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EC1145 The New Homemaker

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In asking you to consider with me briefly the new homemaker, it is not my purpose to introduce to you some ideal person, such as we meet in books, who is possessed of all virtues and wisdom, but with no weaknesses, whose home is always orderly and spotless, and whose children are perfect in behavior and immaculate in appearance; and after presenting this person, tell by what magic she accomplishes all of this.

Who is the New Homemaker?

The new homemaker, as I shall try to interpret her, is the homemaker of the present day who is bravely facing the problems that confront her, rather than ignoring them, and who is realizing that the solution of these problems challenges her best efforts, intellectually as well as physically. She realizes also that it is not safe to rely upon intuition or tradition to guide her. Some of her most serious problems are new, quite different from those of her great-grandmother, and therefore, old methods and processes will no more suit her present need than knowing how to drive a horse would fit one for managing an automobile. Realizing this, the new homemaker feels the need of calling to her assistance the experience of experts who are spending their lives in studying problems relating to the home and to homemaking.

Problems of the Old Homemaker

To understand better the problems of the new homemaker, let us go back for a brief glimpse of the problems of our first American homemaker, the Colonial mother. This old homemaker faced the problem of producing food and clothing, as well as preparing these products for use. In those days practically all the family needs were produced in the home. The book, "Home Life in Colonial Days" by Alice Morse Earle, quotes an article from a newspaper of 1878 in which a farmer states that his family had spent not more than $10.00 that year, this money being spent for salt, nails, and the like. Nothing to eat, drink or wear was purchased, as that was all produced at home.

We can see by this that the home in Colonial days was the center of industry. This home industry furnished not only the needs of life, but it was also the chief source of education for the boys and girls of that day, for their education consisted of arts and skills acquired from the parents by daily participation in the common industry. Along with the acquiring of arts and skills the boy and girl acquired an attitude of cooperation and taking of responsibility, for it was needful that he contribute his share. He learned to see the world as a place where he must play his part and render his portion of service. The home industry of those days also provided social life, for neighborly interchange of work was necessary when occasion demanded extra help. Unusually large tasks called for the quilting and cornhusking bee, which developed into social gatherings. Other interests of the young people, as reading, writing and dancing, also centered in the home.

Shall we now place the modern home beside the Colonial home to see the striking contrast, for great changes have taken place in the intervening years. Practically all home industries especially those of production, have been taken from the home. Some one has said that we neither work nor play in the home any more...
more. The acquiring of arts and skills no longer fits a woman to be an efficient homemaker. She still has the problem of foods and clothing, but it is the wise selection and preparation that concerns her, and this, with present day conveniences, does not demand the continuous combined effort of the family as did home industry in Colonial days. This gives the new homemaker time to spend in solving the problems that the changes in home life have produced. With the removal of industry from the home has come also, gradually, much of the educating and training of children, and their social life and recreation. We see then that changing conditions in the home have relieved the new homemaker of some of the old problems, but they have brought with them new ones no less vital, and far more suitable and complex.

Problems of the New Homemaker

Will you think with me about three of these new or changed problems? We shall not attempt to present solutions to the problems, but we can consider some of the factors that bring them about, and give some suggestions that might be helpful.

Instability of the Modern Home

The first of the problems that I shall ask you to consider with me is concerned with the stability of the home and family life. Have you ever thought when reading the daily paper that it is hard to find one that does not have at least two or three items regarding family trouble, records of divorce trials, or requests for advice as to what to do about certain family relations? What does this indicate? The pessimist says that the home as an institution is doomed. We discount what the pessimist says, as he never prophesies wisely, but, certain it is that the homemaker has many adverse forces to combat in maintaining a happy, stable home. There is no longer the bond of common industry to bind the family together. We have now only the bond of common interest, a bond of choice rather than necessity. Historians tell us that it is internal rather than external enemies that have caused the downfall of nations. Is this not true of homes?

What then can the homemaker do to make her home so wholesome that it will be poor soil for germs of discontent and instability? First, by having the right attitude toward her home and toward life, and encouraging the development of this attitude in the family. Members of families have sometimes failed to realize that to be worthy members in any institution there must be a willingness and desire to contribute to, as well as derive benefit from it. Too often the emphasis has been placed upon the deriving of benefits, and the matter of contributing to and rendering service has been ignored or forgotten. The mind has been set in the direction of expecting and receiving rather than doing and giving. When the person has this attitude, doing his share in the rendering of service, is distasteful; while real love of home and what it stands for converts drudgery into willing service.

