

LIPPINCOTT'S FAMILY LIFE SERIES

EDITED BY BENJAMIN R. ANDREWS, PH.D., TEACHERS COLLEGE, COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

SOCIAL PROBLEMS OF THE FAMILY

BY

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TO
CATHERINE, ERNESTINE, RUTH ELVA AND LOIS GROVES
COMRADES IN FAMILY FELLOWSHIP
AND
GLADYS HOAGLAND GROVES
THEIR UNDERSTANDING MOTHER

PREFACE

THIS book, written as a text for use in normal school and college classes, emphasizes, as its title suggests, the social function of the family. In spite of rapid and radical changes in its inner life, the family still remains the most significant of all our social institutions, for notwithstanding the ever-increasing competition from other social organizations, it continues to have the first and therefore the greatest opportunity to influence the character of children. It also provides for its adult members the most intimate form of association.

Sentiment naturally leads us to cling to conceptions of family life that are in harmony with the experiences of our own childhood, and in this way tempts us in thinking of the family to regard it as a static institution that exists by itself little influenced by the social conditions that are outside it. Actual facts show us, however, that the family is never sufficient unto itself, but rather at all times and in all places is in close contact with the general every-day life of people, influencing the motives and behavior of individuals and in like manner being itself influenced as an institution by the social experiences of its members.

A dynamic portrayal of family life which assumes that the family is always in process of adjustment in its attempt to minister to the needs of both the individual and the group in their practical life is the only treatment of the family that is in harmony with the thought of modern life. This book considers the family as a human relationship ever in such processes of adjustment, sensitive to the total social situation, and never a standardized and completed form of human activity. The faults and failures of the family therefore reveal the difficulties of an intimate group-life that cannot be more successful in its social activities than the individuals who comprise it. Thus the family and outside social conditions are in constant reciprocal relationship, and the two portions of social experience are so intertwined that neither can be understood by itself.

It is natural that tradition and prejudice should show them-

selves in discussions of family problems, since our personal attitudes toward the family are so tied up with our childhood experiences, our teaching and our affections. A scientific study of the family is not an ignoring of the values and ideals attached to the home, but an effort to put aside all subjective attitudes in order to understand the family as it actually is.

As the references and citations show, the literature on the family is extensive. There is, however, much less than one would wish that is scientific in attitude, and recent. The intimacies and reticence of family life create difficulty in its investigation and hamper scientific analysis. This explains in part why literature has attempted to interpret modern family life more often than has science.

I acknowledge my indebtedness to other students of marriage and family life, especially to those referred to in the text. I desire particularly to express my appreciation for the suggestions and stimulus given me in the writing of this book by Professor Benjamin R. Andrews of Teachers College, the editor of Lippincott's Family Life Series. Again I am indebted to my wife, Gladys Hoagland Groves, for her assistance in the preparation of my manuscript.

E. R. G.

January, 1927.

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SOCIAL PROBLEMS OF THE FAMILY

CHAPTER I

SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE FAMILY

Social Importance of the Family.—The family had in its beginnings a biological purpose. It came into being to provide offspring with the protection necessary for physical survival. As a biological institution the family may be found in simple form among the higher animals. For man, however, it has come to have a larger function. Not only has there been an enlargement of its original task; it also has developed a social purpose which has given it a complexity and significance characteristic of the human type of family life. It does more than minister to the physical needs of children; it serves society by its effect upon the various members of the family who live together within the home, and particularly by its influence upon the personality of the growing child.

Thus the family has become of primary importance as an effective socializing agency. It is chiefly through the family that culture is transmitted from generation to generation. Language is a good illustration of the influence of the family in the passing on of culture. From parent to child the fundamentals of culture, traditions, mechanical processes, social habits descend, and in this manner the continuity of social life is assured.

The foundation of the family is sunk deeply in human nature. The family has developed to its present social significance because it provides satisfactions for the most compelling of human cravings. Sex, one of the most impetuous of the instincts, supports the orthodox family although, when unrestrained by modern social convention, it also creates conditions hostile to the monogamous family. Parenthood, which in modern man and woman is usually a source of desires of supreme strength, conserves the family. Property-rights, law and order, the need of intimate comradeship, the wish for

the privacy and comforts of the home, and a host of lesser human wants add to the hold the family now has upon human nature.

