

*Preparing  
For  
Marriage*

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# Preparing for Marriage

Knowledge Needed by Newlyweds

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*A third of our 600,000 divorces a year could be prevented if a wise counsellor talked the situation over with the young people before the wedding. Frequently, his most helpful advice would be "Wait!" or "Don't marry!"*

Gretta Palmer, *Your Life.*

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## Preparing for Marriage

“**H**AVE a star, dear!” said Joe, as he reached up in playful pantomime of plucking one from the sky. “It’s not half bright enough for you, Eleanor,” he continued. “I’d like to pluck the sun, the moon and all the stars and set them into a diadem to grace your lovely brow.”

The wistful sigh, the light burning in his eyes and the tender glance at Eleanor’s radiant face gave corroboration, if any were needed, to his words.

“And if I could scoop up all the gold in the mines of all the world,” murmured Eleanor, as she gazed at the moon shedding its golden lustre on her rapt countenance, “I’d give it all to you, Joe.”

The man in the moon smiled as he looked down upon the lovely scene and chuckled, “I seem to have heard that before.”

Standing in the garden with the June moonlight falling upon their eager faces and the perfume of roses in the air, Joe and Eleanor were the picture of love’s young dream. Stardust was in their eyes. Love was playing its age-old but ever new symphony upon their heartstrings, as they uttered their pledges of a love that would endure until time should be no more. Such are the vows of love which youth has spoken since the world began.

Six months after the wedding. The scene has changed. The romance has faded. The melody has gone. The notes are raucous and angry now. Instead of handing each other the sun, the moon and the stars, they are now handing out angry words and feel a pronounced proclivity to throw anything but rice at each other.

"He's changed," said Eleanor to her mother. "He's a different man from the one I married. He's a brute."

"She's got a temper worse than a tiger. How'd I ever mistake that roar for love's purr," wonders Joe, as their dreams have vanished, leaving only the dregs of disillusionment in their wake.

### Misconception of Marriage

The incident just described is typical of hundreds of thousands of cases which each year swell the tide of divorce into a devastating flood. It shows the sorry ending of marriage entered into under the spur of romantic love, with little knowledge of the true character and personal traits of each other, with no real understanding of marriage, or any glimmering of the manner of solving the grim and serious problems with which the conjugal life is studded. Like the field bristling with hidden mines and booby-traps planted by the enemy, is a considerable

area of marital life into which the heedless and the unwary rush to their injury and destruction.

Every investigation of marriage failures has disclosed that not a few are traceable to misconceptions of the nature, purpose and responsibilities of marriage. Young people often center their attention upon the wedding, with the honeymoon in the offing, without trying to glimpse the duties and responsibilities which lie hidden in the background. They are ignorant about many of the problems, physical, psychological, social and economic, which must be solved if the union is to endure and succeed. Hence the need for pre-marital instruction has become widely recognized, and efforts are being made in all parts of the nation to meet that need.

The domestic life gives rise to problems whose solution demands specific training. No one can enter a profession without years of training. No prudent person launches a business enterprise in a field in which he is a novice. No boy or girl can enter the religious state without long and careful training. Why should a young couple think they can make a go of the complicated business of family life without preparation, instruction or training? The large number of shipwrecks on the matrimonial sea bespeaks the results of such folly. All too late do they

discover the truth of Calley Cibber's words in *Double Gallant*: "Oh! how many torments lie in the small circle of a wedding ring."<sup>1</sup>

Shakespeare expresses the mind and the feelings of both of them in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, wherein Sylvia says to Proteus:<sup>2</sup>

*'Tis pity, love should be so contrary  
And thinking on it makes me cry, 'Alas!'*

If a man without any training in carpentry undertook to build a house, would he not be almost certain to make a botch of it? Why then should we expect a young couple with no preparation or training to succeed in building the even more complicated and difficult structure of a happy and successful home? If an individual with no training in the craft of watchmaking tried to make a watch, would any sane person expect it to tick? To make marriage tick requires even greater skill and insight into a more complicated set of factors. Why would any sensible person expect a young couple with no training to make the complicated mechanism of marriage tick with precision for any appreciable length of time?