The homemaker who is wise will give graciously and willingly all that is due to her family, and just as graciously expect and seek from them all that is due her. This means the "give and take" spirit that constitutes true cooperation. Home enterprises are most successful when they are family enterprises, planned and carried out by all members of the family, all members contributing. Right attitude shows itself in cheerfulness. Do we, I wonder, realize the value of a cheerful, happy spirit in the home? The world outside the home recognizes the inestimable value of the cheery smile and friendly cordial atmosphere. The politician and expert salesman capitalize it. Cannot the homemaker use it as a tool in making her home more happy and secure? Too often, I fear, we think of the home as a place to tell our troubles and worries and show our feelings of
irritability, that have come from outside experiences. Do we not show our best and pleasantest manner to the world and our worst to our families? I came across a little verse that expresses the situation that too often exists:

"We've a pleasant word for the stranger,
And a smile for the some time guest;
But the bitter tone we reserve for our own,
Though we love our own the best."

Would it not be worth while to cultivate cheerfulness in the home, and think of it as a place to forget troubles, to tell happy experiences, and give and receive cheer? Cheerfulness spreads just as gloom does, and when once started makes for happy atmosphere just as fault finding and harsh criticism make for unhappiness and discontent.

Lack of Comradeship in the Home

The spirit of comradeship, if built up in the home, is a strong defense against instability. Comradeship begins by seeing the viewpoint of the other fellow. If a member of a family takes the pains to see the viewpoint of the others, has a sympathetic understanding, he will respect the other person's rights, and will show patience rather than intolerance. He will see and share the other person's difficulties.

The new homemaker has also the task of seeing that her family spends leisure profitably. Some one has said that a man can be judged by the way he spends his leisure. If this is the case, it is quite essential that it be spent in the right way. That much of the leisure time is spent outside the home is evidenced by the fact that great corporations have been organized and are flourishing on money spent for entertainment and amusement outside the home. The people receiving the highest salaries in the country at present are those who spend their time in this entertaining and furnishing of amusement. Unlike Colonial days, the young people of the present find most of their social life also outside the home. The homemaker is recognizing that much of this recreation is unwholesome, and realizing that much of this recreation is unwholesome, she must give to her family wholesome amusement that is sufficiently attractive to keep them from what is unwholesome.

There was never a time before when there were as many possibilities for enjoyment and entertainment in the home as at present. There are books and magazines planned especially for people of all ages and tastes. There is every opportunity for music in many forms, and children are receiving training in it in many of our schools. There are radios and reproducing devices that make it possible to have outside entertainment brought into the home, and the best is available at moderate cost. We have conveniences that make the entertainment of friends much less a burden than of old. There are games of many varieties and kinds, requiring all degrees of skill and ability. Has the homemaker made the best use of the resources available? Has she felt it worth while to spend time thinking about how her children can profitably spend their leisure? Perhaps she has waited so long that her children have already developed the habit of going outside for recreation, and have the attitude expressed by the child, who when asked for a definition of the home said, "It's the place where you go to get ready to go somewhere else." Cannot provisions for recreation and pleasure be a family enterprise where each member is considered and helps in the planning and carrying out of the program?
The Problem of Child Training

A second and most vital question that the new homemaker is asking herself is, what home training does my child need, that he may not only be a worthy member of the family, but will be a worthy member of society after leaving the home? She realizes that providing the right food and clothing for her child, though this is essential, is not enough. She sees the necessity for skilled motherhood, for having something beside intuition and tradition to guide her in helping her child to develop normally. Experience is a good teacher, but rather expensive when experimenting with the lives of children and their future success and happiness.

Over-indulgence on the Part of Parents

Not long ago a mother came to a child-training specialist and said, "Can you help me? I no longer know what to do with my child. I have no influence over him, and he seems to be growing worse every day." On inquiring, the specialist found that the child was but three years of age. This is a rather extreme case, but similar ones are being met constantly by child specialists. What is causing this? We say children are spoiled; that is, parents have been over-indulgent. The child is humored too much. If he does not receive what he wants, he cries and goes into a fit of temper, and parents rather than have a scene, give him the thing he desires. This is bad training. Psychologists tell us that, if after doing a thing once we gain satisfaction as a result, we tend to do the thing again, and each time that we receive the satisfaction, the tendency to do the act again is stronger.

