



# THE ROYAL BANK OF CANADA

## MONTHLY LETTER

HEAD OFFICE, MONTREAL, MAY 1950

### ON BEING A FAMILY

**G**ETTING married is really little more than signing a contract to build a marriage. The real building is done over the years that follow, and the resulting structure is called a family. Planning and energy and skill are needed by the 243,000 men and women who were married in Canada last year, and by the quarter million who will be married this year.

Making it as easy as possible for these young people to find the right way to build sturdy family life is the business of all of us, because the success with which they pair off in this generation determines the fate of the nation.

These young people really have taken on a big job. The responsibilities facing them are literally unprecedented. They are called upon to make decisions which seem to demand all the wisdom of the ages.

#### *Of Married Life*

Both the form of the family and the nature of married relationships have varied greatly in the course of human history, and never were they more exacting than they are today. Poets to the contrary notwithstanding, marriage does not overnight change character and personality so as to fit everyone miraculously for founding a family.

There is more to family life than biology and romance and the economics of family support. Understanding appreciation of each other's good qualities is necessary, and it must be made known. Many a marriage breaks up in sorrow because one of the parties basks in the sunshine of appreciation expressed by workshop or social friends, while at home everything able and good is taken for granted.

What shall we set up as the motto of the home? One man, puzzled to find a decoration for over his living-room fire-place, discarded pictures and wrote up two Greek words meaning *The Healing Place of the Soul*.

Home is the unit of spiritual, emotional and physical security. The home develops personality, educates in living, and fits us to take our place in society. It is here

that children grow into men and women who find within the family the fulfilment of their needs and desires, the release from worry and the encouragement they need to face the heavy responsibilities of life.

Religious belief is a vital part of family life. It is worthy of note that not only does the family instil religious observance, but the various forms of religious confession emphasize the family as a vital part of our civilization.

The Christian Church carried over a high evaluation of the family from Judaism. The people of Israel laid stress upon the beauty and unity of home life. The family pattern became the symbol of the Kingdom of God. Our hope for the future of the human race rests in no small part upon carrying into the wide world the concept of the Christian family.

#### *The Good Family*

Good families do not just happen, but are the result of unselfishness, good temper, forgiveness and humour. A family needs two parents, qualified to make a home that will meet the minimum demands of normal life; community surroundings that make it possible for parents to do their parental duty; and a vital alliance between the family, the church, the school, the political system, and all cultural opportunities.

No other institution can take the place of the family. It is sad to see parental power yielding in some countries to the broadened functions of the state. The spontaneous co-operation of natural human association breaks up, and finds precarious replacement by the external and artificial bonds of social management and compulsion. Practically all the major religious and social study groups are agreed that for any true security, national or international, the rights and obligations of the home must be safeguarded.

We have seen the other side of the picture in recent years, when totalitarian states encroached upon the sanctity of the home and imposed pagan ideas upon their people. This is one of the dangers in a too-socialized world: that by interfering in family life the state may weaken the nation in two important ways,



by raising a race of dependent people, unable to think or do for themselves, and by breaking up the cohesion of the family unit, which is the basis of national unity.

### *Some Mistakes*

Some families break up of their own accord. We see mistakes made in marriage, and we are inclined to ask: "Is this necessary?"

Divorce, desertion, and separation are merely the external evidence of dissatisfaction and conflict within families. In the last year of record there were 7,683 divorces in Canada. In that same year there were 134,088 marriages and there were 3,042,000 families in Canada. For every broken home of which we hear, there are hundreds which stand as stable structures.

Parents can do a great deal to avert the danger of family disruption. A major mistake, made by husband and wife alike, is taking the mate for granted. When each of two persons living together becomes so absorbed in his own affairs that he has no imagination about those of his mate, that is inevitably a symptom of the breakdown of what could have been two happy lives.

Respect is needed in families, all along the line; respect of husband for wife and of wife for husband; respect of children for parents and of parents for children; and respect of children for their brothers and sisters.