Concerted efforts are now being made to induce every young couple to complete a carefully planned course of pre-marital instruction. Pastors, physicians, psychiatrists,



family counsellors and men and women who have achieved outstanding success in the domestic enterprise pool their knowledge in conferences and seminars for those planning to marry.



### **Pre-marital Instruction**

Such a course of instruction under the title, "With This Ring," has been established in Los Angeles. In Washington, D. C., the National School of Social Service is sponsoring an eight-weeks course taught by priests and doctors. In London, Cardinal Griffin set up a Catholic Marriage Advisory Council with quarters just opposite Parliament Buildings.

Confronted with a one-out-of-five divorce rate—where the United States was in 1925—England has announced plans for the estab-

lishment of government-sponsored bureaus to prepare young people for marriage and to advise married couples. For some time Holland has been operating 18 marriage bureaus, with priest and medical consultants. One Dutch bureau handled the problems of 569 persons in a year, with 347 going to the priest members and 222 to the physicians.

The American Institute of Family Relations in Los Angeles has registered notable success along these lines. In the more than 18 years of its existence, only a handful of the thousands of marriages which enjoyed its pre-marital counselling service ended in divorce—a record all the more remarkable in view of its location in the county with the highest divorce rate in the United States.

### Notable Success

“The result of such educational effort,” reports Dr. Paul Popenoe, Director of the Institute, “before or even after marriage, has been more successful than we could have dared to hope. Leaving out of consideration those abnormal individuals—the mentally diseased, the alcoholic, and so on—who should never have gone into marriage in the first place because they are not qualified to make a success of any adult enterprise, it is evident that the great majority of people who loved each other enough to marry in the

first place can make a success of that marriage if they really want to do so.”<sup>3</sup>

Dr. Popenoe then makes the following significant observation concerning the futility and tragedy of divorce: “The majority of divorces are not only unnecessary but undesirable, and in many instances both husband and wife are worse off after terminating the marriage than they were before. Among other difficulties, they have failed to take into account the serious readjustments which they will have to make after divorce. Many of the divorcees find these readjustments not only difficult but impossible; so the death rate, the suicide rate, the insanity rate, and the rate of commitment to prison are two or three times as high for divorcees as they are for married persons of the same ages.”<sup>4</sup>

In many, if not most cases, divorce is the tardy and costly expression of a mutual uncongeniality that existed from the beginning. How much disappointment and suffering would be spared the young couple if that fact were pointed out to them by an experienced and kindly counsellor before they took the plunge. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. The time to tell young people that they are unsuited for each other, that there are radical differences in character, temperament, culture and religious outlook which seriously menace the success

of marriage, is before the life-long vows of conjugal loyalty are pronounced. That is the time when counsel and guidance are most urgently needed and will do the most good.

"A third of our 600,000 divorces a year," points out Gretta Palmer, "could be prevented if a wise counsellor talked the situation over with the young people *before* the wedding. Frequently, his most helpful advice would be 'Wait!' or 'Don't marry!'"<sup>5</sup>

### Before the Rice is Thrown

Marriage preparation courses, supplemented by individual counselling on problems of love and courtship, have achieved notable success at Stephens College for women at Columbia, Missouri. Although the national ratio of divorces to marriages has mounted to one in three, Stephens graduates continue to stay married at a rate more than six times as high as that of the married population as a whole. Dr. Henry A. Bowman, in counselling the students, stresses the necessity of facing realistically the practical problems which marriage inevitably involves.

A common tendency of young couples planning to marry, he reports, is to fail to make proper provisions for the arrival of a baby. "Yet babies come to eight-tenths of all couples," he observes. "And marriages

based on a decision to 'put off' motherhood until later years are highly vulnerable: three-fourths of all childless marriages end in divorce—nine times the rate for couples which have children. It is better to remain engaged until a marriage can be worked out that permits a baby to be a blessing, not a catastrophe."

Dr. Bowman states many marriage failures are attributed to mistakes made after the rice has been thrown. The young couples usually chalk up their failure to each other: "It was his jealousy." Or, "She nagged me too much." Or, "We both changed."

