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## *Diplomacy in the Home*

FAMILIES CAN LIVE TOGETHER and prosper and be happy under an extraordinary variety of conditions so long as they observe a few simple virtues, chief of which is the practice of diplomacy.

The Canadian family has been exposed this century to violent assaults by new ideas and to revolutionary changes in customs. Some of the former functions of the family have been dispersed into schools, youth associations and the like. Teen-age children, who have grown up in the atmosphere of protest sit-ins and group "togetherness" profess not to need parental guidance. But nowhere else than in the family does a child learn the vital art of getting along with people.

Diplomacy in the home is not a secretive and crafty science, but is governed by the mild laws of reason and benevolence. Some people may say that diplomacy is something for the State. Well, is not the family a small State? Pope Leo XIII described it in his Encyclical Letter in 1891: "... the 'society' of a man's own household; a society limited indeed in numbers, but a true 'society', anterior to every kind of State or nation, with rights and duties of its own."

Whatever the mode of governance, the real heart of family life is to be seen in the behaviour of the individual members toward one another. The greatest art known to man is that of living together harmoniously and helpfully. One head of a family, seeking something to decorate the chimney-piece in his library, cast away all other ideas in favour of a plaque bearing two Greek words meaning "The healing-place of the soul".

No social institution is more essential for the human race than is the home. Here it is that we learn to be human. Forms of national government have come and gone: kingdoms, republics, dictatorships. All have had their day and declined, but the family, made up of father, mother and children, endures because it is the basic social, political and economic unit.

Some people may say that the times in which we live are not appropriate to family life. Is it, then, only for placid times? Is it not, rather, a haven, an institution, for times that try men's souls? The family is a universal feature of all human societies, not because it has been

determined by instincts and sentiment but because it has facilitated survival.

### *Family relationships*

The relationship of husband and wife in the family is properly one of equality secured by mutual affection. Marriage is not a mere episode. It is the culmination of two lives, the products of dissimilar circumstances, different upbringing, varying attitudes toward life, and personal ways of doing things. Success under these circumstances is not automatic. It has to be worked for. There are two imperfect personalities to be somehow blended, and there are difficulties from outside to be coped with, such as economic circumstances and changing ways of life.

It is not practicable to have a clear-cut division between the responsibility of the husband and that of the wife. We recall Guillaume Budé, an estimable sixteenth-century humanist. When a servant entered his library and announced that the house was on fire, Budé replied: "Go tell your mistress. You know I leave all household matters in her hands." The full significance of the marriage contract is a mutual agreement in which there are indivisible responsibilities.

Strain is put upon marriage by the differing interests, duties, and priorities of the partners. The world may hail a man as being great — great in thought, word or deed — but diplomacy is needed in the home to live day in and day out with his idiosyncrasies, his petulances, his fears, his pontification, and his attempts to enforce his business obedience system on his wife and children.

The home is a place for trustworthiness, and that is a big factor in diplomacy. The supreme value of parental affection for children is that it is more reliable than any other affection. The world could not operate at all if there were no such thing as trustworthy devotion between husband and wife and parents and children. This sort of attachment was summed up in a letter which Queen Victoria wrote to Prince Albert: "... you will in that find a proof of my love, because I must share with you everything that rejoices me,



everything that vexes or grieves me, and I am certain you will take your part in it."

Sharing is the only means by which parents can bring into play that power blended with gentleness which is the strength of their influence upon children. They must continue to feel superior, because they have lived more years and experienced more events, but they must learn how best to use that superiority.

When parents come together to study their problem thoughtfully, with creative honesty and with willingness to try to solve it, they are actually participating in the making of the new world in such a constructive way that the newness fails to intimidate or terrify them.

### *Something about diplomacy*

How does diplomacy in the home fit into this scheme of making parenthood a constructive force in the emerging social order? The dictionaries tell us that diplomacy is the art of negotiation and skill in conducting the dealings of nations with one another, and that a diplomat is an official engaged in promoting the courtesy and friendliness of governments. These are qualities needed in families as well as among nations.

Family relations are essentially the result of a complicated interplay of understanding, non-understanding and misunderstanding. Not to understand, and not to be understood, are disturbing and perplexing experiences. Yet the remedy is simple: the spirit of understanding is developed by wishing to understand, and this is a principle that is basic in diplomacy.

There are different modes of diplomacy. The formalized diplomacy a man uses in his office or workshop is not the sort needed in his family circle, and yet the striped-pants ceremonial attitude is a useful one with which to start diplomacy in the home. The conventions help to smooth the path of dialogue; the habit of discretion provides an environment in which members of the family may talk freely; the tactful avoidance of an open clash makes people accessible to persuasion and gentle pressure.

When all in the family practise diplomacy, every person in it benefits by the elimination of obstacles that are likely to interfere with the attainment of his best desires. The harmonious family forms the nearest complete basis for the happiness and prosperity of the individual.

### *Unity and individuality*

To call a family a "dynamically unified family" is quite different from saying that it is a highly solidified family. Its unity is based, not upon the authority of the family head, but upon the consensus of its members. It meets family crises co-operatively, but it emphasizes the individualities of its members and makes room for their personality development. When it makes decisions affecting the whole family they are binding on everyone in it.

