

THE FAMILY AND THE STATE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

Ethics and the Family

The Disciple whom Jesus Loved

Altar, Cross and Community

The Making of the Old Testament

THE FAMILY
AND
THE STATE

BY

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PREFACE

THE following pages are an expansion of the Beckly Lecture delivered during the Methodist Conference in July, 1944. According to the terms of the Beckly Trust, the Lectures are 'to further the expression of the Christian attitude in reference to social, industrial, economic and international subjects'. The book is written under the stress of the convictions that the family, in some shape or other, is inextricably intertwined with human life; that the conditions of its existence point to the highest type of human conduct; that in the actual course of its history it has been at once a cause of blessing and of misery to the different races of mankind; that under the influences of the social and economic changes taking place, especially in this country before our eyes, its power to produce either effect may be substantially diminished, and that the State, which might seem its most formidable rival and foe, must be and is being led into an attitude of alliance, an attitude which is essential if either is to play its proper part in the community. The Christian, I have urged, will see in the family a pattern which rests in the will of God; liable to corruption and degradation through the folly and ignorance and sin of man, but intended to prepare him for the divine society where men have received authority to become sons of God.

There is no other subject which touches so many sides of 'the proper study of mankind'. In view of the distinction that, as I hold, should be drawn between the family as a social institution, and marriage as primarily a relation between two individuals, however important both to family and State, I have done little more than allude to questions of sex; and I have summed up rather than described the more noteworthy changes to be seen in the history of the family. I have paid more attention to the social legislation of the present day, since every part of it has its effects on the family, and the character of these effects can be very diversely estimated; and I have considered in some detail (as the purpose of this lectureship would prescribe) the bearing of the Christian faith on the true nature of the family, and the duty of the Christian community in aiming at its achievement. Since to give anything like full reference to the enormous literature on the subject would have

hopelessly overweighted this little book, I have contented myself with mentioning some of the more recent publications, both on the family itself and those social problems with whose solutions the future well-being of the family and of society as a whole is closely bound up, but which will not be solved at all apart from the attitude, at once moral and religious, which the family is intended to embody and enshrine.

CHAPTER ONE

THE FAMILY AS THE SOCIAL UNIT

1. THE family is generally held to be the oldest and, as many would add, the most important and fundamental of our social institutions. It has been usual, at least until recent times, to begin discussion on the family by assuming that it must be maintained in its full vigour, and that criticism and opposition, from whatever source, must be mischievous. This is equally true whether the writers start with Christian presuppositions or not. For instance, Dr. R. MacIver (*Society, a Text-Book of Sociology*, 1937) speaks of the family as a 'universal complex of profound impulses'. It is at once the earliest society and the smallest in scale. It is the nucleus of other social organisms; but it makes greater and more personal demands than all the rest. It is saturated and guarded by social taboos; and while as an association it is temporary, as an institution it is permanent. Mr. L. Mumford, whose recent and valuable little work on re-planning (*The Social Foundations of Post-war Building*, 1943) is based on the conviction that personal considerations are ultimate, holds that 'human personality is formed, primarily, through the family'; while Professor Troeltsch, in his comprehensive and authoritative work, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (English Translation, 1931; the original German appeared in 1911), writes in the same strain; owing to the emphasis of Christian thought upon personality, the family is always regarded as the basis both of the State and of society, and it is thus bound up with all Christian social doctrine.

In the well-known manifesto issued by the two Archbishops, Cardinal Hinsley, and the Moderator of the Free Church Council, in 1942, one of the five demands is that the family as a social unit must be safeguarded, since it is derived from the will of God, and is not, like other societies or groups, a mere natural growth. Finally, the Nursery Schools Association of Great Britain, in its Report for 1943, says: 'We place on record our belief that in post-war planning, the provision of well-designed, well-built and well-placed homes should be a first consideration.'

The family, however, though (or perhaps we should say,

because) it is the most universal of institutions, is very far from being uniform. With a history as long as that of mankind, it is as varied as mankind itself. Peabody, in the work which first bade the American public recognize the bond between Christianity and social conditions (*Jesus Christ and the Social Question*, 1904), writes of the family: 'Here is a social group which in its present form is by no means an original and outright gift to the human race, but is the product of a vast world-process of world-evolution through which various types of domestic unity have been in turn selected and as it were tested until at last the fittest has survived.'