Purpose of the Book.—This book treats the family as a social institution. It has for its purpose the description of the family in the United States, its outstanding problems and the suggestion of means for its improvement. There is naturally an immense amount of sentiment connected with the family. Because the home is so vivid a part of childhood and childhood so pleasant a portion of memory, it is easy for the emotions to color interpretations of the family. Problems of family life are favorite topics in the novel and the drama. Poetry portrays home experiences. In fiction and poetry the appeal to sentiment in the treatment of family topics is in harmony with the purpose of the author and is expected, even demanded, by the reader.

A scientific interpretation of the family requires, on the other hand, a purely objective attitude on the part of both author and reader. This does not mean that the human sympathies that relate to family experience are obstacles to the scientific understanding of the family. It is quite otherwise; but it is necessary that the emotional attitudes that would color the study of the family be held in check, for in no other social investigation is there such risk that personal experience or desire obstruct the effort to discover the facts. The chief value of a scientific study of the family as a social institution consists in the demand such an investigation makes that we consider the family with its problems apart from our own personal and emotional attitudes toward it. By disentangling our own experiences from the subject of our study, we gain a richer and more accurate understanding of the social significance of the family in modern life.

The Family and Human Nature.—Since the family has come into being as a means of satisfying human need and desire we find it revealing in clearest form the motives and mechanisms of human nature. It is easy to picture the family as something superimposed upon men and women to which they adapt themselves with effort as to something alien to their inborn dispositions, but this conception is contrary to the facts. Even when in individual cases we find the family unable to function in such a way as to satisfy the persons concerned, we discover that the family has added no outside

foreign element to the situation, but has merely failed because as an institution it is helpless to do more than provide an opportunity for human nature to show itself freely and forcefully. The obstruction to the happiness of the home that fails lies in the clashing of the personalities of those who, in spite of contrary tendencies and lack of sympathy, are being tested by family contacts and intimacy. "You can know no one as he is unless you see him in his own home" is a true saying which brings out the value of the family as a revealer of the workings of human nature.

Intimacy of Family Life.—Family life, because of its intimacy and privacy, provides a unique opportunity for the free expression of personality. It is in this closeness of relationship that the family meets its severest strain. It is also in this very intimacy of home associations that we find the power of the family to influence character and satisfy human cravings. Thus the family permits in the largest possible manner "the intimate face to face associations and coöperation," which Cooley has told us are characteristic of the primary groups.¹

With the closeness of contact of the members of the family, who in the privacy of their little group know each other as well as one person ever knows another and who deal with each other frankly in the everyday concerns of life, goes also in all normal homes the sympathy which makes possible that unity of interest characteristic of wholesome family life. History and literature are replete with illustrations of the social value of family intimacy. If, for example, Louis Pasteur "was the most perfect man who has ever entered the Kingdom of Science,"² it is certain that his significance for society was as much the result of family ties as of inherited genius; for his youthful effort to please his parents was a great stimulus to him, his intense affection tended to turn his thought toward social welfare rather than personal ambition, and the death of his children attracted his attention to the prevention and cure of disease.

The family is the meeting place of adult and child. One, a social product already largely shaped, becomes the chief influence in fashioning the other and helping him to adapt himself to his social environment. The family is something more than the prototype

¹ Cooley, C. H., "Social Organization," Ch. III.

² Radot (Devonshire, tr.), "The Life of Pasteur," p. xvi.

of society; it is itself a society, the first into which we all enter, and the most powerful in changing raw human nature into a socialized personality.

The Family Socializes Human Nature.—Trustworthy experimental knowledge concerning heredity and environment is accumulating rapidly, especially in regard to plants and animals; but the relative importance of hereditary and environmental factors in the shaping of a human personality is, in spite of our ever-multiplying information, largely a matter of speculation. There is, indeed, an increasing agreement with reference to the immense part in the environmental influences that the happenings of the first six or seven years have in molding the development of an individual. No later social influences seem to get so deep down into human character as do those that come early to the child.

In the demonstration of this fact and the explanation of how it comes about, our psychology and sociology are making more clear and specific an idea which, built upon everyday observation, has been widely held by people of various times and places as a multitude of proverbs testify.

It is because of the significance of the child's first few years, physically, mentally and socially, that society is so largely a product of family conditions, for when the child leaves home to enter school he has already received a large part of the social influences coming out of his environment that determine character. It is this fact, coupled with the difficulty that many homes have in meeting the needs of the young child, that is bringing about the rapid growth of the nursery school for the pre-school child.

