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Preparation For Marriage

E. G. HAMILTON, M.D.

One third of all the marriages in affluent St. Louis County end in divorce. The statistics for Catholic marriages are not that bleak. However, little time in practice is needed to observe that widely disseminated false concepts and attitudes are having an effect upon Catholic marriages. Certainly our area is not unique. Workers in this field have found better adjustment and more wholesome attitudes toward marriage in a group of mothers than in their eighteen to twenty year old daughters. It is apparent we have continued to lose ground in the last two decades.

We all have an affinity for stock answers to complex problems. It is probably not an oversimplification, however, to say that two factors comprise a major portion of the problem. One is emotional immaturity of one or both partners and the other a loss of definition as to

the true feminine role. Maturation is not fostered by the widespread permissiveness, presently in vogue, or by outright neglect. Too often in the home, no guidelines are drawn within which one may, with confidence, know that his or her actions are appropriate and will lead to future fulfillment and happiness. Too often, the developing child has in the home no adequate models to imitate in his or her striving for maturity. It is little wonder that, in the demanding vocation of marriage, far from attaining their potentialities, these unprepared novices stumble into problems. Lacking remedial measures, their children, under such circumstances, are likely to come out worse than the parents.

At what point in this vicious cycle should training for marriage begin and how extensive should it be? The doctor's consultation room conferences on "pre-marital advice," while rewarding to both the couple and the doctor, are like "cramming" for an examination. The pre-Cana conferences, perhaps even more valuable, deserve the same indictment to a lesser degree.

Especially in the female, the training for marriage begins at birth. Training and development in the

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pre-school years are very important and almost exclusively in the realm of the parents—especially the mother. If she is away from the home often or is fretful and maladjusted or if the father is unloving, an unhealthy climate for the child exists from the start. The effects will persist to a greater or lesser degree throughout life.

During the grade and high school years the first opportunity occurs to rectify some of the deficiencies that have arisen due to home conditions. We accept the value of religious training in the Catholic schools. But I surmise we expect more benefits than the students, their background and experience considered, can appropriate for themselves. The great religious truths are weakly soluble in the immature personality.

At this point it might be helpful to describe the mature female. Events have conspired to blur her image. Knowing her nature, there is greater likelihood ways may be found to foster her development. As pictured by Robinson, we know nothing of her physical attributes since they are of little import. We do know that she is much "at home" in the world—glad to be a woman with all its duties and responsibilities. She has an infallible sense in selecting a mate who is almost perfect for her. He may not be perfect in any ultimate sense, but he is perfect for her and as a father for their children. The good husband adds to her sense of "at homeness" and, springing from her sense of security, is delighted in giving to those she loves. This is the *sine qua non* of the truly feminine

character. Psychiatrists have given it a name—"essential feminine altruism."

The finest flower of this altruism blossoms in her joy in giving "the very best of herself" to her husband and children. She never resents the need in herself to give—never considers it a burden or an imposition. She is proud of this giving and delights in it. It stands her in marvelous stead for all of life's demands—and they will be considerable. She is deeply religious—often lacking the benefit of formal training. She has a firm belief in a Creator, and in some form of hereafter. She also believes marriage is a sacrament, binding forever. Biologically, she is the carrier of immortality, of the generations of man. This gives her an appreciation for and affinity to the awesome and creative forces of the universe. Sexually, she almost always reaches a climax in the act of love. It is deep and satisfying. Although it defies description, no woman who has ever experienced it can doubt it is the real thing. Some may wax poetic speaking of it. Others, less expressive, but still accurate, may compare it to going over Niagara Falls in a barrel. She is quite a show-off and likes sexual compliments from her husband. She is not shy. She would not demure at initiating love with her husband. Although she will immediately change her amorous direction if she finds her husband too tired or too preoccupied without feeling the least bit rejected. She realizes that a woman can make love anytime, but a man only when he is ready. She is always ready to make love when

her husband is ready (barring sickness, or certain times in pregnancy). Her deep altruism makes her extremely sensitive to his moods, and she will not find it in herself to treat him as if he were a robot, become angry or feel rejected if, when the button is pushed, he does not respond. She will die a thousand deaths rather than make him feel sexually inadequate.

Her eternal acquiescence never lets her in for a painful sexual experience. If she fails to reach an orgasm once in a hundred times, she takes pleasure in the very obvious pleasure she is able to give her husband. She not only takes the lead from her husband about whether they are going to make love—the kind of love making is also usually his decision and, in pure delight, she follows him completely. Whether he feels lusty, gentle and tender, experimental or passive, she picks up the mood and responds delightedly.

Her altruism does not lead her to martyrdom. In fact our heroine is quite self-centered. She is content with all the aspects of her body, of her female anatomy that gives her so much pleasure. This pride and self love is reflected in her outward appearance. She is clean as a cat and neat as a pin. She enjoys dressing well, and is well aware of the things that bring out her special attractiveness. She is so confident of herself that she does not feel a production requiring several hours in front of a mirror necessary. Regardless of her physical attributes, whatever she has she enjoys. Her self-love has the important attribute of being detachable. She can easily project

nearly all of it onto her children or husband and take as much joy in their joys and accomplishments as she would from her own.