Some indeed would hesitate at the last sentence. Now, when the family is under fire more fiercely than when Peabody wrote, to be satisfied with assuming its truth would be perilous. But Peabody's reference to the evolution of the family as we know it is carried further by Professor B. Malinowsky, one of the leading authorities on primitive society (in art., 'Kinship', *Ency. Brit.*, Ed. 1929). The typical family, he points out, 'consisting of mother, father and their progeny [note the order] is found in all communities, savage, nomad, barbarous, and civilized. Everywhere it plays an important role, and influences the whole extent of social organization and culture'. 'Sociologically, it is more important than the clan, which, in the evolution of humanity, it preceded and outlasted.'

2. We must not, however, conclude that because the family is important and indeed universal, and, in fact, of the *esse* of human society, that it is therefore, in any of its bewildering manifestations, of its *bene esse*. Before doing this, we must decide which of these forms has our approval. Shall we cheerfully set side by side the monogamy with which Western Europe is familiar with Moslem polygamy and the Mormon institution which for a time was permitted to flourish in Utah? Christian observers, missionaries and others, would unhesitatingly condemn many shapes of pagan families as producing the evils which are feared from the downfall of the family nearer home. Nor can we be deaf to the criticism of the institution within our own borders, nor close our eyes to the growth of noxious weeds which have spread under the shadow of the majestic growth of the family in the Christian West. 'The need for a reconsideration of home life', as Mr. T. G. Dunning has said, 'does not rise exclusively from modern sex irregularities.' These irregularities,

indeed, have been perfectly familiar through all the Christian centuries, even when the family was regarded as indissoluble, and all but beyond the scope of criticism.

3. The critical attack, in fact, was led by Plato in the fourth century before Christ. He was not concerned with questions of sex in our modern form; indeed, some of his suggestions for the reform of the institution involve what is to us a startling neglect of elementary sex-morality. What interested him was the relation of the family to the State. We have noticed how both Troeltsch and Malinowsky call attention to the bond uniting the family to society and to the State. Not that the two are synonymous. Society seems sometimes to be nearer to the family and further from the State; sometimes to be nearer to the State than to the family. Later, it will be necessary to draw a more careful distinction between the two (p. 63). Even the assertion frequently made, that the family historically precedes society, needs caution. For the isolated family is almost as rare as the isolated individual; and where the family unit appears (as, among the apes, with gorillas, it is said, but not with baboons) to be cut off from its kin, abnormal but mere temporary conditions, or even mere mal-observation, will often be found responsible for the mistake.

What we do observe, from the jungle clearing to the civic community, is that the family and society, the family and the State, are interdependent. The harmonies and loyalties which society demands are learnt in the family; the duties and the self-denials which the State imposes would be impossible without the family's response. Normally, no family group could survive without some socially organized co-operation with other groups. Each member of the family, once the stage of childhood is passed, is claimed by other groups and surrendered to them. The family must deny itself in order to live. Yet if it loses its members to the wider claims of the State, and recognizes that a man must be a citizen and a clansman and not merely a father or a son, neither city nor clan can forget for a moment that its citizens and clansmen are also fathers and sons or they are nothing.

4. All this diversity of the family unit within itself, however, or in its relations to larger groups, robs of their importance some of the well-meaning but vague terms in which the subject is often pursued. It is not possible, for example, to talk of the

'normal family'. Families with both parents and three children living are, or were a short time ago, said to be more numerous than any others; but this is far from allowing us to neglect, in our view of the family as a whole, parents with one child or none, or families where the grandparents take the place of the children. Nor can we talk of natural affection as the mark of the family. Psychology, under the lead of Freud, has been accustoming us to think of the family as the theatre of primitive conflict and hatred and jealousy; and Freudianism would never have attracted so much attention unless the existence of these conflicts had been able to appeal to our own experiences.

Well-meaning and sympathetic social students are constantly tempting us to think that the fundamental condition of family well-being is economic. Remove the nervous strain of insecurity, give parents and children something to think of besides the necessity for obtaining food and clothing and employment, and the atmosphere will naturally glow into geniality and warmth. But there are those who cannot forget families where such necessity is unknown, yet nothing is to be heard within but household strife. Indeed, books and articles where by 'the family' is meant the family under the constant threat of poverty, are only equalled in number by those which assume the family to be well-to-do or at least comfortably off. Common experience repudiates all these facile generalizations. It is impossible to say that *the* family is, or that it needs, this or that. Moreover, the 'bad' is always the 'more or less bad'; the 'good' is always the 'more or less good'. There is hardly an assertion on the subject that does not lead to a corresponding denial. We cannot say that the family is an abiding source of happiness to its members and of blessing to the State without observing that both State and individual have seen in it a menace which needs constant watchfulness and not infrequent defiance.

