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A New Judgment Problem for Home Economics

By A MERE MAN

Look Out for Choices!

“Look out for choices! They run into habits, character, destiny.” So thought Maltbie Babcock. Everyone who knows life well and is accustomed to thinking seriously about it, must agree that he is not putting the case too strongly. It is plainly very true that the success and the satisfaction we experience today depend almost entirely upon the choices and the decisions we make yesterday. For do not our success and happiness depend on the effectiveness with which we solve the many problems which we encounter—duties of the shop, the office, the home and the market place? The great majority of the problems of life are judgment problems—decisions to be arrived at, choices to be made.

How much opportunity and encouragement do we give our students to practice making judgments in actual life situations to the end that they may acquire skill in making wise choices in the life problems they will most assuredly meet? How many of us can recall being called upon very often to give our own opinions on real, worthwhile problems in our school work? It is true that we were called upon to memorize the opinions and judgments of other folks and to reproduce them when called upon, but this process calls for memory and not for judgment. Dr. Julius Boraas in his book, “Teaching to Think,” states that he has visited many hundreds of class rooms for the purpose of observing teaching methods and that he has yet to see a judgment recitation. My own observations, while not nearly so extensive as those of Dr. Boraas, substantiate his statements very fully.

It is not easy always to estimate in advance the importance of any one choice or to predict its results. History reveals to us how, at times, the fate of nations, the destiny of millions has been determined by what appeared to be, at first, very unimportant decisions of their rulers. Probably all the choices we make, even to the smallest of them, have considerable influence on our careers. There are, however, three large important decisions, or choices which overshadow all others we might name when considered in the light of their influence on our success and happiness.

Three Important Decisions

The first and doubtless the most important of the three is the moral choice to which we must all make in our lives when we finally decide whether we shall live honest, upright lives or lives of sin and dishonesty. I believe that every sane individual makes this choice at some time in his life.

The second great choice is the choice of a life work, which, it seems, very few of us make intelligently.

The third great choice is the choice of a life mate. Judging from the large number of divorces we have in this country, it would seem that we make this choice about as intelligently and successfully as we make either of the other two of this great triumvirate.

It seems to me that when all these three choices are wisely made, happiness, success and all other great satisfactions of life will most surely result and that just as surely will misery, failure and disappointment be the result if these three choices are poorly made.

Challenge to Home Economics Teachers

But all this by way of introduction. The real burden of my story has to do with the last-mentioned choice—the choice of a life mate. And right here I wish to challenge the teachers of homemaking in this country. What are you doing to insure happy homes for the future, to lessen domestic difficulties and broken homes? You teach your students to bake cakes and pies, to cook meats and vegetables, to care for the house to make and repair clothing—and you do it exceedingly well. But too many of you stop at this point, evidently not appreciating the fact that proficiency in the above-mentioned skills has relatively small influence on the happiness and success of the home if the two homemakers are not well mated. I know some very unhappy homes in which the wives are most excellent cooks and housekeepers and I know some happy homes where the wives could not, by any stretch of the imagination, be called good cooks or good housekeepers. But these last are good homemakers and they have become so mainly because they have been fortunate enough to secure for their life mates men of congenial dispositions, similar interests and vision, equal intelligence and ability.

I am aware of the studies which have been recently made on the subject of divorce and have noted that brutality, drunkenness, non-support, desertion, unfaithfulness and some other such factors have been listed as the causes for divorces; and they doubtless are the immediate reasons. But back of all these, causing most of them and explaining them, lies the fact that two natures or personalities very much unlike, perhaps diametrically opposed to one another in their most fundamental characteristics, have tried to live as one in the intimate relationship of marriage and have found it intolerable and impossible. These other factors listed above are symptoms of the disease and not the causes, more often than not.

Marriage Failures

We hear a great deal of the divorce evil and to some of our reformers the making of divorce impossible would solve all marital problems; but divorce is not in itself an evil thing, but rather a device which all progressive countries have adopted as a legal means of escaping from the intolerable yoke of domestic unhappiness. The existence of divorce at all is indicative of evil conditions and we should not spend our time and energy in bemoaning divorce, but rather we should study the conditions which make divorce desirable or inevitable. At least this would be a more scientific approach. In the meantime, it is ridiculous to hold that a delicate, sensitive woman must endure for a life time the abuse of a drunken, brutal, profligate man, just because she has made a mistake in a choice for which she had little or no preparation. No, the evil thing is not the divorce, but the unhappy conditions which make divorce desirable or imperative.

