The New Family in the Postwar World

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What does this title mean? The "new family" is made up of the same structural elements which have composed families in all times and in all places—man, woman and children in all of their relationships. It still has its age old functions to perform, though it may have to draft a new pattern.

The family, as an institution, has been hard hit by the war. Its chief breadwinner has been inducted either into an army of workers or of warriors. In either case, he has been subtracted from the home for long periods. The wife and mother has been forced—in many cases by economic pressure from within as well as without—to enter into industry and become a producer of goods as well as the cohesive force holding the family together. The children, if they were small, thrived pretty well in Day Care Centers and Nursery Schools, but if they were of teen age, they were pulled and twisted in all directions. The housing projects sponsored by the Government alleviated the problems, but still there was a serious shortage of dwellings, and families were compelled to crowd into space never meant to house so many people. Now definite goals for the betterment of family living will have to be set up.

To train our young people for democratic living we must have vital, dynamic, aggressively democratic experiences in the home. Through the intimacies of family life come the habits and attitudes basic to that kind of life.

The Post-War World: Will this post-war era, that so many long for, be born on a certain day? If we look we can see that it is already "post-war" for many of our boys and men. We find them in hospitals, schools, back on the job or getting ready to enter a new one. So, with the four-year old, who when trying to understand the meaning of tomorrow said, "Oh, today is yesterday's tomorrow"; we can say that today is the future and begin living immediately to accomplish the dream of yesterday.

Therefore, let us take stock of the elements out of which the new families are to be made which are to contribute so largely to the goals of democratic living which we have set for ourselves. The satisfying home has certain common needs: maximum health for everyone, economic security, agreeable personalities, good management, trust and faith in one another, and love and mutual respect. It is the people in it who make the house a home.

What will the man be like when he leaves the armed forces? This depends on the type of man he was before. What kind of person was he? What attitudes governed his actions? What responsibilities did he carry? As a civilian he could choose, somewhat, the kind of home in which he would live, what kind of work he would do, who were his friends. On entering the services he was deposited with little more than a toothbrush into situations where he had no privacy and no control. He had finished grammar school and had started in high school, though there were some that had never used the little schooling they had received and were classed as illiterates, while others had graduated from a university. For nearly 8,000,000, it can be said that education has been rudely interrupted and one problem now is how to make possible for each one to continue his education as he comes back to pick up the threads of civilian life.

No matter how young he was when he left his home the veteran is an adult in experience. He will be very different from what he was, as the discipline and regimentation will leave their marks on him. In some respects he will be more demanding, for he has grown accustomed to a more balanced diet than he had in civilian life, and better grades of clothes (though he was not allowed to choose them). There will also be inner changes, for he will have experienced sights and sounds which he wants to forget and cannot and which he does not want to talk about.

There are going to be wide gaps between the ex-service man and the civilian who has stayed at home. It will take time and effort on the part of both to reach common understanding. He will have dreamed about home for years and will have built up pictures that seemed realities. It will be difficult for him to accept things as they are. He will come back to a family that remembers him as he was but does not know him now. It is part of the mustering-out plan to give to each returnee the best possible counsel. In the light of his own desires he will be told what type of job holds for him the most promise of success.

Eighty to ninety percent of all the returnees will settle either in the jobs they left or others that may make use of the specialized training they have received in the armed forces. Some will want still more training and G. I. Bill of Rights makes provision for vocational training. Two million men have already said that they want to start small businesses. Statistics put out by the Chamber of Commerce show that 1,000 small businesses fail every day because the owners did not know the methods that lead to success. The government experts have compiled at least 20 booklets to serve as guides for men who want to avail themselves of government loans before going into business.
for themselves. The thing to remember is that the returnee does not have to rush into this venture immediately; he has two years to build up his background and training before applying for a loan. There is reason to think that these new business owners will succeed for they are at an age when vigor, imagination, dreams, and daring are at their peak. Everything possible will be done to fit the disabled into jobs in which they can be proficient and feel wanted by the family and community. The plan for the counselling is national in scope but is to be carried out in the local community where the man is known.

The girl. What have they been doing since their men went to war? Many have gone into war industries. They have proved to themselves and others that they can be "workmen worthy of their hire." Half of these women would like to stay in the "plant" after the war. Many would like to fit themselves for jobs more congenial to their desires. In all too many situations, the girl finds that she is good enough to be a worker but she cannot rise to the managerial jobs. This is still a man's world. On the other hand, where she has had opportunities to hold administrative positions, her success has been outstanding.

Many young women have joined the uniformed forces. While their experiences have not been the same as that of their brothers, they have some things in common that make for sympathetic understanding. They, too, have been tested, trained, sifted and placed in jobs suited to their talents. Some will want to continue working; some frankly say that they will be glad to return to their homes. But, all will have learned to live vigorously for a purpose and this will have its influence on future family life.

