

TO MANY PARENTS, the announcement by an 18-year-old daughter or a 21-year-old son of an immediate intent to marry brings tremendous shock. Such parents point out, often with hysteria, that the daughter has an education to complete; or the son, even if he has graduated from college, faces possible military service, and after that not only the problem of getting a job but the necessity of working at it long enough to assure a livelihood for two.

Vital statistics show that more and more parents are hearing such announcements from their offspring. But it seems to me that more and more of them are reacting to the news with happiness—and something more: an eagerness to help the young people.

Not far from me in South Florida lives one such pair. The husband is still in college. He is going ahead with his studies and will be graduated soon. His wife, an extraordinarily lovely girl, did not finish. She yearned for independence, so in her second undergraduate year she left college and went to New York, where she found a job. Her father and mother—close friends of ours—didn't always know for sure where she was. Her increasingly frantic mother finally flew to Manhattan and found her young daughter very independent, indeed, about everything: boy friends, late hours, places of entertainment.

Our friend brought her daughter home where she soon found another excellent job. But instead of living at home she wanted her own apartment. Then she fell in love. Now she's married and her first baby, a son, was born not long ago.

In addition to his college courses her contented, hard-working husband is studying flying so he can become a commercial pilot. I'm sure he will make it: he's that sort of young man. Of course, right now, her parents are helping the young pair (the boy's father and mother were killed in an automobile accident some years ago) and they're helping with joy; for a more delightful, effective, and satisfactory marriage is rarely seen.

That's the story of a girl who didn't know what she wanted until she found love and marriage. Another daughter of a friend of ours knew exactly what

she wanted—after her first semester in a distant university. What she wanted was a youth named Chuck, who had years to go before getting his engineering degree. This young lady was beautiful, too—tall and dark and willowy, sensitive and thoughtful and tender. She had no urge, like the other, to run away or to live alone, and she knew her parents as well as she knew her own mind—which is exactly how well they understood her.

So she told them, on her first Spring vacation, that she was going to marry a very young man who was working his way through engineering school and still had years to go. They would need a good deal of money for that period, she calmly told her parents. They listened, talked together, asked to see the young man, talked to him at great length—and agreed.

Not many months ago, the young lady and her husband stayed overnight with us—on their way to the West Indies. A glow of happy assurance radiated from both. The girl, whom we had thought of as "just a kid," emitted an additional radiance—that of approaching motherhood. We recently received word of the child's birth—a son. The announcement was handwritten, not engraved—to save money—and was very charming.

ATHIRD very young couple we know has survived one of those tragedies that might have destroyed their relationship had they not been so brave. And their marriage would certainly have involved a period of terrible hardship had not their parents helped them over the rough spots. We watched the girl develop from a thin and awkward child to a graceful 16.

She became engaged to a young man studying science and they were married as soon as he received his Ph. D. His prospects were superb—until disaster struck. A rare disease rendered him not blind, but permanently too poor-sighted to continue his intended career. The parents, then soon-to-become grandparents, were even more devastated than the young couple. But hiding their sorrow, they went to the rescue, setting the young husband up in a business in which his knowledge of science was a great asset.