In the light of this it is not hard to see why children form the habit of making a disturbance when refused what they want, for by making this disturbance they receive not only what they were demanding, but also the satisfaction of attention from their parents. Now, if the act had been followed by discomfort or dissatisfaction, such as failing to receive the thing desired, and failure to attract the attention and sympathy of the parents, the tendency would be not to make the disturbance again, since it did not work at first. If parents would take account of this in dealing with children, less trouble would result.

Shielding the Child from Responsibility

Another weakness in the rearing of children is to shield them from hard experiences and responsibility. The natural tendency of the mother is to shield her children from all hardships in order to give them happy childhood and youth. One mother says, "I had to work so hard when I was a child that I resolved that my daughter shouldn't have to do any work at home." We also hear a father say, "I had to sell papers when I was a boy and earn my own way through school, but I shall see that my son will not have to do as I did. I am able to take care of his education so he need not work." Thus in many homes children are given comforts and advantages with no demand of anything in return, and fathers and mothers are sacrificing everything to do this.

Someone has well said that a mother should love her children as herself, no more, no less, for if she loves them more, she will spoil them, and if she loves them less, she will neglect them. But you may say, do not most mothers love their children better than themselves? Yes, they love their bodies better; they would gladly endure suffering for them, and would do without everything to make them have a good time. But is this really loving them? Is it giving them what they need morally and spiritually? When parents become slaves to their children and ask nothing in return, are they not denying them something far more important - the growth of the soul? Real love for a child glories in his having his share in the opportunity to serve, for it is only in this way that he can...
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Grow in capacity to love, as love is born of service. What kind of attitude is the child developing who is brought up in an atmosphere of always receiving and never giving? Habits and attitudes that develop in childhood exert strong influence on after life. If the child fails to develop the attitude of willingness to do his share of giving and serving, he will not be ready to take his share of responsibility later. But, some one suggests that children do not always want their share. Perhaps they have not been led to do it young enough. In the Merrill Palmer Nursery School in Detroit, Michigan, in which a group of some thirty children are trained and made a study of by child-training specialists, I have seen little tots three years old setting their little tables for lunch and serving each other at the table. They are taught to wait on themselves, pick up playthings and arrange them in an orderly way. It is a part of their life, and they really enjoy being able to do these things.

I have visited frequently in a certain home where the homemaker is wise. Little Louise, five years old, sits on a high stool by the sink and scrubs vegetables while her mother is preparing dinner. She helps to carry dishes to the table, taking one at a time so that she will not break them. She feels a great responsibility in helping her mother. In the clothes closet in this home there is a row of hooks placed low so that the children can hang up their own wraps while they are too small to reach the high hooks. There is a special place for playthings, and it is the responsibility of each child to put his away when through with them.

Are these little folk doing much to help their mother? Perhaps not, but they are developing an attitude toward life that will lead them to render real service later. They are learning self-reliance and willingness to do their share. The chief influence in forming character is what children themselves do. The way for them to learn perseverance, justice, cooperation, regularity, etc., is to begin early to practice them. One of the most promising moments in a child's life is when he begs to do something that is difficult for him, and says that he can be trusted. The new homemaker recognizes this and instead of shielding him and stifling his ambition, she stimulates him to put forth his best effort.

The New Idea of Discipline for the Child

Not long ago in a meeting of mothers one mother said that she considered the children now-a-days were in need of discipline, and she subscribed to the old idea that sparing the rod spoils the child. We cannot deny that we have drifted far from this old form of discipline which was in the last analysis obedience of the child through force. We are coming to see that there is a better form of government than the old method of force, and this is cooperation of the child through comradeship. This new form of government stands for leading the child to choose wisely for himself rather than forcing him. It is government by control from within rather than force from without. It requires real skill to lead instead of driving.