More girls are staying in high school and going to college because there has been more ready money to keep them there. If the school has been awake to its possibilities in helping to equip the wife of tomorrow, she will have gained insight into (1) the art, the literature and the culture of her own country and that of others; (2) she will have had chances to develop individual interests which make her a more interesting person both to herself and to others; (3) she will have learned some vocational skills; (4) she will know enough about health and physical fitness to keep herself and her family and to contributing to the health of the community.

According to a Report of the White House Conference on Rural Education, "Education should be directed to building strong, wholesome family life, and understanding values which people hold dear. Experiences in creative arts and crafts and wholesome recreation should be vital forces." No matter what vocation the girl has trained for, if she follows the traditions of the past, she will marry and have a home of her own and children. She did not want to be a spinster at the end of the war. It is, therefore, desirable that her education give her knowledge and skills which will help her to create, with her husband, a successful home, one which will exemplify all of the principles of democratic living desired by the community and the nation. Small Phoebe, aged 11, when asked to write an essay on how she could practice democracy in the home, said that she was too old to learn democracy, she had been living that way since she was four.

What are the problems that face new families? All through the tragic periods of our history, as well as in the calmer years, marriages have been made and families built up. Usually, the number of marriages increase before and after a war and decrease during the fighting.

1. Are the two people well mated with common enthusiasms, interests and desires?
2. Have they entered marriage with a sense of permanency and a will to solve their problems?
3. Will each be willing to give up a little?

The following are characteristic stories of the unique problems which are facing some of our young people today.

(i) Mary and Bill had known each other in high school. They had dated occasionally. After graduation they began to see more of each other. In time, they had an "understanding." Both were willing to listen to their parents' plea of waiting awhile. "Let Bill get started on a job and Mary try her hand at earning too." Then the war came and Bill joined the army. He wanted to marry before going overseas. His reasons were: if they were married they would feel a sense of belonging to one another; he would have someone to fight for and she someone to work for. Both would enjoy a sense of fulfillment of desire and deep satisfaction. "Their parents' reasons for not marrying before such a long separation were: having taken on the responsibility of a wife, the boy would worry when it was impossible to know what was happening at home. His wife might become dependent upon one of the families. Then there was the possibility that he might not return or if he did that he might be wounded; could his wife then support them? There were other arguments,—but they were married. The honeymoon was short. Mary followed Bill from camp to camp. Mary had to live in one room with another Army wife and could only see Bill during his time off. When Bill was sent overseas, Mary went home to live with Bill's mother and await the birth of her baby. This was not an impossible situation but required tact and forebearance on the part of both. At times Mary felt that she had missed something very precious and then she faced the situation and did sensible things her husband suggested by letter, saw the Army doctor and followed the regime he set for her. She took Red Cross classes and went into a hospital as a nurse's aid. After the baby was born, she had little time or desire to do other things.

Bill tried hard to imagine what a small baby was like. He went to a hospital and asked to see a new one so
that he would have a more definite picture of what Mary was writing about. Try as hard as he could to think of “family,” what Bill really longed for was Mary of the pre-baby days. It was the same when he came home on furlough. Mary had two to care for but showed more concern for the youngest member of the family, while Bill was jealous of the time she thought she had to spend with the baby. Grandmother sensed it and rose to the occasion by suggesting that she look after Junior “while you two children run off to the seashore for a real honeymoon.” It wasn’t that Bill couldn’t adjust to the presence of the child, if he were given time, but that was what he didn’t have—Time. Before he had to leave, he made great strides in getting acquainted with his son and was beginning to feel like a real parent. Mary was happy to be sharing the joys of parenthood, though she was willing to “pick up the load” again when Bill had to leave. What a home and family life she was planning for, after the war! This was just the beginning.

(3) Here today, and gone tomorrow.

Marceline, a senior in high school, met Harry in a U.S.O. where she had gone seeking excitement as well as to “entertain the boys.” They “fell” for each other immediately. They danced and played together every day and night for the next week which was all that was left of Harry’s furlough. Marceline was happy and gay and gave freely of herself to Harry who was hungry for the love and affection of a girl. To Marceline, it was as though she was doing something patriotic to make a soldier happy. As a matter of course, they talked of marriage and thought that they were the exception that proved the rule of “love at first sight,” though the only thing they had in common was dancing. They had no mutual friends except the acquaintances of the dance hall. The future was fogged with the passions of the moment. And so they were married. They didn’t even have time to prove that the Fairy Tale ending “they lived happily every after,” was true or false, as Harry was called back to the South Pacific. There he idealized his love as the child, if he were given time, but that was what he didn’t have—Time. Before he had to leave, he made great strides in getting acquainted with his son and was beginning to feel like a real parent. Mary was happy to be sharing the joys of parenthood, though she was willing to “pick up the load” again when Bill had to leave. What a home and family life she was planning for, after the war! This was just the beginning.