On a mundane level, trouble sometimes starts because of money matters. There are great anxieties in homes which are not economically secure, but it is not always true that they raise difficulties which end in family disunion.

Sometimes these very stresses seem to have made family relationships more meaningful in constructive ways. In the families of even the very poor one may find solidarity, a willingness to share, and a readiness to live beyond narrow self-absorption on the part of both parents and children. It seems as if the very dearth of material things leads the family to use its natural talent to make living beautiful.

### *On Family Ritual*

Family ritual means the little formal things done in the family, things which acquire a sense of rightness as a result of their continuing history. Ritual centres chiefly around going to church, observing birthdays and other anniversaries, family meals, and co-operative ways of using leisure time.

One must be interested in his family, want to make a go of it, and think of it as a lasting relationship, to look forward to the establishment of family rituals and traditions.

It will not do to make up something, like drinking cocoa together before going to bed, and call that worthwhile ritual. What is significant is that the family gathers every night, engages in a common experience, relaxes together, and exchanges comments. The cocoa is incidental.

### *The Parents' Contribution*

Parents are responsible for giving their children security and protection, but this is not enough. There needs to be harmony in the home, affection, and a sense of beauty. Children do not love their parents because they are parents, but because they are lovable. Children do not learn principally by precept, but by example. They absorb the standards we live by, rather than those we talk about.

The mother of a family has special responsibilities. Homemaking is a vastly bigger technical task than housekeeping. The ideal mother may be said to include in her make-up these virtues: She would be a versatile and helpful manager, looking upon her home duties as part of a full life; she would give as well as take in conversation, games, excursions and planning; she would be an appeal court in family disturbances, the expert adviser in problems, and the trusted friend of all the family. She would find time to keep a spirit of play and fellowship in the home. She would be a good listener.

And she need not keep all these virtues exclusively for her children. Clarence Day, in his delightful *Life With Father*, shows how mother used effective techniques in dealing with the other senior partner.

As to father's place in the family, there are two ideas. One recalls the strange habit of the marmosets. After feeding her baby marmoset, the mother hands it over to be taken care of by the old man; from there on it is his responsibility. The other extreme is seen in Dagwood's family life. He is kind, dutiful, diligent, well-meaning; but he has so completely given up any claim to authority that the family would risk break-up and disaster if it were not for Blondie.

Somewhere in between these extremes is the true place of fathers. They are necessary, if children are to grow up to be well-balanced adults. Out of the power and wisdom father possesses in their eyes, children bolster up their feeling of being small and weak and helpless. It is from fathers that children obtain their ideals about the "rules of the game."

No father is expected to carry the whole weight of the family problems. By coming between his children and all suffering a father makes them infantile. His job is not to be a buffer between the family and trouble, but to help his family command it. He has an important job outside the family, to be a good citizen, bearing his share of social responsibility.

Fathers should not use the family as an excuse for not doing the things they would like to do, or feel they should do. A quip by Francis Bacon is often quoted by men in need of such an excuse: "He that hath a wife and children hath given hostages to fortune; for they are impediments to great enterprises."

This generalization must be accepted with caution. Countless men who would otherwise have led ordinary lives have been inspired into greatness by their wives and children. And, by the way, Bacon was merely



repeating what was said by the melancholy Greek philosopher Lucian in the second century. It takes a handy excuse a long time to die.

### *Education for Marriage*

A person wishing to become a lawyer, doctor, engineer, nurse, or teacher must give several years to study and training. When it comes to marriage, we have been accustomed to thinking no preparation is needed; that all we have to do is find someone attractive, pop the question, have a ceremony, and settle down to a life of bliss.

A change is taking place. During the past few years we have wakened up to the idea that a little learning makes marriage more likely to succeed, and certainly it helps in bringing up a family.

Education for family living has its beginning in school years, when the child learns elementary facts about hygiene and home management, but the best work is done in early adult years. There are facilities for study in every city and in many smaller centres. The task is to convince young people that learning is worthwhile because more enjoyment can be had in married life if they approach it prepared.