Unity in the family is not brought about by domination, sets of rules or any similar force. It is the outcome of affection, understanding, the sharing of experiences, mutual confiding, companionship, and common interests in religion, in recreation and in maintaining a status of decency.

The family is not merely an association of people living together. It is an institution with forms and conditions of procedure according to which group activity is carried on.

Non-involvement is utterly impossible. Some people deceive themselves by thinking that they can be onlookers at an interesting dramatic performance without becoming part of it. Every member of the family is an actor on its stage and must play his part in accordance with the script approved by all.

The widespread acceptance of democratic theory has made the world uncomfortable, and its adoption into the family poses many problems. The children enter into family planning and activities and the parents share their authority among all members of the family in varying degrees.

This is a ticklish situation, in which the only relief is the practice of diplomacy. The lesson must be somehow learned that increased participation demands increased shouldering of responsibility — a principle not yet grasped by millions of people who profess to prize their political democracy.

The inter-family personality situation is extremely sensitive and delicate. Individuality is a precious possession. The role and status of every member of the family must be properly recognized and liberally appreciated by the other members, or the delicate mechanism is disturbed, personal feelings are injured, and the family equilibrium is upset.

Mutual respect, the mainstay of successful diplomacy, is not merely a matter of doctrine or convention. In the family, it must be something deeply felt with almost mystical conviction to such a degree that possessiveness and oppression become impossible.

### *To cope with change*

We are becoming aware gradually of the fact that we are part way into a society which is based upon the probability of change, and on the way out of a society which was based upon the apparent certainty of permanence. This is true in business, government, and the family.

It has become necessary to recognize that new modes of behaviour, sets of attitudes, and social values are being accepted and practised as the right way of life.

Every social situation, including those within the family, is influenced in part by technological developments. As an example, consider transportation today compared with that of forty or fifty years ago. Families can live farther from the city centre and from places of employment; yet young people are only a magic carpet trip away, by car, bus or airplane, from ex-



periences in their home city or in the wide world that were closed to them until the past few years.

These changes bring in their train forms of social conduct unlike those previously known and practised. The tendency to underestimate the role of environmental factors causes much family misunderstanding.

Both parties need to be sensible of the fact that young people and parents are acting in the framework of different situations. Instead of saying, when a member of the family acts in a manner which is at variance with our expectations: "Something is wrong with him" it is desirable to ask "Is there something wrong with my assumptions and interpretations?"

We have seen, on a world scale, the craving of peoples to become independent, sometimes before they were ready for self-government. This hunger for liberation from restraint has grown into urgent demand and violent action. The judgment of great colonial powers has led them not only to relinquish governance but, like the British Empire, to prepare the units for independence. The transformation was accompanied by a deeply-felt struggle between love of power and desire for the juvenile states' good.

It is so in the family. While authority over the child is to a certain extent decreed by the nature of things, it is nevertheless desirable that the child should, as soon as possible, learn to be independent in as many ways as possible. This may be unpleasing to the power instinct in parents, but it is something that should be done with grace and goodwill. It is a sad fact that many parents cling to outmoded dominance until they find themselves frustrated by young people who will not stay to be scolded.

As to discipline, we might take a lesson from wild creatures. Those who have watched families of sheep or elk in a national park know that the mother has an eye always on her young ones. They may venture here and there within a prescribed space but when they step outside that area the mother makes a sign and the young come scampering back.

Family discipline should not be too binding, and the circle should be extended as the child makes progress toward autonomy.

### *Active diplomacy*

In attempting to put diplomacy into use in the home, the first requirement is sincerity, another word for honesty. Sincerity is steadfast and substantial, and it does not waver in the face of challenge and trouble.

Diplomacy is greatly aided by empathy. This is the capacity to enter into and share the feelings, attitudes, interests and experiences of others. When stumped by a problem brought to you by one of the family, try to see it in its relations, within the framework of the questioner's daily life, and in the setting in which the problem arose.

Your diplomacy cannot be based upon indifference. The greatest comfort you can give members of your family is understanding made lively by enthusiasm.

When people tell you their disappointments, sorrows, aspirations and expectations, these confidences must be respected. Unhappiness will follow any breach of this rule, and the stream of understanding will dry up.

### *Communication is vital*

Effectual communication of thoughts and ideas is vital. The mother's communication with her small baby is simple: smiles, bodily movements, tone of voice, variations in the cry of the baby. Contrast with these the breadth and depth and complication of the intercommunication which goes on between parents and their teen-age children, and between themselves. All the symbols of language are used, plus indirect techniques such as innuendoes, provisos, silence, and manner.

There is no place in family conversation for the assumption made by *avant-garde* painters and composers and writers that people must learn their language. This is the supreme arrogance of the private "I". It declares: "Here is my cipher; come and decode it." Everyone in the family owes it to everyone else to be as intelligible as he can be.

There is also the obligation to listen. The true diplomat never listens by halves: he pays attention. He gives others their equitable opportunity to speak. If there are five in your family, sitting around the table in a family conference, and each does his share of the talking, each will be listening eighty per cent of the time.