My proposition is simply this; that the causes for most of the failures in married life are to be found in the fact that between the contracting parties there exists too wide a gap between their personalities, their visions, their sense of relative values,
their interests, ideals and standards. This great disparity does not always lead to a very happy and contented home. It may lead to depression or divorce simply because one or both of the parties, through love for the children, if any, through fear of notoriety or because they see no other way out, have to change or to stifle their individuality as to make life tolerable. But is such a condition much more desirable than a divorce? Certainly no one in such a home is likely to be very happy. Nor can they reach their full stature of growth as parents, as citizens, as individuals. It is also questionable whether the sacrifice made by unhappy parents in living together for the sake of their children is justified by the results. Probably the effect of being reared in an unhappy, strained atmosphere is more disastrous to the proper development of children than to be deprived of one parent, usually the more undesirable one.

Ideals and Standards

If space permitted, I could describe in detail concrete cases which demonstrate that disparity in interests, views and philosophies constitutes the real basic cause for unhappy domestic life. But it should not be necessary to go to the extent of giving concrete illustrations, for it must be apparent to anyone that the ideals and standards, the personal qualities and tastes one possesses determine not only his general attitude toward himself, but also his approach to life. If two people of diametrically opposed ideas, opinions or views regarding the solution of any specific life problem. The problem involved in planning the future of the family, in building and furnishing a home, in the care and training of children, in saving and investment, in recreation, etc., all will serve to strengthen the bonds between man and wife if similar ideals, standards and interests are brought to bear on their solution. If these last are diametrically opposed, such problems only create friction, disagreement and loss of respect. In such cases the rival of children does not prove the panacea it is held to be by some. The children in many cases aggravate the trouble simply by presenting more vital problems on which the parents may disagree.

Adjustment Is Necessary

But, you say, it is necessary for people to adjust themselves to one another and that it is their plain duty to do so. Is it not true that in the perfectly matched couple there will always be considerable adjustment to make, but not so much that it cannot be made without too great a loss on either side? There is no question that the adjustment is not possible. People are what they are primarily by virtue of their heredity and their early training. It is not possible to make any radical changes in an adult's attitudes, ideals and habits of thinking and behavior.

How much easier the adjustment, however, when the two parties involved have similar ideals, compatible interests and philosophies of life. It will be hard enough even then, but when there exists a very serious disparity in these fundamental factors, one of two things is almost bound to occur—either there is an open break resulting in divorce or separation or divorce virtually sells his or her soul, robbing his or her ideals, becomes a stunted personality, only a shadow of what the Creator intended. Revising marriage laws, suggesting better ways of dealing with such problems, will not solve the problem. The actual number of divorces may be lessened by such means, but it will not decrease the number of unhappy homes and this should be the real object of our endeavors.

How Education Can Remedy

I trust that I have made my case clear. Stated briefly, it is this: That the home is the bulwark of our civilization and that this bulwark is being seriously weakened by domestic unhappiness, which expresses itself in divorce and separation; that unhappiness is caused mainly by the incompatibility of personal attitudes and interests of the contracting parties; that the personal traits, ideals, attitudes and interests are too deeply rooted in heredity and in early training to be radically altered in adult life, except in exceptional cases, perhaps, and that the logical, sane method of preventing domestic unhappiness and dissension at home is to train young people to choose their life mates with a view to the similarity of the vital factors mentioned above.

Let us admit, for the sake of further discussion, that all which precedes is true. Two questions immediately confront us: (1) Can we develop in our boys and girls the skill or ability to choose their mates intelligently? (2) Will not such a cold-blooded, business-like method of choosing a life mate take all the romance and tender sentiment out of this glorious springtime period of life? Indeed, it is much more desirable and satisfactory than the romance of the courtship which dies with marriage. In such cases the courtship of two well-mated individuals of similar interests, tastes and ideals will be much more satisfactory and enjoyable, will foster a deeper respect and admiration, and will involve the close cooperation of two persons who are radically different in these fundamental qualities.

What Can Be Done

Whether this is true or not, the question still remains—what are you going to do about it? Maybe it is not fair to direct this challenge at the teachers of homemaking, but, according to tradition, the choice is made by the sex whose instruction is your special charge. If this is true, then the major part of the responsibility is yours and you are called upon to grapple with it. I do have a suspicion that the men exercise some little choice in the matter and I believe that some instruction should be given them also. Which teacher is responsible for the instruction of the boys I do not know, nor do I feel that it matters much, so long as the work is well done. Probably the health teacher, the science teacher and the citizenship teacher will all be making their contributions to the development of this ability. Each of these subjects contain much information which, if carefully selected and properly taught, would aid very materially in the development of the ability to choose one's life partner intelligently.