Her detachable self-love and her need to give unrestrainedly are the two chief components of her maternal instinct. The fulfillment of it is the most important function of her life. It colors, deepens, and enriches her sexual life. Her unconscious phantasy with every intercourse is that he might make her with child. Her psychologic and biologic gratitude to him for this richest of all potential gifts is boundless. Childbirth holds no terrors for her. She sails through it proudly, like a clipper ship made especially for such weather. She wants to nurse her child and usually succeeds.

Once married, a career is of secondary importance. She will follow it if necessary for the family, but it can no longer be the center of her life. Achieving her biologic destiny with its associated joy and satisfaction makes all other personal achievements pale for her.

As one could surmise, this paragon ages gracefully. She knows just when to give up her children, let them stand on their own, and learn the difficulties of freedom. In doing this without fuss she wins her children's regard forever. She reaches her twilight years with a deep sense of fulfillment. She is convinced of immortality for she has served it with her whole being. She looks at death totally unafraid, wondering, perhaps, what the Creator, who has made her life such a marvel, is like on an even closer view.

What has happened that results in so many pathetic caricatures of the real thing? Social upheavals, beginning at the end of the 18th century (which continue to the present), incited Mary Wollstonecraft to publish "A Vindication of the Rights of Women." In it she declared that men and women are in all fundamental characteristics identical, and that women, therefore, should receive the same education as men, be governed by the same moral standards, do the same work and have identical political rights and duties, etc. Though the movement righted many social ills, the concept of the feminine role as being inferior has been accepted by too many women as an article of faith down to our time.

Now the goals of the feminists have in great measure been achieved and woman is more confused and miserable than before the movement started. The feminists point to a few as yet unattained goals and say, "Once these are attained, happiness is assured." The truth is that in areas wherein women are set against men or made competitive with them—the movement is terribly neurotic. This concept exerts its influence on the education our women receive at all levels. They are stuffed into our educational system without regard to gender and come out the other end with the appearance of glittering females but actually possessing few of the more desirable attributes of either male or female.

No matter what career a young lady pursues, she is destined in most instances to abandon it sooner or later for marriage—a career for

which all this time she has attained precious little specific preparation. (Is it not likely that the vast majority of women often make for their wedding in part, at least, a subconscious recognition of their lack of real preparation for marriage?)

In the military training a raw recruit developed through out drills and exercises fully worked out emerges as a competent member of a fighting team who performs heroically on the field of battle. The same recruit thrown into battle without training would perform miserably, if he survived at all, and his superiors would deserve censures for so committing him unnecessarily. But we prepare couples to face even more challenging situations with prospective for considerable attrition and blindly hope "love" will somehow carry them through. At the same time we require them to pass an examination before operating a motor vehicle or entering college.

Mothers who indicate they would prefer a marriage without sex, nevertheless have this in mind when they seek pre-marital instructions for their daughters. By this well meant gesture they display naivete about training necessary for rewarding experience in all areas of the marriage relationship, including sex.

As early in the curriculum as practical, we should begin to teach the young girl just what the feminine role is (While you are getting two experts to agree just what should be taught you can begin to appreciate her predicament.). We must stress the ways, emotionally and in-

tellectually, in which she differs from the male. The qualities of mind and heart that make up these differences should be drawn out and developed, not ignored or obliterated. The creative aspects of her nature must be developed that they may be used for the benefit of her fortunate husband and children. The details and dignity of home-making and child-rearing must become a part of her if she is to face these challenges with confidence and purpose. Included under home making would be the subtle skills and feminine wiles relating to the successful "care and feeding of the male." The male is certainly due his share of attention, but the complexities of reintegrating him into a "new" role do not exist as they do for the young lady. Actually, there won't be enough teachers to go around. A broadly applied program would first entail the training of teachers. But the deficiencies in training for marriage are so great that, to begin with, a little learning applied at almost any point would be beneficial.

Most physicians would shrink from outlining the specifics of a complete program. Our inadequacy springs from the lack of training in medical school on the subject of marital problems. Many of us, when faced with a patient's problems, are painfully aware that the mere knowledge of sexual anatomy and physiology does not insure the authoritative wisdom imputed to us and needed by the patient. A great body of knowledge exists, however, usually used for therapy, that can be incorporated into an orderly program for prophylaxis at various

levels. Any good marriage counselor can outline the common attitudes and problems that cause marital discord, and those that contribute to harmony.

It would appear that the obstetrician has a wonderful opportunity (and perhaps an obligation) to score an easy victory in the battle against ignorance in marriage, especially when caring for the primigravida. The young couple, by the time of the first pre-natal visit, has usually met with a few problems and has a thirst for knowledge. The young people are especially receptive to wholesome, practical Christian teachings on marriage during this period. In all probability the benefits from such instruction might well exceed those from the strictly medical aspects of pre-natal care.

The possibilities for the pediatrician in continuing the program, guided by his observations of the mother and child, are again of such magnitude as to present a tremendous challenge.

One should not infer from any of the foregoing that we are seeking to produce women who are "breeders, feeders and follow the leaders." It is just as important that they develop to their maximum capacities as it is for the males. But if development is fostered along lines that are consonant with true femininity many of the currently common internal stresses can be reduced or eliminated.

They will be able to look with a fishy eye at the phony blandishments hatched by the feminists and the mass media. They will not ex-

haust themselves seeking Pyrrhic victories. The hands that "rock the cradle and rule the world," at this juncture in history, can and should be warm, purposeful and confident.

The magnitude of the work to be done is apparent and e manifold benefits are obvious. We should start on the largest scale possible without delay.

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