5. On the other hand, we certainly do mean something definite when we think of the family. The shape may change, as Hamlet's cloud, now like a weasel, now a camel; but it exists in the minds of us all. Nor need these opposite statements reduce us to the expedient of attempting to reconcile them by 'the apotheosis of a negation'. Life itself is a matter of opposites, for life means change and growth, whether we choose to call it progress or not. It is only of the perfect, the perfect flower or the perfect institution, that we can make positive and confident

assertions. But no institution, no organism, is perfect. It is of the nature of each, as we say, to suggest, if not to aspire to the ideal. It is equally of the nature of each to fall away and be debased. Few of us, however narrow or however unfortunate our experience may have been, have not known some families whose laws seem rather of heaven than of earth, and even if we have whispered 'behind the veil', we have felt that reality must be there. Dissatisfaction and disappointment with the changing shape that is before our eyes leads us to another shape, which does not change. In the same fashion we contemplate bodily or mental health. Every person we know furnishes an example of good health and of bad health. Perfect health we have never yet known; but we aim at it as if it were the one thing worth thinking about, the object of unwearied search and hope.

On another point, too, there will be general agreement. The rôle which the family has often played in society may have been unhappy and its influence sinister; yet it would be impossible to contemplate its disappearance without consternation. If it did not exist, to adopt Voltaire's quip, it would have to be invented. This is as true of the bad—that is, of the more or less bad—as of the good. But no one can imagine such an event. We must take our human world as we find it. Nature, always being twisted by some aboriginal perverseness in things, and thwarted by the ignorance or carelessness or greed of men, is still trying to do the best that is possible. Nothing can be received by us from her without labour and obedience; yet everything may be given if we are willing to pay her price. We shall therefore avoid eulogy and condemnation alike; and with what dispassionateness is possible for those who have tasted both her sweets and her bitterness, we shall consider how we can most successfully make the best of her terms, and shape them to the highest ends.

6. Our first task will be to discover, if we can, what it is in the institution of the family which has made it valuable—what are the services (generally taken for granted) that it has rendered to society. To do this, we shall have to go beyond the examples that will most readily occur to us in the society with which we are familiar. To say that the family has performed some signal service to the human race demands that we should watch the family growing and changing in history. We must not be content to examine the type or types known to us in modern

western Europe. We must observe its roots in the past. We must not forget the great civilizations of the East, with whose development Christianity has had nothing to do. Behind these stretches the multitude of intricate family systems revealed, as still flourishing, by the labours which anthropologists have carried out for the last two or three generations. Our modern family may or may not be their descendant; but we can draw no dividing lines between what we call primitive, civilized, and modern.

Such a journey, rapidly as we must take it, should enable us to see the essentials of the family, and disentangle the changing from the permanent. We shall then be led to recognize whether there emerges any pattern or type to which the institution, so kaleidoscopic in the variety it reveals, can be said to point, or which it contains wrapped up within itself. Careful analysis will reveal a type of harmonious interrelationship, never seen elsewhere, though always hinted and often half descried, from which can be seen at its clearest what we mean by personality. The person is only fully known in the home. Personality, in its proper sense, can only grow up in the family; and without personality the family, as the typical and fundamental social unit, would be impossible. But the family is not shaped, in any of its forms, by human wisdom. It is always a *datum*, something given to human society, however it has been debased by human folly, and we shall have to ask whether we must not look for its origin in heaven rather than on earth—that is to say, in the mind of some Creator who sees the end from and in the beginning. To put it down to chance would be as hasty and unscientific as to assume that all the instincts and laws of the formation of an organism out of myriads of microscopic cells are the result of a fortuitous clash of atoms or the working of a machine which is not allowed to have a designer.

Thirdly, we must consider the present-day family with which we are primarily concerned, and this in the light of whatever conclusions we have reached, and of the influences, economic, social and moral, which are acting on it. Do we need to fear that some of them at least are foes to the family institution as we have come to understand it? If so, we shall look round us to see what other forces are fighting or can be called on to fight on our side, and how the alliance can best be used.

Fourthly, in the light of the above, we must search for the guidance that can be elicited from the Bible. Neither the Old

Testament nor the New gives systematic directions for any ordered study of the family. The various books contained therein, themselves representing very different forms of social organization, assume rather than recommend or enjoin or even criticize those forms. Much of what is said is of the nature of *obiter dicta*; some of it is at variance with ideas of our own, which we are not likely to surrender. It is not to individual passages, some of them still disputed by specialist interpreters, that we shall chiefly look for traces of a gospel for the family. It is rather the profound revelation of God's will and its searching and ruthless demands on man's conduct, enshrined in every part of the Bible, but shining with a clearer radiance in the New Testament, that points to what the family in the purpose of God is meant to be. So understood, the consideration of the divine will, if such we may regard it (and we wish to make no unfounded assumptions), naturally follows rather than precedes the discharge of the other tasks we lay on ourselves.

