care, protection and development of individuals such as mothers provide in homemaking and housekeeping.

Not that the woman in the house is pre-eminently important. The average Canadian family functions through the division of labour and responsibility between husband and wife. He is the provider and she is the homemaker. He meets the day-to-day needs, such as shelter, food and clothing, and the prudent man plans ahead for future needs and to protect his family in case of his death.

The Family is Needed

Man became human through association, and the family is the first school in which the child learns behaviour patterns which guide him in his associations with other people. The family is the smallest group unit and the first of the societies within which men and women spend their lives. It is our most important social institution; to millions of people it is a sacred institution.

If the family is to be preserved in its distinguished role, everyone needs to do some clear and candid thinking. It is all too easy to brush off criticism, or to seek to transfer the responsibility elsewhere. A survey not long ago reported that 45 per cent of Canadian adults felt teen-agers to be worse in their behaviour than a generation ago; another poll said that 31 per cent of Canadian adults believe parents are worse today than they were 25 years ago. Both may be right, or both wrong, but there are certain facts which give a better criterion than mere opinion.

The divorce rate in Canada has been climbing much more rapidly than in the United States. In 1926 the Canadian rate was about one-seventeenth that in the United States; by 1945 the fraction had increased to about one-seventh. Within the Dominion, the rate increased more than five times in this period.

Here are the actual numbers of divorces in representative years: 1921, 548; 1931, 700; 1941, 2,461; 1945, 5,076. Or look at it another way:

Year	Number of Marriages	Number of Divorces	Percentage of Divorces to Marriages
1935	76,893	1,376	1.8
1940	123,318	2,369	1.9
1945	108,031	5,076	4.7

In addition, the census of 1941 showed that there were 80,137 legally separated people.

An attempt is being made in social work circles to centre attention upon the causes of divorce in order to eliminate them. Immature and hasty marriages are condemned as a leading cause by some sociologists. Others blame the way in which we talk and write and broadcast about the one marriage in twenty-two which ends in divorce, ignoring those which are successful.

Clarita deForceville said in *Marriages are Made at Home* that a generation ago divorce was less common, not because people were more moral or the pace of life was slower, but because of a number of established conventions which tended to hold husbands and wives together. The rules of society were stricter; religion played a more powerful part in everyone's life than is customary today; family principles and traditions did not countenance divorce and remarriage.

A poll last year reported that 45 per cent of those questioned said family life is less successful than in their parents' generation. This is a terrible indictment, when upwards of half the people examined admit their disappointment with what they have been able to make of family life as compared with their parents.

What are the Causes?

Under the disturbed conditions of these times it is no wonder that there should be stresses in families.

Immigration from abroad to this land, and migration from country to city and from city to city open a great gap between the old culture of parents and the new culture of children. Parental wisdom becomes obsolete in the eyes of young people. The intellectual capital built up through generations of close family life (called by some persons "folk knowledge") fails to be transmitted. The younger generation is left without compass and maps, and sets out on the voyage through adult life on a basis of trial and error.

Besides the added stresses within the family, there are pressures from outside to which we have not become acclimatized. Children are urged by stories, advertisements and radio to do this or that beyond the financial or cultural reach of the family; they are lured into loose thinking and fanciful appreciations of life by movies, comic strips and fiction.

It is the fashion today to laugh at Horatio Alger's success boys, and at Samuel Smiles' *Self-Help*. But the plain fact is: those stories and essays had the saving grace that what the heroes won they worked for; today's easy life is pictured as being reached by smartness or outwitting other people, or leaning on social security provided by parents or the government.

What are the Symptoms?

Prominent among symptoms of family breakdown is the revolt of youth against established things. This is evidenced first by devaluation of parents. Scarcely any area of family life is safe from criticism in this stage. It may touch the home, the style of furnishing, the mother's qualities as a homemaker, the father's ability as a breadwinner, and everything else from mother's clothes to father's political ideas.

This is nothing new. It is the last stage reached by adolescents in their psychological weaning from parents. But, says Dr. D. E. Cameron in *Life is for Living*, "There is reason to think that these conflicts are sharper than they used to be."

In former days the beliefs and attitudes which a boy learned from his father would serve him as he grew to manhood and, with little change, were still valid in his last years.

Today, youths are inclined to fixate upon some outsider, a teacher, club leader or pal, and accept his opinions as infallible. This is hard for parents to take, because they usually believe they are at least as intelligent as the McWhistles, with whom junior and daughter spend their spare time.