(3) The woman who wants to combine a career and marriage.

Sara had been a teacher before she married Peter. She had tried conscientiously to make a good home for Peter who was a worker in a war industrial plant, but she really liked her job better than housekeeping. Maybe one of the reasons that caused her to like teaching better was because she had been trained for it and she had enjoyed success. There was also the possibility that Peter would be reclassified as 1-A. At the moment he was classified 4-F due to ill health caused by stomach ulcers, but these were now largely passed, and Peter was beginning to feel it when people expressed surprise at seeing a man so hale and hearty out of the Army. Sara had never done much housework at home. Her mother had always said that she could do it faster than Sara and that Sara could go and do her homework. So now she did it the hard way. She did not feel that she did her housework well. It seemed as though she could pay someone to come in and do as well as she did or better, if she could find any one. The fact that Sara had been accustomed to earning her own spending money and had adjusted her style of living to the size of her pay-check made the stretching of Peter’s salary, to cover the wants and needs of two, very difficult. Then, too, she had made some very close friends who also taught at the school and she enjoyed them as well as the children and parents.

One of Sara’s friends was an older woman who had solved the problem of homemaking and teaching very nicely. She had taken the maternity leave allowed her by the school when her three children were born. Living on a small poultry farm as they did, on the edge of town, the family had been able to get a man and his wife, past middle age, to come and live with them. They helped with the housework, children and chickens. Her husband, who had never been very successful with town jobs, liked to work around the place and did not mind having the children tag along when he was working. In fact, he said that they helped him. As Sara looked at the family she thought that they seemed to have made a success of building a cooperative home.

Peter had never thought that his wife would work after they were married. He had taken it for granted that she would want to stay at home as his mother had done and that he would be the bread-winner as his father had
been. It gave him a sense of importance and power to have his wife depend upon him. To be sure, he had not counted on the rise in the cost of living or on the possibility of his being reclassified before the year was over. He knew that the allowance given a serviceman's wife when he went overseas would not be enough to enable Sara to live as she was accustomed so he stopped fussing about women's work being in the home. He found that he enjoyed helping her do the cooking, and housework in the morning and at night so that they could leave the house for long evenings together. It pleased him to find out how well he could cook and he could make a bed better than Sara, "if he did say it as shouldn't." He enjoyed, too, the course of lectures sponsored by her school on current affairs to which he and Sara went each week. He hated to think that when he went into the service that she would have to do her week's marketing alone. Life would be even more complicated as there was going to be a baby. They were asking Sara's widowed mother to come and live with them. That would mean there would always be a third person in their little home, and it would ensure Sara of having someone to help her when, after her "maternity leave," she would go back to teaching. When he came back and was ready to become the chief provider again, he was sure he and Sara could work things out.

Sara realized how fortunate she was in having a husband who could see her point of view in wanting to work rather than settle down to the routine of housekeeping. One of her friends had found the opposite was true in her family: she had had to give up her job in the Post Office in order to be the homebody her husband and his family expected. She felt frustrated,—until she found something that she could carry on at home. This did not mean that she did not recognize that homemaking could be a satisfying career but she knew that she would be a better wife and mother if she had some challenging interest occupying her leisure rather than the card-playing that filled the leisure of so many of her neighbors.

(4) Crippling need not spoil two lives.

Hal came back to Anne a veteran and a cripple. They had started their married life with such high hopes. They had been able to buy a house of their own and Anne had been able to surround her two children with a sense of security that all was well and would continue to be so. Hal had lost an arm and had been in the hospital for months. He had not been able to keep discouragement out of his letters. Would he be able to find another job since his incapacitation was such that he could not carry on his former one? Could they keep the house and continue the children's education?

Anne knew that the adjustments to civilian and home life would be difficult for her war-torn husband. She was fully determined that she would make every effort to help her husband, and to save her and her children's home life if possible. She attended an adult education class in psychology and read all the available literature which was flooding the pages of current magazines as well as literature coming out in book form as to how to understand and help in the adjustment of the crippled veteran to a satisfying civilian life. She would give him time to make his own adjustments. She would not ask more of him than he could give her freely, but, oh, how she would like to know all that he had been through so she could help him when he returned. One thing she knew was that she still needed the help that he used to give her in doing the outdoor work, so she would ask him to do the things that he once said were his jobs. When he came home, he gradually found that there were many things a one-armed man could do. One would have to look twice at Hal to realize that he was a casualty, for he had been fitted with as perfect an arm as mechanical genius could devise and he was learning to use it dextrously. What was more, he had seen other men who were much worse crippled than he was learn to use mechanical body parts and even get jobs and earn a decent living. He was not going to let this get him down, if his wife could take it in her stride too. So he rose to the occasion and soon both were working together with a keen sense of their old companionship.