Not every kind of conversation is useful. The family does not benefit from what is technically known as "domestic echolalia", another name for nonsensical and repetitious chatter.

Congenial intelligent conversation is a great aid to family concord and good understanding. Any idea brought forward by a member of the family is discussed. Everyone feels that he shares in the debate. Everyone can express his convictions without implying that others are wrong.

There are limits, of course. A statesman's wife who kept good track of her husband's talking used a private signal: her warning to him to be quiet was calling him "William" instead of "Will." In any diplomatic situation, striving to get in "the last word" is the most disruptive and dangerous of infernal machines.

### *Tools of diplomacy*

Many of the things that disturb family life are the product of original mistakes compounded by bad manners. Walter Hines Page, distinguished United States ambassador to Great Britain, said: "The more I find out about diplomatic customs, and the more I hear of the little-big troubles of others, the more need I find to be careful about details of courtesy."

If love is the foundation of happy marriage, good manners are the walls and diplomacy is the roof.



The essays written by Addison and Steele have lived through many years. In one of them Steele says: "Two persons who have chosen each other out of all the species, with design to be each other's mutual comfort and entertainment, have in that action bound themselves to be good-humoured, affable, discreet, forgiving, patient and joyful, with respect for each other's frailties and perfections."

Manners for two are fixed by the same rules as are manners for the million, based upon the Golden Rule. They spring from kindness, courtesy and consideration, with a dash of *savoir faire* — the faculty of knowing just what to do and how to do it.

Members of the family give proof of their high regard for one another by the delicacy with which they frame their requests or instructions. Parents show a happy blend of authority and companionship. They are simple, open and cordial, void of all arrogance. They are more than kind; they are kindly, and kindness means a pleasant way of doing a kind thing.

As a minimum, diplomacy in the family asks everyone to be considerate and decent, gracefully remembering the rights of others. At its best, diplomacy is unruffled good breeding, taking care and trouble to see that others are not neglected. It does not take anyone for granted.

The word "tact" covers a great deal that is essential in diplomacy. It means being completely aware of the feeling belonging to certain situations and acting in accordance with what courtesy dictates. It means offering a discomfited member of the family a chance to "save face." It even means the difficult exercise of being generous and gracious while being honest and unyielding — what Ralph Waldo Emerson called "good-natured inflexibility."

### *"A word fitly spoken"*

The giving of praise and commendation is one of the special privileges and charming graces of family life and one of the most useful tools in diplomacy. Among the Proverbs ascribed to Solomon are these: "A word spoken in due season, how good is it!" and "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pictures of silver."

When you praise a member of the family it increases your credit for having good taste. It shows that you have learnt to know what is excellent, and hence how to prize it in your family. The commendation need not be confined to achievements, but may show appreciation of effort. It need not be extravagant, but it should not be withheld because it does not seem to be adequate. We are amused by an episode in the life of Napoleon. On a motion to award the great general a pension, the French Assembly decided that "Such glorious deeds could not be rewarded by gold" so gave him nothing.

Jealousy should not be allowed to interfere with the

giving of credit and praise. To envy another person his skill or accomplishments or social grace is to grieve over our own lack of these, and is demeaning to us.

### *The art of the possible*

Diplomacy is not a cure-all, but it makes room for things to be set right. It helps to solve even the most awesome problems. Simply stated, it finds out what the other person wants and plans how to meet that requirement as far as is reasonable. When both parties do this, agreement is attained.

The factors are: negotiation, conciliation, concession and compromise, and using these effectively is called "The Art of the Possible." It is directed toward finding the balance among conflicting desires which will give the greatest all-round satisfaction.

Sometimes the initial efforts fail and different ways have to be tried. Diplomats do not try to saw sawdust. They get on to a new piece of wood. They bring in a new point or take a new viewpoint. They change some factor so as to give the problem a new surface on which they can get a grip.

One can be a diplomat cheerfully. There are some people who become depressed, and go around as if they were trying to qualify for Shakespeare's description: ". . . like the painting of a sorrow." Being a diplomat in the family can be full of quiet delight and pleasure. Even the simple device of collecting tidbits of information, news and humour to be trotted out at the diplomatic moment is a satisfaction-giving experience.

### *Educate your heart*

Diplomacy in the home is taking care in little ways so as to reduce life's fitful fever. It means making adjustments both of thinking and acting so as to meet and cope with ever-changing situations composedly and with good sense.

Diplomacy does not consist in making promises or holding out prizes. Children are living at the exciting wave front of life. We need to be careful not to offer young people too many hopes, too many choices, too much for too little. At the same time we must not discourage their ambition to be the best in whatever sort of life they choose.

We pay attention to informing and training our minds, but diplomacy requires us to educate our hearts. It means not only keeping the home fire burning but throwing a pinch of incense on it once in a while. It includes some kind deeds done for their own sake without expecting a return.

Even if the bond of family kinship is not so strong as it once was, there is need for the ties of friendship if people are to live happily together, and one of the strong links in friendship is diplomacy. The person who applies diplomacy successfully will not only strew benefits but will reap flowers.