Another symptom is the striving for "independence", sometimes camouflaged under the title "democracy." Individualism weakens the unity of the

family. The natural spreading of democratic thinking into family affairs is seized upon in the immaturity of adolescence as a license to freedom, and youth goes to extremes.

What to do about it

There is no simple and easy way of dealing with the conditions which promote family disorganization. There are too many factors involved, and human nature is too varied to allow of a simple recipe.

In business life we can turn many relations into routine, so that daily contacts are smooth, but we cannot turn the family into a routine affair without killing it.

One lesson can, however, be carried over from business into the family. Executives have found that it pays to listen to employees' and colleagues' troubles. Even if nothing can be done to help, just giving a person a chance to talk things over provides a relief which makes relations happier. It should be done in little pieces, not left until so much has piled up that only an explosion provides relief. When labour relations or family relations reach bursting point it is an indication that someone has not been listening.

Several public and civic movements are trying to do something about the tangled threads of family life.

Probably most hopeful of the activities are those directed toward education for marriage. At a Conference on Family Life, sponsored by the Christian Social Council of Canada and the Canadian Welfare Council, and attended by representatives of eight denominations, the problem was carried to a very high plane.

Rev. J. R. Mutchmor, of the United Church, said: "To Catholic, Jew, and Protestant alike, marriage is the ground of human fellowship and society, and is most precious to mankind. It is not to be entered upon lightly or unadvisedly, but reverently and as in the presence of God. Christian marriage is therefore to be regarded as a holy estate which God has established and sanctified for the welfare and happiness of mankind."

Rev. Father André Guay, of the Marriage Preparation Service, University of Ottawa, said that premarriage education included spiritual preparation as well as factual instruction, and these are combined and intertwined in the textbook he uses. More than 3,000 students are taking the course by correspondence, and the plan used in Canada is being adopted by many other countries.

The job of educating for marriage and family responsibilities is a big and worthy one in which many agencies may take part. People will see their proper place in the scheme of things when we point out to them, in their impressionable years, the duties involved in family life, and the sacred and civic nature of the obligations they assume when they undertake marriage. It is a work for all our teaching, preaching and social agencies, and for the press and the radio.

Then there is parent education. Someone has said that parenthood is the last stand of the amateur. For all other jobs some training is required, but for the delicate job of guiding a family and the intricate job of promoting the physical, social and intellectual development of children, it has been assumed that no specialized training is needed.

Dr. S. R. Laycock, professor of educational psychology at the University of Saskatchewan, sees two principal ways in which parent education can be carried on: through the work of voluntary agencies such as Home and School Associations, of which there are over 1,300 in Canada, and through government or university departments of extension. He commends the National Committee for Mental Hygiene (Canada) and the Canadian Association for Adult Education for their help to other agencies, but regrets the lack of financial means which prevents their launching a systematic programme of parent education on their own.

Co-operation

Marriage is neither a delirious passionate madness nor jogging along in stagnant habit, but the living co-operation of two people who are going the same way.

As Dr. Margaret Mead wrote in the *American Journal of Sociology* last May, in a special issue devoted to the family:

> The life of a family is coming to be seen as a ship which may be wrecked by any turn of the tide unless every member of the family, but especially the two parents, are actively and co-operatively engaged in sailing the boat, vigilantly tacking, trimming their sails, resetting their course, bailing in storms — all to save something which is worth their continuous care.

Marriage is not made of isolation, any more than it is made of subordination. In the marriage partnership it is as important to respect opinions, ideals, habits, and the privacy of the individual as it is in other human partnerships. Because it is a partnership both parties are equal and equally responsible.

When couples are asked what they have gained from marriage, one of the most frequent answers is "Companionship." It is out of this fact that hope rises for the future of the family.

The ideal characteristics in family life are affection, sharing experiences, enjoying mutual confidence, participating in the making of decisions affecting the family or individuals, having common interests in religion, recreation and civic affairs and putting forth combined efforts in case of family crises. Out of these will develop a feeling of security, and a sense of recognition, which is a product of being consulted and heard.

In family life there are no trifles. Everything counts. Being a family means having fun together, as well as shouldering together the serious things like bills, housing troubles and the children's school problems. A sense of humour can soften the blows that are sure to fall. For a family to be able to laugh at the same things is the saving grace.

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