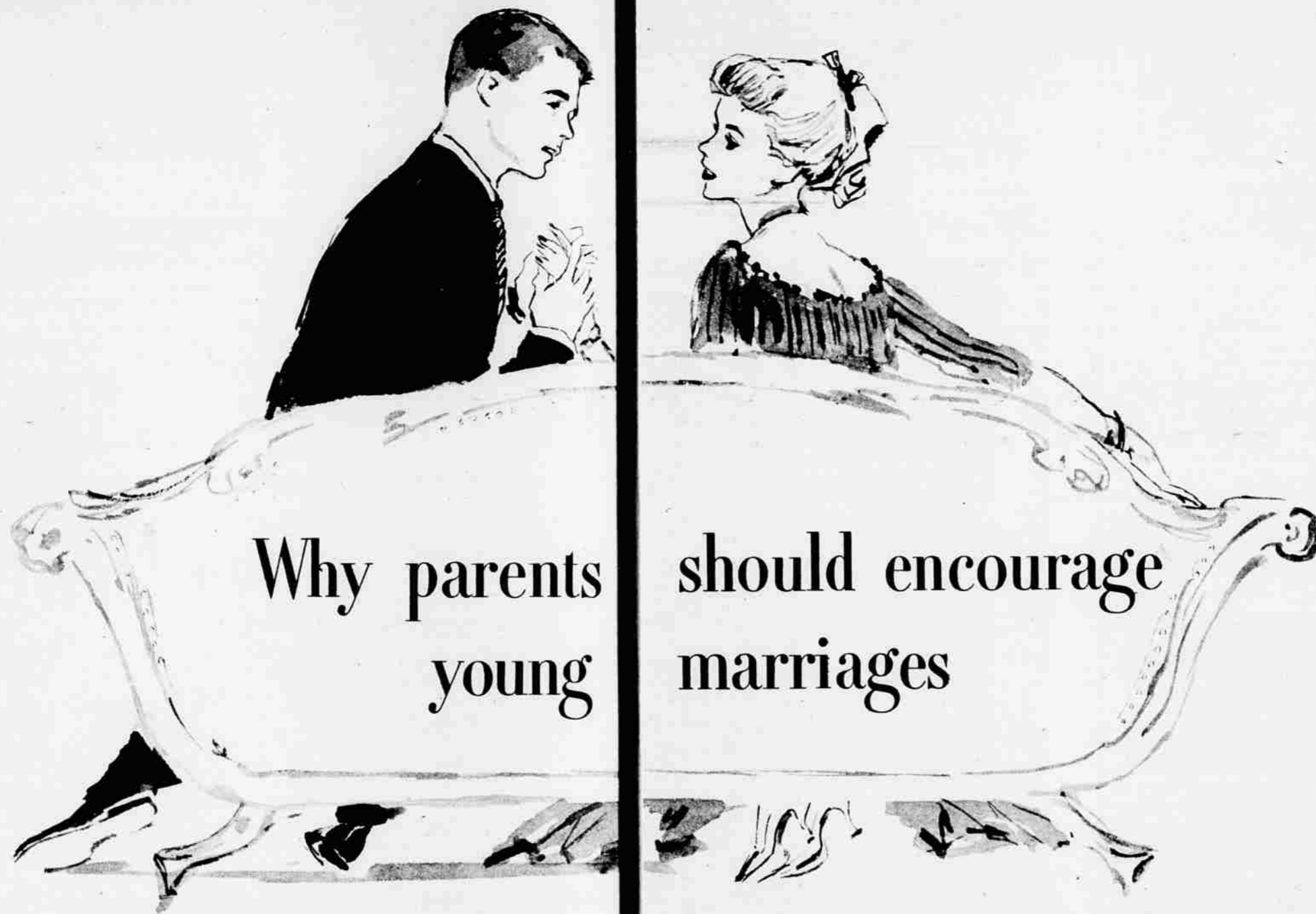
Not long ago the whole family visited us—husband, wife, parents, and two grandchildren. There wasn't a sign of regret anywhere, because there were no regrets—just pride.

My wife and I now continually play host to the children of our friends—married and often with children of their own. And we also frequently have as guests the married young friends of our daughter—who is also married—and their children. Among those we know, there hasn't been a divorce, and it doesn't seem that there will be. Most of these young marrieds have had some parental support, at least at first. But the result has not been to make them spoiled or dependent. On the contrary! It has enabled the boys and the girls to marry and still complete the education, military service, or both, which stretched ahead so that they can then enter the business or professional world as mature and thoroughly prepared young adults.

Indeed, I've seen so many parent-assisted young marriages work out so well that I'm beginning to wonder

whether the old custom of dowry isn't more sensible nowadays than we think. And I don't believe it matters whether the dowry goes with the bride or the groom, for nowadays not one young couple in a dozen can educate themselves to the degree they desire on their own—let alone start raising a family. Costs are higher and education takes longer.

Perhaps the ideas with which I was brought up are obsolete. We were instructed not to marry until we could "stand on our own two feet" financially. To expect help from one's parents after marriage was regarded as weak and almost un-American. Early marriage was altogether deplored; when it occurred, the older generation shook its head and predicted the marriage was doomed. Youngsters who were refused permission to wed sometimes eloped—and were bitterly "cut off" by their parents. Certainly such gloomy predictions and bitter rejections, common in my youth, hampered or even sabotaged many youthful marriages, causing their doom.



Why parents should encourage young marriages

In doing so, they're making one of the best possible investments in the future, says this distinguished author.

by Philip Wylie

WHEREVER IT EXISTS, disapproval of early marriage is a comparatively recent social attitude. In the days of our grandparents, early marriage was regarded as desirable. My own father became engaged at 16 to the woman who was to be my mother; she was only 16. Moreover, the daily papers report many elderly couples celebrating 50 or even 75 years of happy marriage. Such long and loving experiences would not be possible unless the marriages had begun early.