For a real spirit of comradeship with the child there must be sympathetic understanding, and to understand the child one must study him individually. We are taking account of the fact that children are not all the same, and therefore cannot be dealt with in the same way. We believe that this new comradeship between parents and children will lead to the child's best development, but the present difficulty seems to be that the old form of government was abandoned before parents had learned the art of the new, and the result has been almost an absence of government of children.
The Problem of Efficient Use of Time

Now, some one may say, how is the new homemaker going to find time to spend in planning and carrying out recreation in the home, and how can she, in the rush of home work and outside demands, take time to study her children and give them the experiences they need for development? This question leads to the third problem of the homemaker, that of wise use of time. In the past the time of the homemaker was little considered, but we are realizing now that if present demands are to be met by our new homemaker, she must use her time and energy wisely.

The Time Budget

One great help to wise use of time in the home is the time budget. The homemaker is coming to understand the need of planning ahead her daily activities, of making a careful outline of how her time is to be spent. This will prevent her from throwing herself into whatever comes first at hand and rushing from one type of work to another in a haphazard manner with waste of time and energy, and with emphasis on trifles rather than essentials.

Elimination of Unnecessary Things from the Home

Elimination of traditions regarding home care that are not based upon sound judgment is another help in reducing time. Household methods and customs should be carefully scanned to see what is really essential and what is decreed by habit. Can the family laundry be cut down by eliminating extras that are really luxuries? Can more simple living and table service be substituted for more elaborate? Cannot the consumption of time in long cooking and sewing processes be reduced without physical loss? Is there unnecessary furniture and equipment about the home which is of no real value and does require time and effort in its care?

Convenient Arrangement and Labor Savers

A careful consideration of convenience in arrangement of household furnishings is also a big element in time saving. Are cupboards, stoves, and sinks so arranged as to require fewest steps and least energy? Are there stools and chairs in convenient places to permit the homemaker to rest whenever possible so that she may conserve her strength during a busy day? Are her sinks and tables of proper height so that she may be comfortable while working? Modern science has done much to give the new homemaker conveniences. She must then take the trouble to find out what things are available to make her work simpler and reduce the time spent in household tasks, and obtain as many as she can afford.

Cooperation of all Members of the Family

A very important factor in economy of time and effort for the homemaker is enlisting the cooperation of her family. However efficient she may be she cannot reduce work hours it the members of her family are late to meals, are careless about bringing in dirt, are disorderly in their habits, and feel the need of being waited upon. It costs very little effort for various members of the family to wait upon themselves, and have the responsibility of their own personal belongings, but if it is all left to one person, it becomes a real burden. The homemaker has a right to expect punctuality from her family, and a real interest in keeping the home clean and orderly. Combined interest and cooperation in the home as well as other institutions makes individual burdens less.
The New Homemaker Faces her Problems Intelligently

Are these the only important problems of the new homemaker? By no means, but they are some of the newer aspects of the present situation that the new homemaker is recognizing as an immediate challenge. They are problems that cannot be quickly and easily solved, these problems of making the home a happier and more stable institution, of training the child in such a manner as to really adjust him to the age in which he lives, and to use time wisely so that the most vital things rather than minor considerations are emphasized. The situation is hopeful because the new homemaker is seeing her problems more clearly; she is recognizing them as her problems, and facing them rather than turning her back upon them, trusting that things will work out all right. She is feeling that they are problems so vital and complex that they require not only her best intellectual efforts, but also demand all the knowledge that she can gain from specialists who are studying them.

Educators and psychologists are recognizing the need for more knowledge of the child and child training, and are devoting much time to research and study, sociologists are investigating the causes and remedies for the instability of the home, experts in the line of homemaking are striving to help the new homemaker with her managerial difficulties. The government through its various bureaus is furnishing free for the asking the results (in form of bulletins and pamphlets) of the study of experts in these lines, and is providing, through vocational education departments, classes in homemaking and mother training. Such classes are being conducted in our own state. Lincoln, Omaha, and other cities and towns have groups of women meeting together once or twice a week to study mother training and problems in the management of the home. Should any of you be interested in forming such a group, to study these problems under a capable leader, you will receive consideration by writing to the State Department of Vocational Education, Lincoln, Nebraska.

With all of these agencies contributing and with an attitude of courage and determination, the new homemaker will be enabled to work out her problems of family relations, child training, and wise use of time as cheerfully and efficiently as the old homemaker of Colonial days solved her problems of arts and skills in production.

(Prepared by Jane Hinkley. Department of Home Economics.)

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