

SECOND SESSION**INTRODUCTION****23 October 1966****L. G. Norman, C.B.E., M.D., F.R.C.P. (Chairman)**

I think it might be appropriate if I read a prayer for our study this morning:

Lord, thou knowest that I am growing older:

Keep me from becoming talkative, and possessed with the idea that I must express myself on every subject.

Release me from the craving to straighten out everyone's affairs.

Keep me from the recital of endless detail; give me wings to get to the point.

Seal my lips when I am inclined to tell of my aches and pains; they are increasing with the years, and my love to speak of them grows sweeter as time goes by.

Teach me the glorious lesson that occasionally I may be wrong.

Make me thoughtful but not nose-y; helpful but not bossy.

With my vast store of wisdom and experience, it does seem a pity not to use it all; but thou knowest, Lord, that I want a few friends at the end.

This is sound advice, although I am sure our speakers will be keeping to the point and to time. We had an excellent session yesterday, beginning with Dr Annis Gillie's thoughtful points on the critical years during which parents have the chance of exercising a very important influence in their children's lives, and followed by Dr Herford's study of the crucial adolescent changes from the world of school to the world of work. Finally Judge Pennant gave us a fascinating and human account of his work in the court on the manifold problems of divorce.

Our first speaker this morning will be Mr John Wallis who is the counselling secretary of the National Marriage Guidance Council. Mr Wallis was originally a schoolmaster, and during the war he served in the Royal Air Force, at home, and in India, and was twice mentioned in despatches. He studied at a pioneer Adlerian Child Guidance Clinic in London, and in 1939, during the evacuation of children from London he founded a child study group. For some years Mr Wallis was chairman of an approved school for senior

girls of high intelligence, and a member of the Council of the National Association for Mental Health. Soon after the war he became a marriage counsellor and held this responsibility for training for ten years.

MARRIAGE BREAKDOWN

J. H. Wallis (*Counselling secretary, National Marriage Guidance Council. London*)

First I must offer a few general remarks about this morning's topic, by way of introduction.

Marriage disharmony or final breakdown is at once everybody's business, and yet nobody's. It comes the way of the lawyer, the clergyman, the family doctor, the psychiatrist, the health visitor, the probation officer and a host of others, including the income tax inspector, the dentist, the dermatologist and many others. Clients who are clinched in the vicious circle of severe marital discord make things difficult for the professional adviser or helper, for they often seem quite unable to avail themselves of professional help, even when they seek it, and yet, in terms of time and of training, how many professional people feel fully competent to handle these complex and sometimes urgent emotional problems that arise marginally or centrally in their normal work?

As the professions become more and more highly specialized and subdivided, the client gets more and more skilled and expert help with his problems but necessarily less and less time devoted to himself by any one individual. Technical advances are of immense benefit to most of us, most of the time, but the relationship problems of marriage are not, in the same sense, technical at all. The bewildered, frustrated or anxious husband or wife seems to be saying (and sometimes actually does say) "There are many experts who help with our problems, but no one to help *us*".

Perhaps we need a new profession. Perhaps we need auxiliaries within the existing professions. Meanwhile everyone copes as best he can for the sake of the client or patient and his family, and sometimes, of course, very successfully. But meanwhile we often see either or both partners of an unhappy marriage going the rounds to doctor, lawyer, social worker, clergyman or minister, getting relief for some part of their problem, yet not quite getting the help they are seeking for themselves and their marriage. In a highly-