Parenthood is a job for the sturdy. It can be rather rough going. Young children love to make a noise, and they are given to moving violently about. The parent who is forever saying "Quietly!" ought to have made inquiries about the real nature of children before becoming a parent.

Then, the noisy period past, the children develop into animated question marks. For 15 to 18 years they display insatiable curiosity and an inclination to argue. These are part of their education, and the parent who snubs their curiosity is shirking his duty.

It is not always a comfortable situation, because sometimes the parent just does not know the answers. That need not be disastrous unless the child finds his parent bluffing. It is far better to say: "I don't know, but let's find out." The weak or thoughtless person will end a debate by the mere exercise of authority, but the child senses that a grown-up who has to stand on his dignity like that must be a person of short stature.

There is no easy way of being a parent. There is no set of encyclopedic volumes with all the answers.

It is, however, a good thing to have a list of principles. This one, though prepared by the Highland Park School in Michigan for students in its child-care course, is equally good for seasoned parents: Take your time; use a low, quiet voice; answer questions; talk to the children when occasion calls for it, but avoid talking to them all the time; be consistent; be calm, controlled and relaxed; be friendly, but not aggressively so; be reasonable, just, and fair; when the children are working or playing well, don't interfere; laugh *with* them, never *at* them; show no favouritism; avoid talking about a child in his presence; be patient; encourage self-help; give sincere praise for accomplishments.

### *About Recreation*

Recreation need not be the complicated experience some people make it. It is relaxation to go down to the country station to watch the train come in, or to drive out from a city to look at a few cows and chickens. Think of how fascinatedly men gather at a subway excavation or a lot where riveters are bolting together the skeleton of a new building. Adults return from these excursions relaxed, and children find in them the raw material for exciting games in the sandbox or on the living room floor.

Because all families have so different work and interests during the day that leisure time offers their only hope of getting together, it is reasonable to suggest that every chance for recreation in the home should be grasped. Planning for fun together is an important part of family living. It is surprising what opportunities can be found around the house.

If parents are the kind who like to tinker and to create things with their hands, and if they are willing to let the small fry hang around and ask questions while they work, that is one answer to the problem of what to do. It is only one more step to allow the children to make things for themselves. What they turn out will not look like much, but they will learn to handle tools. More important, they will learn the pleasure to be had in a home workshop and will be drawn closer to parents who are also in the secret.

Today's apartments and houses are not as roomy as living quarters used to be. It is up to the family to make sure the best use is being made of what is available. Family recreation is worth sacrificing some old-time prejudices for. Such a prejudice is the tidy parlour. It doesn't seem to have done much good, in many cases, to change the name to "living room", because it is anything but that. It would be fun to muss it up by living in it together of an evening, with cut-outs, card tables, sewing kit, and other diversions.

If that is going too far in the interests of family recreation, make a survey. Can you set up a hobby corner in the attic, the basement, the garage, or even in a clothes closet? What can you provide in the way of equipment — a workbench (a packing case or several small boxes nailed together will do), game tables, a stand for the boy's microscope or for the girl's hand loom?

Are you doing the most that is possible with what you have? Does everyone get an inning? Is everyone encouraged to become interested in what everyone else does? Can what one does be made to contribute to the hobby of another?

### *In the Community*

Most communities provide, either naturally or by co-operative enterprise, resources to supplement those found or made around the home. No family can create all the apparatus and opportunities for a wholesome, balanced and satisfactory programme of recreation. The ideal situation is where the community bands together to make recreation available to all citizens at the lowest possible cost.



Some cities in Canada have gone in for the lighted schoolhouse idea with great success. They make provision for both children and adults in classes devoted to crafts of all kinds, music, shopwork, science study, drama, physical recreation, literature, public speaking, and a host of other activities.

If the school houses in your community are still closed in the evening, look for the reason. They are public property, financed by the community, and fullest use should be made of them. Traditional objections, such as possibility of damage, increased janitor service, cost of supplies and maintenance, and lack of efficient supervision, are being overcome in scores of communities by co-operation between the officials and the citizens.