"But such marriages—one-third of all that fail—were wrecked before the announcements were engraved," remarks Dr. Bowman. "Instead of marriage failures, they are actually dating failures. No word of advice to already married couples," he concludes, "is half as valuable as what we say to those about to embark on a marriage that is almost impossible of success."

What society needs desperately to stem the swelling tide of divorce is some form of *marriage control*. It may well be that intelligent and conscientious pre-marital instruction and counsel will prove the most effective control that has yet been devised, especially for those unamenable to the sanctions of religion.

A further evidence of the increasing

awareness of the importance of pre-marital instruction is found in the action of the Young Christian Workers of Canada. Alarmed at the increasing divorce rate, they sponsored the establishment of marriage preparation courses which have evoked a wide response throughout all Canada. In the first five years more than 20,000 young people have followed these courses.

### Purpose of Engagement

The purpose of the engagement period is to afford the couple a final opportunity to determine definitely whether or not they are sufficiently congenial to achieve a successful marriage. During this period when their affections are centered upon each other to the exclusion of all others, they should learn something of the family background, the cultural interests, the personal traits, the moral character and the religious outlook of each other. The pair who spend this time in mere romancing without exploring the indispensable requirements for a stable union will not infrequently discover, after the rice has been thrown and the honeymoon has ended, an unexplainable inclination to begin throwing something heavier than rice at each other. Instead of using the engagement interval for the realistic appraisal of each other, they squander it in sentimental ro-

mancing and star-gazing only to find out too late that they have tumbled blindly over a precipice into a fateful abyss.

Describing the purpose of the engagement period, Professor L. M. Terman says: "This engagement period gives an opportunity for the couple to experiment with the experience of being devoted to each other, or of belonging to each other exclusively in certain respects. They have an opportunity to find out whether this intensified relationship will prove intellectually and emotionally satisfying or irritating. They have an opportunity of trying out the social adjustments involved—introducing each other as their future husband and wife, seeing how their tentative partners get on with each other's friends, discovering whether the adjustments of emotional and social partnership really work out well or begin to chafe. Often the period of betrothal is also a time when the couple are building up the economic resources and status necessary to start the kind of home toward which they aspire. The engagement might well be characterized, then, as the period during which the idea of marriage with this particular mate is being explored as a working hypothesis." <sup>6</sup>

During this period the young couple should be given specific instruction concerning the conjugal relation and family responsibility and thus be afforded an insight into the need



for time, patience and mutual understanding to achieve satisfactory adjustments. If such guidance were given, how much disappointment and dissatisfaction would be spared the bridal pair during the first weeks and months of marriage.

### One Out of Five

Investigation has disclosed that only about one man out of five has been properly prepared for the fulfillment of his new role in the fundamental relationship of the family life. The proportion of women properly instructed is probably even smaller. Not infrequently the sophisticated ones are the most ignorant in this matter.

Stressing the need for such pre-marital instruction, Dr. John M. Cooper states: "If not before engagement, certainly before marriage, and a good time before, the parties concerned should know in what marriage and the marital relation essentially consist. Notwithstanding all our supposed youthful sophistication, it is astonishing how much of nescience prevails, more often among girls, occasionally among boys, and not so rarely even among those of both sexes who pass for and consider themselves sophisticated. Both the man and the woman should have a talk well beforehand with a highminded and informed physician. So far as the girl is



concerned, it may be well to recall that ignorance and innocence are not synonymous. To let even the most 'innocent' girl go into marriage ignorant of what the physical basis of marriage consists in is to run the risk of profound emotional shock that often has grave consequences to both her own and her husband's happiness, and to their mutual love and common welfare." 7

### Answer All Questions

It is evident then that no engaged couple should allow this interval to pass without completing a thorough course in pre-marital instruction. Whether it be taken at that particular period or not is a minor detail. But that it should be completed sometime before marriage is of the utmost importance. The course should present not only the ideals of marriage but also the common difficulties and the practical problems as well as the means of solving them. No question in the mind of either the young man or the young woman should be allowed to go unanswered.