As in all educational problems, two main problems face us here. The first one is—what shall we teach? The second one is—how shall we teach? We know as little of one as of the other. We must first determine the subject matter as scientifically as possible. This would involve a close study of many concrete cases of both happy and
a wreck of this place,' is the comment as they ride on. If they would but stop, their own eyes would lead them to the way to the apparently barren hillsides, they would see a far different sight. They would not be able to step without bruising the tiny evergreen trees carpeting every slope. They go on the farther ridge. Millions of little Douglas fir trees have come up without the aid of man as soon as the old groves were removed.

"Here is the second crop of timber which is growing throughout the northwest today on countless mountain sides: on slopes too steep ever to be used for agriculture; in canyons too dark and moist to grow any crop save that of trees. But the land will produce trees faster and better than any other forest region in the world, outside of the tropics. The long, clear summers and rainy, warm winters make ideal timber growing conditions. In addition to Douglas fir, which makes up approximately 70 per cent of all timber west of the Rocky mountains, the three other important commercial woods are West Coast hemlock, Western and Red Alder species.

"The problem of fire control goes hand in hand with the growth of new timber and I soon discovered that these forests are the best protected in the world. A sum ranging between one and two million dollars, depending on the season, is spent every year in Washington and Oregon to prevent and fight forest fires. Timber land owners and lumbermen pay 76 cents of every one of these dollars and a good share of their money is spent to protect their new forests on the logged-off lands from the match of the careless smoker and the campfire of the heedless traveler.'

"Of what interest are these new forests to me, a reader of the Iowa Homemaker? Why should I care whether or not the little trees grow again on mountain sides which I have never seen?"

"Here is the reason—my last and most fascinating discovery. The almost miraculous regrowth of Pacific northwest forests is an assurance that America's future is always be able to afford comfortable, beautiful, and economical homes of wood. Durable, sturdy lumber will always be forthcoming from the great forested areas close to the north Pacific ocean at a price which the ordinary person can afford to pay.

"No other country in the world has had this advantage. For generations timber has been so scarce in Europe and Asia that the working classes have had to build only small houses of stone, mud, thatching, etc. As the sons and daughters marry they cannot afford a home of their own but must live under crowded and often unsanitary conditions with a consequent lowering of living standards.

"Americans have always had an abundant supply of timber. From the New England forests came the lumber to build the Colonial homes which still represent the finest type of American architecture. As the pioneers pushed westward they found forests always

ahead of them. Until they reached the last and greatest forests of them all—those of the West Coast.

"From the immense trees here builders discovered they could get the same beautiful, wide paneling and finish; the same sturdy summerbeams, wainscoting, clapboards, and shakes which Colonial craftsmen found in the virgin pine trees of the east. From these new western forests lumber could be gotten to duplicate the many Colonial types—most artistic and homelike of all American homes. This lumber has gone throughout the civilized world. It has built homes from Alaska to Australia; from China round the world again to Russia.

"Until the word went out that here was America's last timber stand and with it the rumor that soon there would be no more lumber. And those who had no opportunity to see for themselves began to think that this might be true. They knew nothing of the new forests springing up every year which would produce lumber for their children's homes.

"Out of this came the lumber industry's national program to tell the world that here, rather than the last timber stand, is "America's Permanent Lumber Supply." And as one of the most important details, it came with my present position, the most interesting work I ever expect to do."

Gamma Chapter of Omicron Nu has recently initiated the following women to membership: Seniors, Mrs. Lena Gilbert, Ames; Beryl Spinney, Ames; Susan Scurr, Gilman; Virginia Parrish, Grinnell; Mildred Hawkins, Rock Rapids; Virginia Buck, Des Moines; and Florence Wilson, Roland; Juniors, Helen Kallenberg, Ames; Winnifred Mighell, Holstein; Cleo Fitzsimmons, New Sharon, Des Moines; Helen Mautho, Washington; and Dorothy Dean Heryford, Ames.

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unhappy homes. Gradually certain definite principles would be developed and carefully verified. The next step would be the development of teaching situations or activities which would present these essential principles as to develop the ability desired. I cannot state these principles nor describe these teaching activities. I know no more of this matter than you do, my gentle reader. But both you and I know a few facts concerning this matter of marriage. We know that by influencing young people in the choice of their life mates we have an opportunity to touch destiny. We know it is very imperative that something be done very soon to safeguard the homes of America. And we know that we are doing little or nothing at present, except in isolated cases, to insure that the choice of a life partner will be wisely dealt with by the future homemakers of America.

Be pleasant every morning until ten o'clock. The rest of the day will take care of itself.