Home life, so far as the young child is concerned, is an introductory training station, and what the child gets, good or bad, profoundly affects his entire career. The home-child relationship is more complicated than appears on the surface. The child brings to his home life impulses clamoring for expression, and these are gradually formed into *conditioned reflexes* (associations dislodged from the original evoking stimulus and attached to some other stimulus), habit-trends, imitations, preferences and prejudices; because what the child presents is matched by what the other members of the family contribute, born also of impulses but more seasoned and conscious as a result of added years of experience.

The adults and older children stimulate, check, suppress and transform the attempts of the little child to obtain his satisfactions. Thus in the home there is a seething interplay of social influences to which the child is most open and sensitive, and against the force of which he has little power to protect himself. In this way the home circle becomes an arena of struggle, coöperation and adjustment, the young child being normally the one who must make the most radical efforts at adaptation to the social forces that play upon him.

Homes without children have much the same situation except for the fact that the interplay of personalities is all on the adult level, even though the emotions generated may be as undeveloped as children's, and compromise to a large extent takes the place of the conformity so commonly pressed upon the child. Even the family that is composed wholly of adults provides greater opportunity for the making and unmaking of character than do other human groupings. The home has no rival as the place to see human nature being formed.

There is, to be sure, a somewhat similar expression of human nature in the wider life outside the home, but without the frankness and intimacies of family contacts, and modified by the conventions and the various forms of superiority-inferiority relationships.

The Family and Social Change.—The family, although providing for its members a social microcosm, does not, of course, exist by itself uninfluenced by outside social conditions. Much of the family behavior is actually derivative, having its origin in the out-of-the-home experiences of the various members who compose it. In this way the family is kept in close contact with the social environment and is forced to adapt itself to the conditions of a group life larger than that of the home.

We are prone in thinking of the family to regard it as static, having reached by social evolution a final form which is fully adjusted to an unchanging situation. As we look backward we easily see the variations in family conditions and the necessity for them, but in our own time and place it is natural to feel that at last the family has arrived and must be protected against further change. It is our faulty human wish for permanence of conditions that have

become comfortable by being made habitual that creates the idea of the family as an unalterable social institution.

Much of the pessimism regarding the family is born of the conviction, held with the tenacity characteristic of strong emotional bias, that any change in family life is an evil; or it comes from a failure to recognize that the family in its attempts at adaptation must suffer disturbances and losses. It is only by internal readjustments that the family in common with other institutions can adapt itself to human need and accomplish its social task.

The family must remain sensitive to the varying circumstances of group life; it cannot settle into a self-satisfied stiffness. Traditions passed from one generation to another within the family group frequently leave no place for family adaptability, but change takes place in spite of this, only with more emotional stress for the representatives of the two periods of time, who, with differing viewpoints, contend for power to shape the family.

Difficulty of Adaptability.—No social institution adjusts itself easily, for its organization always tends toward conservatism and the advocacy of letting things be as they have been. The family suffers especially in its attempts at social adaptation, for it has more of sentiment connected with it than have other institutions.

The meaning of individual family difficulties expressed in quarrels, separations and divorces is the failure of the persons concerned to adapt themselves to the needs of the family situation. Such failures bear testimony to the fact that for many people the shifting demands of business, morals and beliefs are more easily met than the demands of the home.

The difficulty is increased by the common notion that the family is a stable institution. Ideas of what constitutes a satisfactory family condition may clash, each individual assuming that the proper thing is what he or she has seen or personally experienced in other homes. Again, the conflict may result from an individual's attempting for selfish reasons to block changes that another member of the family believes imperative.

It would help not a little in solving the growing dissatisfaction with family life, evidenced by our increasing divorces, to exchange the conviction generally held that the family is our one unchanging human relationship for a clear recognition of the adaptation to

actual conditions always required in the building up of a wholesome home.

Increasing Difficulty of Family Task.—The family in common with the other fundamental social institutions finds its task of adaptation becoming ever more difficult as a result of the growing complexity of civilization and the higher standards of living. In comparison with the family life of savages or even of people a half-century ago, the modern home has to make much more delicate adjustments or fail to bring to its members the satisfactions they want.