Friendly and experienced counsellors should supplement their formal lectures by having private conferences with each individual. During these chats they should advise the person as to whether or not the choice of the partner seems to be a judicious and sensible one. If their keen and ex-

perienced eyes detect elements of radical incompatibility which seriously threaten the success of the proposed marriage, or even foredoom it to failure, they should so advise the individual with the greatest frankness. "A stitch in time," runs the proverb, "saves nine." A word in time may avert a blunder that will tangle up one's whole life and spell misery and tragedy.

### "A Three-day Furlough"

To illustrate. Joe Smith is a young man of 22, from the North. He meets a waitress in a restaurant in a Southern city near his training camp. After four weeks of acquaintance, during which he has dated her nine times, they are married. She has explained to him that her four-months-old baby is her daughter by her first husband who was killed in a plane crash. When Joe is discharged 15 months later, the couple go to live with his family. They begin to discover radical differences in temperament, tastes and cultural background. On top of this comes the discovery that her child is illegitimate . . . and the marriage hits the rocks.

The case is typical of thousands of marriages that are doomed from the start. Would Joe have entered into such an ill-starred alliance if he had been properly instructed in the fundamental requisites for an endur-

ing and happy marriage? Would he not have seen what a blind man could have perceived, that the marriage didn't have a ghost of a chance?

Edythe had been listening to a lecture in a three months preparation for marriage course. The instructor had laid bare the dangers of a couple's rushing headlong into marriage without a thorough knowledge of the character, temperament, tastes, family background, and religious outlook of each other. He stressed the need of time, patience and consideration in making necessary adjustments.

"Why didn't they tell us about these things beforehand?" she remarked to her companion. Her face clouded and her red lips twisted in painful recollection. "Then marriage would have meant more to Bert and myself than a three-day furlough and two week-ends in a hotel room." Alas and alack! That was all that marriage meant to thousands of young couples during the war years. They rushed into it and out of it with equal speed.

### **The Best Guarantee**

So large a stake has society in the enterprise of establishing stable and successful homes, that the force of enlightened public opinion should require the completion of a carefully planned course in marriage before

a license will be issued. More important than the need for uniform divorce legislation for all the states is the need for a law that requires the completion of a marriage preparation course as a condition for obtaining a license.

A diploma testifying to the completion of such a course would thus give society some reasonable guarantee that engaged persons are properly prepared for the supremely important task of establishing stable and successful homes and the rearing of offspring to be law-abiding and good citizens. Such a diploma is of the same importance as the medical certificate showing freedom from the venereal diseases which make marriage a nightmare and a menace to the health of the children and of society as a whole.



To safeguard the rights of the marriage partner and to protect the health of the offspring, states now commonly require both parties to undergo a medical examination to secure a certificate of freedom from venereal disease. Most people regard it as a sensible and a wise law, designed to safeguard the physical health of society at its source. Not less important, however, is its social health. The best guarantee of this is the stability of its homes. Hence the need for legislation requiring all applicants for wedding licenses to present certificates showing their completion of a pre-marital instruction course which affords society a reasonable guarantee of its social health in the form of stable homes and wholesome family life.

That such legislation will soon be enacted in all states, it is earnestly to be hoped. Meanwhile much can be accomplished by making such courses available in every community and by encouraging all our young people to take advantage of them. Such pre-marital courses might well be established in every large urban parish. In towns and cities with but two or three parishes, one such course offered at a convenient center two or three times a year might prove sufficient to instruct all young couples.

### **Cana Movement**

In this connection mention should be

made of the Cana Conference movement. In January, 1943, Rev. John P. Delaney, S. J., started what he called Family Renewal Days in New York. They reflected similar exercises in Europe. In 1944, several of the Family Renewal Days were held in Chicago. In October of that year the first St. Louis meeting of 27 couples took place. Out of this meeting came the name Cana Conference. Recalling the joy which Mary brought to the bride and groom at Cana, these couples conceived the movement as bringing Christian joy and gladness to homes harassed by the mounting wave of divorce and the lowered standards of family life.