There is one aspect of family life which has in general received but little attention: the position of woman in the family, as at once wife, mother, and member of the social community. The family has been, and is still for the most part, considered by politicians, social students, and even Christian teachers, from a narrow patriarchal standpoint. Moreover, the teaching of our Lord, never adequately comprehended by His earlier or His later followers, was revolutionary. Hence, such a discussion cannot be left on one side.

Lastly, it will be useful to apply the principles to which we have been led to certain concrete problems which are now facing every student of the subject. And though at times the historian is tempted to say of the family what Lucretius said of religion, 'What miseries it has caused!' and though contemporary changes make the timorous fear that the current of its life may be lost, for evil and for good, in bogs and sands, we may hope to end, unless our labour has been thrown away, by seeing the family, in Mazzini's phrase, as the 'heart's fatherland'.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FAMILY AS AN ASSET

1. THREE hundred years before the birth of Christ, the Greek philosopher Aristotle had spoken of all social life as a partnership, and of the family as a partnership in its simplest form. That partnership he called economic, using the word, not in its loose modern sense, of anything that has to do with money or wealth, but of the law of the household. There can be no human life without co-operation in production and sharing in enjoyment. Husband and wife, and, as soon as it emerges from infancy, the child, must act together and maintain the home in its capacity for satisfying the primal human needs of food, clothing, shelter, and companionship. They can and do share the results of their combined labour, having, literally, all things in common. All sound economic theory, if Aristotle is right, is built up on the law of the family; for if the family is the simplest form of social life, the whole of society is made up of groups of human beings, and what holds every group together, from the cricket club to the trade union, from the local political party to the nation or an international Church, is the fact that its members share certain preferences or likings, that they join in securing them, and enjoy them together. Such preferences may be trivial, and the combinations of individuals for securing them short-lived. Groups are formed and broken up; individuals join and leave them. But the more fundamental and widespread the preferences, the more stable the group. This is why the family has proved the most stable of all. Looked at as the unit in which its members jointly produce and enjoy what is essential to all life, it could only be shaken if some other group were to come into existence to supply those needs in a more adequate fashion.

2. From one standpoint, indeed, the family seems opposed to all that we mean to-day by economic life; to be, in fact, an abiding protest against it. To us, economic life stands for competition; and without competition, we have been taught to assume, there can be neither cheapness nor satisfaction. The producer must be stimulated to do his best, and the consumer must be able to exercise his choice. But if anything but such economic life is unthinkable elsewhere, even in wartime, economic

life is itself unthinkable within the family. There may be emulation between the children; there may even be good-humoured rivalry between husband and wife to see which can bring most to the common stock, material or spiritual; but no one will try to outdo the others; there will be prizes neither for ingenuity nor industry nor deception. Producer and consumer are the same; and therefore their interests cannot collide. Each augments and each enjoys what all possess. It is only when the interest of the producer is one and the interest of the consumer is another that competition develops with all its sinister results.

3. Indeed, as a matter of history, economic competition, as we understand it, is no older than 150 years. It was the Industrial Revolution, the birth of mechanical inventions, and the expansion of markets which, following on the protests of Adam Smith and others against artificial restraints in the way of trade, opened the door to industrial competition. 'Each for himself, and success to the best.' But the change had already taken place on a smaller scale two centuries before, on the dissolution of the merchant and craft guilds, and the passing of the medieval ideal of just price, just rent, and no usury. The Middle Ages, indeed, were very far from being 'golden', as some uncritical lovers of the past would assert. Group rivalry and a selfish refusal to share privileges or opportunities were as bitter as the fiercest quarrels between capital and labour in later times. Harmony and fairness in trade and industry were eulogized by those doctors of the Church who paid attention to such matters of practical life, and they were enjoined by countless pious rules and by-laws, as can be seen, for example, in the writings of Tawney (e.g. *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism*, 1926) or of Bede Jarrett (*Social Theories of the Middle Ages*, 1926). But G. G. Coulton has made it clear, in spite of Abbot Gasquet, that the strong were as eager to take advantage of the weak as they have ever been. To confuse economic competition and human selfishness is fatal to all sound historical judgement.

The conflict now is between the private control of capital and some form of socialism or communism which, if it could have been explained to the men of the Middle Ages, would have horrified most of them as much as the grosser activities of capitalism to-day. Moreover, capitalism is more and more a matter of syndicates, trusts, managers, investors, and of groups in some form or other rather than of individual and