

THE FAMILY

ITS SOCIOLOGY AND
SOCIAL PSYCHIATRY

BY

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THE FAMILY

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TO MY WIFE

JEAN RODGERS FOLSOM

PREFACE

This book aims to integrate the various scientific approaches to the study of family phenomena. It attempts to weave cultural anthropology, individual psychology, social psychology, history, sociology, economics, and psychiatry into a unitary *science of the family*. It aims to present: (1) a framework of thought or "point of view," (2) an adequate set of concepts, (3) the important facts and generalizations ascertained through research and other systematic observation, (4) stimulation and guidance toward further research.

The treatment begins with the cultural *approach*, and this point of view governs throughout. The subject matter, however, is concerned predominantly with the modern changes and problems of the family. Primitive and historical family data are presented not as detached bodies of information to be acquired for their own sake, but mainly to establish those modes of thinking which increasingly characterize modern sociology.

In consistence with this cultural point of view, the contemporary problems of the family are analyzed in terms of the logic of cultural change. The drama is not one of old "evils" attacked by new efforts at "reform," but of continuous social change with its ever new maladjustments, followed by readjustments. The picture is a dynamic one. There is never any real issue between change and no change, but only between any proposed change and alternative changes which might effect the necessary readjustment. The social engineer is not like the boatman upon the waters of a lake, holding the power and the duty to choose his course among the several directions of the compass and the additional alternative of anchoring where he is. He is rather like the boatman in the swift current of a stream, whose only real choice is to steer to right or to left, and whose responsibility is to prevent the boat's upsetting.

If this view of the modern family and its problems should provoke in some readers a sense of individual helplessness in the face of the tremendous forces of social change, such persons are invited to give special attention to Part V, dealing with the social psychiatry of the family. It is there shown that the individual can do some-

thing, and has indeed a responsibility. He is responsible for his own life and for the personal relationships into which he enters. Although he may not be able to alter perceptibly the mass currents of change, he can choose intelligently his own role in the family culture and he can help those about him to ride those currents skillfully and happily rather than awkwardly and painfully.

The policy is to print in boldface type the important technical terms where they are first used. Frequently, where a term is used in a loose, scientifically misleading, or analogical sense, it is placed in quotation marks.

The author has presented a great many more statistical facts than he would expect any student to remember specifically. These are intended: (a) to develop *quantitative* "good judgment" in thinking about family problems, in other words, the ability to make a reasonable estimate of the extent of various conditions; and (b) to provide data for future reference as needs arise. It is hoped that the factual content is sufficiently broad to make the volume worth keeping as a book of reference. Statistics, however, are not *ipso facto* significant. In many lines of research a more adequate "qualitative analysis" is necessary before counting and measuring can be worth while. The author has attempted to report significant research findings representing a wide variety of problems and methods, rather than an exhaustive compendium of any one type of research.

To those who will some day find opportunity for research, it is hoped that this volume will indicate needed and promising directions. To others, it is hoped that it will bring an appreciation of the supreme importance of research and of its claim to social support.

The references at the close of each chapter serve the double purpose of indicating authority for textual statements and of providing a general bibliography for the chapter. A brief list of the most general works may be found in the Appendix, and also a few additional items of importance in the footnotes are scattered through the volume.

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JOSEPH K. FOLSOM

POUGHKEEPSIE, N. Y.

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THE FAMILY

PART I

THE FAMILY PATTERN AND ITS SUBCULTURAL BASIS

CHAPTER I

THE FAMILY PATTERN

Common Sense and Science.—The great majority of educated people in America today are not superstitious. Some superstitions linger among the less educated, but they are certainly less prevalent, and less seriously taken, than a hundred years ago. People who are free from the more obvious and ancient superstitions and from the delusions of cranks are said to possess "common sense." Yet to take a special pride in this possession, or to repeat the phrase "common sense" frequently in discussing human problems, is a dangerous intellectual symptom. In many persons "common sense" indicates not only a freedom from ancient superstitions, but also a "pig-headed" resistance to any further progress in thinking.

A witness in court, it is related, once exasperated a lawyer by his lengthy and complicated answers to questions. The lawyer finally admonished him to answer every question with a "yes" or a "no." When the witness replied that not all questions could be answered that way, the lawyer challenged him to put a question which could not be thus simply answered. "All right," said the witness, "here's a question you can't answer by yes or no: have you left off beating your wife yet?" This lawyer represents a large number of fairly intelligent people who pride themselves upon their common sense. The witness represents the modern scientist who is trying sincerely to throw more light upon the problems of mankind and eventually to make the world a better place in which to live.