The growth of the movement, especially in the Midwest, is traceable in no small manner to the tireless zeal and vision of Rev. Edward P. Dowling, S. J., of the *Queen's Work*. As a





member of the Institute of Social Order, he had occasion to delve deeply into the whole field of social problems and quickly perceived that the Christianizing of the home is one of the crucial needs of our day. There is need for the family to recover the distinctive joy and atmosphere of the Christian home and to mirror in its domestic life the spirit of the Holy Family at Nazareth.

While the Cana movement serves to strengthen the marital bond and banish the spectre of divorce from the domestic landscape, its primary objective is to make happy marriages happier. Instead of having the Christian family life creep along precariously on two cylinders, Cana leaders strive to have it purr along smoothly and joyously on all six. Cana seeks to place the prosaic, mundane activities of the home against the backdrop of eternity. "It is to the unseen spiritual factors," observes Frank Riley, "submerged in the preoccupying sea of wages, bills and budgets, toward which the Cana Conferences are directed."<sup>8</sup>

This movement, rich in promise, has already spread to many dioceses and has accomplished much in revivifying the ideals of Christian family life and in encouraging married couples to strive to weave those high and holy ideals into the pattern of their daily living. In many dioceses priests have been appointed directors of the Cana move-

ment and are encouraging such Conferences to be held in every parish.

### Pledge to Christian Marriage

Typical of the ideals for which the movement stands is the Pledge to Christian Marriage recited by 1,400 married couples at the closing session of the Catholic Family Life Conference in Chicago. Attracting nationwide attention and receiving the acclaim of the press throughout the land, the Pledge runs as follows:

In gratitude to Almighty God for all the blessings that family life has brought me, I pledge myself always to uphold the great dignity of Christian marriage.

Therefore, in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament, I profess my belief in the sanctity of marriage. I acknowledge it as a sacrament and a symbol of the union of Christ and His Church.

I believe: "What God has joined together let no man put asunder."

I renew my deep reverence for fatherhood and motherhood.

I believe that in family life parents cooperate with God.

I believe that in family life the child is paramount.

I abhor and condemn every sinful interference with the role of parenthood.



With the help of our Immaculate Mother I pledge myself anew to wholesome family life.

I resolve to do all in my power to foster the virtue of purity, the bulwark of the family.

May the Holy Family—Jesus, Mary and Joseph—bless our families and our homes.<sup>9</sup>

### Prevent 200,000 Divorces

Through its constructive efforts to strengthen and sanctify the family life and to bring into the home the joys of the Holy Family of Nazareth, the Cana movement will lessen, if not eliminate, the likelihood of divorce among its members. It constitutes a powerful ally and supplement to the nationwide Movement for Pre-marital Instruction. Even when the greatest care is exercised to screen out inadvisable marriages and to prepare suitable partners for the faithful discharge of their conjugal duties through systematic pre-marital instruction—human nature being what it is—there will always be need for Cana Conferences to safeguard and strengthen the marital bond. But the most effective time at which to give counsel and guidance is before unsuitable and ill-advised unions are formed. Since 92.7% of the men and 93.5% of the women in the U.S.A. get married, such pre-marital instruction, supple-

mented by individual counselling, should be offered in every college and university.

Better than any remedy for disease is its prevention. This can best be achieved by heading off young couples before they take the step that will bring disappointment, frustration and unhappiness to both. When every young couple is led, either by the force of enlightened public opinion or through the compulsion of law, to take a systematic course of pre-marital instruction, divorce will not become extinct, but it will shrink to a fraction of its present gargantuan size. A painstaking study, extending over many years, of the causes of marriage failure has deepened our conviction that more than 200,000 divorces could be prevented each year through such careful and intelligent preparation for the most serious and fateful step which a young person can take in all his life.

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1 Act I, Sc. 2.

2 Act IV, Sc. 4.

3 *Modern Marriages*, pp. xf.

4 *Ibid.*, xi.

5 *Your Life*, August, 1947.

6 *Psychological Factors in Marriage*, Louis M. Terman  
New York, McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1938, pp  
198-199.

7 Cooper, *op. cit.*, pp. 108-109.

8 *Columbia*, April, 1946.

9 *Information*, April, 1947, p. 164.