Social pressure in the form of fashion, conventional behavior, and such standards as are popularly regarded as ideals for home life, keeps the family ever in a process of attempting to do what is expected of it.

Of course it is true that this pressure is felt by the family members individually to a large degree rather than by the family as a whole, but the home group reacts to the situation as a result of the individuals' responses. If, for example, fashion demands of the marriageable daughter of the house, who contributes to the family income, the expenditure of a relatively larger part of her earnings that she may have the fur coat she needs to meet the matrimonial competition of her girl friends and rivals, then the family as a whole feels the drain made on her wages by a luxury she could not really afford.

The relationships of the various members of the family are more difficult to maintain satisfactorily to each person when there is an increase of leisure, with its heightening of desires and usually of sensitiveness, because there is time to develop the competitions that normally arise in the modern home. It often seems to children (and usually they are quite right about it) that what one of them has or does explains the necessity of the others' going without this or some other much-sought pleasure.

Then there are cross currents of social pressure. The mother may require the assistance of her adolescent daughter if her tea party is to be a success, while the assignment of work given by the high school may forbid the girl's helping at all. The child appeals to her mother as to what she had better do in her dilemma, and the mother finds herself from the family viewpoint interested

in both of the child's duties, for the family will suffer a loss if either task is omitted.

It is also true that as the child comes more under the dominance of outside social organizations such as school and church—and such institutions are continually encroaching farther upon what was once entirely family territory—it is harder to adjust the various codes of conduct and the differing standards and purposes. The family has to assume the rôle of arbitrator; it must help the child adjust not only to the conflicting demands of outside institutions but also to the opposing interests expressed in the home program and that of other social organizations. The husband and wife in their response to out-of-the-home conditions have to meet difficulties similar to those encountered by the children. The family may have less function than in former times, but what it does becomes more complex and difficult.

Program for Reconstruction.—At a time when family defects and failures have become numerous and obvious there is need of a program which will tend to conserve family welfare. It is impossible to let the family meet its storm and stress with no effort to direct its course. Our other social institutions have the benefit of intelligent criticism, investigations and undertakings that attempt to strengthen them. At a time when people are so aware of their social needs, it is inevitable that movements and programs should originate that have for their purpose the betterment of family life.

Even the idea of giving specific training for parenthood and marriage is making headway. This is not entirely new, for in some form it is often present in savage society, but the present tendency is toward a kind of instruction that is different from that of the past.

There is common agreement that the ordinary home does not, indeed cannot, give such instruction satisfactorily although formerly under more simple conditions its failures were less costly. Specialization is required on the part of those who would teach the conditions of happy parenthood and marriage; the average parent and teacher realize that the information science has for them must be gathered by the expert and passed out in some popular form of instruction. Magazines have taken over a large part of such teaching and make increasing use of those specialists who can give in an

entertaining and clear way what parents and other married people most need to know.

A great deal of this work has been done by the psychiatrist because his experience in dealing with personality problems has shown him the central significance of the family in maladjustment of an environmental nature, and also because patients have found him more helpful and understanding than others. It has also been an advantage to have help given by a specialist who is prepared to discover whether the social problem is only such or whether it is an expression of physical or mental disease.

The Study of the Family.—The student of the modern family meets all the difficulties that attend the study of any social institution and some that are peculiar to the family itself.

In no other experience is there so much of feeling and self-deception as is characteristic of family relationships. It is next to impossible for one to view without bias one's own home situation. The visitor in a brief period generally can see the significant conditions of a family in a clearer light than can the members themselves. Emotional attitudes are almost inevitable in the everyday contacts of a home. One's ideas of family matters are bound to be colored by feelings that forbid calm, objective judgments since everything which happens within the family is so likely to have a personal interest for each member.

Sentiment also hampers a just appraisal of any definite family. We look backward through the colored lights of emotion; our forward vision is distorted by our hopes, fears or wishes. The exact facts are hard to get. This does not mean necessarily that the interested person is trying to hide or change facts, but rather that our family relationships, past, present, and even future in so far as imagined, are too shot through with personal meaning to be treated with unprejudiced judgment.

The family also hides itself behind a privacy not shared by any other institution. If law regards a man's home as his castle, convention and tradition make the happenings of the home more private than the inner counsels of the most secret fraternal organizations. It is bad taste to talk without great care of one's own or even another's home conditions. Curiosity may wish to pry