Watson and Green asked 40 students to give their opinions concerning certain questions investigated in Hamilton's *A Research in Marriage* and Davis' *The Sex Life of 2200 Women*. The students had not learned the actual research results. *There was no general agreement between the student's opinions and the research results.* There was enormous personal variation among the opinions. Men were no more or less accurate than women, married persons than single persons, age than youth. The investigators concluded that the selection of a wise counselor on sex matters should be a matter of personal qualifications, which may well be independent of the person's age, sex, or marital status.¹ It is probable that good judgment upon family matters *in general* is also dependent more upon individual thoughtfulness, habits of observation, and technical knowledge than upon the "wisdom of age," feminine "intuition," masculine "reason," or so-called "practical experience."

In the minds of many persons the problems of the modern family, together with most other social problems, can be boiled down to the simple issue: can human nature be changed? There is only one good answer to this question. It is: "What is human nature?" "Human nature" is one of those simple phrases which is supposed to have an obvious meaning to everyone with common sense. When the scientist interrupts the discussion to ask its meaning, he is accused of befogging the issue and dragging in a learned theoretical vocabulary to cover up his ignorance. Yet in such cases it is not the scientist, but the impatient layman with his exalted common sense, who is living in a mental fog. He is not conscious of this fog because he has always lived in it.

If we wish intelligible answers from Science, we must learn to ask her intelligent questions. In the human and social sciences especially, a great deal of preliminary work needs to be done before real problems can be solved. The investigators must agree upon what they are talking about. Their units of observation must be defined. The ancients thought the universe was reducible to four simple elements—earth, air, fire, and water. Yet we would never have learned to make the numerous practical products of modern chemical industry by formulas for various combinations of earth, air, fire, and water. The things which appear simple to common sense are often complex in reality, while the really simple *elements* of the universe are not obvious and distinct to sense observation. The first scientist who analyzed water

¹ Superior numbers refer to "References" at the end of the chapter.

into hydrogen and oxygen must have appeared to his lay contemporaries as a very impractical theorist.

"Human nature" is not a simple elemental attribute of human beings. It is a vague term for all the behavior and mental characteristics which are supposedly universal and inborn in mankind. But as we shall see, not everything that is universal is inborn, and not everything that is inborn is universal. "Human nature" is therefore at best a vague term, and there is little profit in attempting to generalize about it. It must be analyzed into simpler elements.

What Is the "Family"?—Likewise the "family" is a term of uncertain definition. It seems, superficially, to be one of the elements into which we may analyze human *society*, other elements being the economic system or industry, the political system or government, the educational or school system, the religious system or church. Yet these five great *institutions* are not simple elements. They may seem, in our society, to be fairly distinct, but when we trace them back far enough, they merge. It becomes impossible to define precisely among primitive peoples, for example, the boundary between the economic system and the family system. The family among most primitive and historical peoples was largely an economic institution; or, to put it another way, the economic system was largely a family institution. An institution is not a distinct unit, but a selected phase of the total network of human relationships.

However, since this book is not intended to describe the whole of human society, we must have some working definition of its field. In brief, it will deal with those relations between human beings which involve: (a) biological reproduction and kinship, (b) the personal and the mass relations between the two sexes, (c) the living of persons together in a common domicile. These relationships roughly constitute what is called the family system; we shall center our attention upon them, but without attempting to make strict lines of demarcation.

A Comparative Analysis of the Family Pattern.—In the insular realm known as Melanesia are the Trobriand Islands, just northeast of Australia. The people of these islands live in a system of family relationships strikingly different from our own. This family system has been described in interesting detail by Malinowski in his *Sexual Life of Savages*.² The title may be somewhat misleading, since the physical sex relations are only a small part of the total picture. Because this description is so much more adequate than most descriptions of primitive family life, it is chosen for our present study.

The Trobriand Islanders are a primitive, that is, a *pre-literate* people. Their culture is not, however, of the lowest order. They practice agriculture and keep pigs, and are placed upon the second or middle agriculture level in the classification of Hobhouse, Wheeler, and Ginsberg.³ They are a black-skinned, woolly-haired people, classified physically under the Oceanic branch of the negroid race (geographically remote and somewhat different anatomically from African negroes). Considering the smallness of this population and the probability that it will sooner or later die off or be absorbed into the white man's society, what can be the significance of studying its family system?