There are certain organizations which seem to be the logical centres for starting or improving community recreation programmes: Home and School Associations, Citizens' Associations, Community Clubs, and so on. If there are no such organizations, or if they do not function, then a voluntary society of wide-awake citizens can fill the gap.

### *What Can Be Done*

The way to go about it is to survey the recreational and cultural facilities your neighborhood offers its people. Are they adequate? Are there activities for the teen-agers, the pre-school group, the young married couples, and for parents? Is there a playing space with provision for tennis, badminton, bowling, archery, and such games as softball and hockey? Is there an indoor recreation place, not closed to ordinary amateur groups by red tape or expense, giving everyone a fair chance to play? Have you a library?

One of the oldest-settled communities on the St. Lawrence still hasn't a library, but it will have one by the end of this year. Citizens found a building that could be bought for a few dollars, obtained permission to move it to a corner of a park, and are fixing it up into a presentable place. Boy Scouts and Girl Guides are collecting books in a house-to-house roundup, to form the nucleus of a collection. This is something that can be done anywhere, and it is an effort not to be despised.

When citizens keep their fingers in the recreation pie they are acting wisely. It does not do to give over such an important activity wholly to experts. Recreation together is one way of helping to keep the family together. It is a creative experience not only in regard to muscle and mind, but of sympathy and heart.

The danger of parents' abdication is vividly portrayed by George Orwell in his unhappy forecast of what regimentation might bring by the year *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. Here is his picture: "This was the second time in three weeks that he had missed an evening at the Community Centre: a rash act. In principle a Party member had no spare time, and was never alone except in bed. It was assumed that when he was not working, eating or sleeping he would be taking part in some kind of communal recreations."

Besides taking part in home and community recreation, parents need to show an interest in the commercial activities which cater to their children's appetite

for amusement. Children need to be shown how to discriminate, how to avoid mental indigestion through a surfeit of any one kind of fare, and how to arrive at their own standards of selection.

It is interesting to watch the evolution of children's tastes, and it is not wise to become alarmed when they seem to go overboard about this or that programme. We can listen with them to the radio they enjoy, go with them to movies they fancy, and then invite them to join with us in our listening and seeing. In families, taste is contagious.

It is the privilege of parents to listen to the problems which crowd children's minds. What they see on the screen and hear on the radio and both see and hear on television confuses them. We need to interpret conflicting standards of behaviour.

### *On Being Mature*

The task laid upon parents is not easy. From marriage through all the experiences of raising a family there are thousands of decisions to be arrived at, things to be done, and choices to be made. Every one of them is pregnant with meaning for Canada's next half century. It is no exaggeration to say that what Canada is in the year 2000 depends upon the mothers and fathers of today and tomorrow.

That responsibility demands maturity of outlook. What does "maturity" mean? A person cannot be mature if he is dependent on others, or if, contrariwise, he is puffed up with pride in his independence. None of us can get along without others, without affection, without being looked after in situations where we cannot look after ourselves. But that must not lure us into leaning on relatives, neighbours, the community or the state.

Maturity means not playing at being flighty because we are afraid of being looked upon as old fogies. It means not thinking of adulthood as merely a time of glory departed. It means not being afraid to participate. It does mean having a buoyant and courageous impulse to seek ways of achieving a new significance in adulthood.

To sum up: there are several things a family must be if it is to keep its pre-eminent place in our civilization. It must be permanent, companionable, and co-operative. It must provide both partners and their children with a major opportunity for self-development. It must have a spiritual centre. It needs to be unified, democratic and adaptable. It must work intelligently with church, school and community.

Lord Halifax stated four basic principles of life which are quoted with approval by the United Church of Canada commission on marriage and the home:

1. The religious principle of the absolute value of every human soul in the sight of God.
2. The moral principle of respect for human personality.
3. The social principle of individual liberty.
4. The domestic principle of the sanctity and solidarity of the family.