Hal could not carry on his old job so he and Anne decided that he should take advantage of the G. I. Bill of Rights and go to a Vocational school to be trained for a new job. He had talked over these things with the government counselor and knew which school could give him the best start in the new field he chose. Anne would have to scrimp along for a while longer, but he was sure that he would soon be earning more than he had before and she assured him that she trusted his plans.

How can the community help the family? The conception that the community should be held responsible for so much thought coming within the province of the home is relatively new. The family will not profit by the new offerings, however, unless they become an integral working part.

Some of these newer services expected of the community are: (1) The machinery to implement the G. I. Bill of Rights. The federal government may assume the financial responsibility but the community must plan for the return of the one-tenth of its population who fought the war for democracy. There are also certain benefits which are promised the veteran's family. (2) An active health service manned with competent physicians, dentists, oculists, visiting nurses, and for the benefit of the returnee, a psychiatrist. There should be a committee made up of the visiting nurse, the minister and the doctor who could help with mental therapy. Of course, there should be private and public clinics which would serve the community in sickness and in prevention. Special maternity

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and baby clinics are necessary. There should be special provisions to correct defects. If the community sets up a health council, all the offerings of the agencies that deal with health could be coordinated. Families should become familiar with all these services and use them. (3) A public welfare department, which may overlap a little with the health agencies. This department usually tries to aid those in need of financial aid, to help parents solve behavior problems, and finally, it tries to see that there are leisure activities such as competitive games, crafts and hobby groups, training for vocation and study groups. Such organizations as the Y. M. and Y. W. C. A. are classed in the welfare group. The community usually also has a corps of social workers who visit individual families. This is a very important phase of the community’s work of trying to improve family relationships and standards of living and is usually supported democratically by a Community Chest. (4) Committees and “boards” to help shape the policies relating to young people, in particular the returnees. Let them take over certain programs of improvement. Give them a meeting place and offer guidance and encouragement through adult sponsors. Help them to train themselves to be the leaders of tomorrow. Let them talk and plan and do. If they get the feeling of doing something constructive, they are not apt to have time for destructive activities. The Town Meeting of our early New England colonists was rather a good idea.

There are many other activities in the communities which challenge the active support of families. Two of them are most important from the standpoint of the fullest development of the individual: one is the Church and the other is the school. All of our Churches are organized along lines of service and should provide companionship and fellowship for people who are joined together by common faiths. They should be a force in the community to lift standards of living.

The whole responsibility for having a good school does not rest on the faculty or the principal. The P. T. A. which should be made up of all of the parents can see that many things are carried out which contribute to the health and learning of their children—such as the introduction of a good school lunch program. The Educational Policies Commission of the National Education Association has just finished a splendid post-war plan for our schools called “Education for All Americans.” It proposes a 14-year program consisting of 6 years in the elementary school and 8 in the high school. The objective is to educate the youth to fulfill his personal promise and to take his rightful place in the community.

Conclusion

As Margaret Mead pointed out in her article in the April number of Harper’s Magazine, “What’s the Matter with the Family?”—the family, as such, has survived many thousands of years, but has undergone changes to meet the needs of the present society wherever you happen to study it on the face of the globe. The American family has had some of the props of custom knocked from under it and at the moment it is floundering, looking for a new design of living. We must draw the new designs charting the course of the new family in war time.

A design that was “drawn” 2,000 years ago will still serve as a beacon light for families who have the will to continue. “Love suffereth long and is kind, love envieth not, love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not its own, is not provoked—beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things—Love never faileth.” (Cor. 13:4).

Unemployment and the Family

22 other families showed varying degrees of worry, discouragement and irritation over their economic plight.

6. Conflicts between husband and wife and parents and children increased as a result of unemployment: “Because of restricted living quarters and the fact that members normally employed were all home, the family members saw much more of each other than formerly and found themselves cooped up in a small space. There was little privacy, and friction increased. Many families, even those in which there was an underlying unity, spoke of increased quarreling.”

7. Another effect of unemployment was the cutting off of outside social relations such as attending church and motion pictures and visiting friends and relatives.

8. Young people especially felt the lack of adequate clothing and were sensitive about all social contacts. Some times the families continued to buy a daily newspaper (often with a sense of guilt over the expenditure) in a desperate effort to retain some contact with the world. The radio became important as a source of information and amusement.

9. The effect of unemployment upon the young people in the one hundred families created a period of dissatisfaction, restlessness or resentment. On the part of the boys, discouragement, bitterness, surliness, and hitchhiking across the country in pursuit of some vague chance of work elsewhere seemed to be the most drastic results.

10. The families receiving relief manifest a shame in being on relief even if they are grateful for it. Often there is resentment of the supervision. Work relief, however,