The size and the geographic and historic importance of a primitive tribe are no indication of the sociological significance of their ways of life. Strange as it may seem, this study of primitives is one of the most valuable avenues to an understanding of society in general. In recent years sociology and cultural anthropology (ethnology) have come closer together and are now essentially one and the same science. In zoology we do not demand that attention be apportioned to the various animals according to their abundance and the frequency with which we have to deal with them. Such a "practical" zoology might confine itself largely to horses, dogs, and other domestic animals. But he who would really understand animal life can learn more in the zoological garden than in the barnyard, because of the much wider variety of species exhibited. *Primitive tribes are the "zoo" of sociology.*

Let us compare the family system of the Trobrianders with that of our own society. One of the advantages of such a comparative method is that the description of our own culture is made with a very different emphasis from usual. It brings out the points which would be of interest to an ethnologist from some utterly foreign civilization visiting our own. This naïveté about our own society would be quite superfluous if we were dealing with some specific problem. But for our present purpose it is exactly what we need.

COMPARATIVE DESCRIPTION OF FAMILY PATTERNS

Note.—For ethnological terms used in this outline consult Chapter V, section 2.

TROBRIANDS

AMERICA

I. The Control of Reproduction

(1) *The ideology of birth*

These people do not know the relation of sexual intercourse to reproduction. They believe in a spirit world, inhabited by the rejuvenated spirits of the dead. Every newborn child is the reincarnation of one of these spirits, and is brought to its mother by an older, controlling spirit (godfather or godmother) who is identified with some deceased person. The reincarnated person is not identified with a particular deceased person and is assumed to have lost all memory of his past, but he belongs always to the same clan and sub-clan as in his previous existence.

There are no moral ideas of reward or punishment connected with the ideology of reincarnation, nor ceremonies associated with it.

They believe that the penetration of the vagina by some means is an essential condition for pregnancy, but have no idea that male fertilization is necessary. Their myths suppose women to have existed and to have given birth to children before the existence of men.

These people understand the relation of sexual intercourse to reproduction. They believe in a spirit world to which the dead go, but these spirits never return. Every newborn child has a spirit or soul newly created by a personal, anthropomorphic Deity who is ruler of the universe. There is no reincarnation. Personal or family status in the spirit world is unrelated to earthly status.

Their mythology supposes man to have been created prior to woman. Mankind began with a single pair, who were created immortal and without need of sexual function or reproduction. By discovering sexual intercourse this pair became sinful and mortal, thus necessitating the carrying on of the race through biological reproduction.

(2) *The relation of social to biological fatherhood*

The "father" of a child is the mother's husband, who helps her to

The social father of a child is also the biological father. He should be

bring it up. Premarital pregnancy (though not intercourse) is shameful, and often leads to the abandonment of a girl by her fiancé, even though he has been the cause. As a matter of fact, pregnancy is a comparatively rare result of the free sex relations before marriage, for some reason unknown even to modern scientists. After marriage fertility is desired and actually quite adequate, but no child of a married woman is attributed to any biological father, even in cases of known adultery during prolonged absence of the social father.

married to the mother and live with her, exercising authority over her and their children. All sexual intercourse before marriage or with other than the married partner is immoral, in varying degrees. Premarital pregnancy is shameful, because it is evidence of intercourse. But subsequent marriage of the sexual partners removes much of the shame, especially if they be married before the child is born. Fertility in marriage is generally desired, deliberate infertility is immoral according to more conservative attitudes, though in most classes it is regarded as subject to personal choice. Any evidence that a child's biological father is other than his social father leads typically to anger of the husband and to investigation; if illegitimacy is found to be true, great moral condemnation falls upon the woman.

(3) *Population control*

There are no contraceptive methods.

Various methods of preventing pregnancy are used, the only one morally approved by all being abstinence from intercourse. But effective contraceptive methods have been recently perfected and are used and approved by roughly a third to two-thirds of the population, particularly the more educated classes. The circulation of contraceptive information is illegal though not immoral.

Abortion is possibly practiced, but rarely. Certain herbs are supposed magically to cause premature birth.

Abortion is common, but is immoral and legally punishable by heavy penalties. It is seldom officially discovered and punished, because of clandestine tolerance.

There is no infanticide. Infants,

Infanticide is illegal and immoral,