It is time, then, for a large and well-meaning group of American parents to take a realistic, fresh look at early marriage. For the marriage of boys and girls in their late teens and very early twenties is becoming almost as commonplace as it was generations ago. Parents of teen-age youngsters should therefore understand how to act sensibly, if the situation arises in their own families.

First, why do parents regard early marriages as a mistake? There are three main reasons. Young people want more education than formerly,

Next, in modern business, industry, and the professions, it takes much longer than it did for the average man to become able to support a family. Finally, some parents tend to stretch out their children's "youth," making it a too-long period of pleasure without responsibility.

Such "overprotection" frequently produces young people who go all through life thinking, feeling, and often acting like adolescents. Unfortunately, their softheaded, oversentimental parents may also encourage them to marry whenever they wish. If that happens to be early in life, the almost-certain failure of their marriages reflects badly on all young marriages. So do marriages contracted simply to escape unhappy home environments—along with marriages that take place because parents literally drive their children from home to be rid of the burden.

But the parents of properly reared young people can face the prospect of early marriage with eager sympathy. Their children will surely have been

guided toward the attainment of true manhood and womanhood, the highest aspect of which is mature fatherhood and motherhood.

Paradoxically, some of the reasons for postponement of marriage a generation ago have become reasons for early wedlock today. When education was completed at age 21 or so, it may have been wise to delay marriage. Besides, most colleges and universities expelled students who married; this is no longer the case. Today, moreover, it may take six or eight or more years to complete a desired college education. In addition, young men facing the years of military service don't want to put off marriage to age 30 or thereabouts—the age at which many now begin to earn a livelihood. Finally, what suitable and attractive young lady will wait for a fiancé that long when she, too, will be about 30?

But early marriage has much more than time-saving to recommend it. From a biological or medical standpoint, it is ideal. Women are at the peak of their fitness for bearing and raising children from their late teens into their twenties. Men are not only at the peak of their manhood at the same period, but it is the optimum time to father healthful offspring.

Nature, in short, has planned us for early marriage, without considering how long education or military duty will last or how many years are required to attain good take-home pay. On the other hand, as marriage is delayed the statistical chances of producing normal offspring are reduced. Besides, the older people are at marriage the more exhausting the task of bringing up a family. And parents who have babies late in life are often, tragically, more like grandparents to their own offspring.

THE FIRST POINT to consider if the question of an early marriage arises in your family is the suitability of the young person who wants to wed your daughter or son. If he is manifestly unworthy, a boor, mean, out only for a good time—or if she is truly "impossible" (not just because she is young!)—you should use every honorable and intelligent means to prevent or delay marriage. Otherwise, you

should at least acknowledge that your child has chosen an acceptable mate.

The next question concerns the economic situation. In many instances, that involves the willingness of parents to accept part or all of the cost of maintaining a married son or daughter until the young couple can stand on their own feet financially.

The third vital question concerns the depth and reality of each young "romance." Are they really in love—or just physically attracted to one another? Are they planning marriage merely to enjoy themselves—or to start a family, which is what marriage is all about? What are they looking toward as they consider marriage—just the honeymoon, or whatever home they will have after that? On the list of things they want immediately, what comes first—a hi-fi and TV set, or kitchen utensils and furniture? Do they talk about the babies they hope to have, or about putting off fatherhood and motherhood while they "have a good time first"?

It isn't difficult for a wise parent to determine, by observing young would-be brides and grooms, whether they are emotionally fit for marriage!

I don't make this statement merely from watching other youngsters, either. Our daughter was still in school when the man who became her husband asked to marry her. We consented—with enthusiasm. Their first child was born when he was still in uniform; their second after he had finished his tour of duty as a Marine and had returned to college for a graduate degree. And we have become grandparents at a time when that ineffable experience promises to continue until, perhaps, we are great-grandparents—another gain from early marriage!

Some parents, of course, dread the day when their children will marry because it threatens to make them grandparents! That, in turn, will ruin their silly illusion that they have "stayed young" into middle age. Such parents don't even deserve children of their own—let alone grandchildren!

So give early marriage your blessing; and these days, if you're able, give what it may need from your bank account, too. Could there be a better long-term investment?