# THE FAMILY IN ITS SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS

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# PREFACE

In presenting this little volume to the general reader, and to the student of social institutions, no attempt has been made to include all the problems relating to the family. The social world is agitated by many suggested reforms and remedies for known or suspected evils in domestic relationships, and numerous writings are constantly appearing dealing with various aspects of this question. The new science of eugenics also is broadening its scope as it pushes to the front; and, if given time for development, will yet prove of inestimable value in any policy of racial upbuilding.

In this work it has been the writer's desire to present in a somewhat popular form the historical background for studies of the modern family and to indicate in general the apparent trend of future changes. It is believed that much of the pessimism of the time, so frequently voiced in discussions of divorce, arises from a failure to appreciate the present in its relation to the past. A sociological viewpoint, on the contrary, tends to develop a conviction in the essential integrity of the American family, a recognition of a trend

towards a highly ethical form of monogamous marriage, and a belief that familial interests will be best furthered by an intelligent public opinion expressing itself through law and moral code.

J. Q. DEALEY.

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## CHAPTER I

### THE FAMILY AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION

THROUGHOUT Western civilization problems in respect to the family are coming to the front. For the past three centuries men have devoted themselves to the reconstruction of economic, political, religious, and educational institutions, but have up to very recent years utterly neglected that most important and most fundamental of all institutions — the family.

In the latter half of the nineteenth century the rise of the theory of evolution aroused an interest in the origin and development of social institutions, and among these the family soon attracted attention. The publication of Bachofen's *Das Mutterrecht* in 1861 and Spencer's study of *Domestic Institutions* contained in his *Principles of Sociology*[1] stimulated increasing interest in both the evolutionary and the practical aspects of the question. In the United States the results

[1] Volume i, published 1873.

of such investigations are best seen in Lewis H. Morgan's *Ancient Society* (1877); in the three volumes on *Matrimonial Institutions* by George E. Howard (1904); in the series of annual reports issued since the year 1881 by Dr. Samuel W. Dike as secretary of what is now known as the National League for the Protection of the Family; and finally in the national governmental reports of 1889 and 1908–09 on *Marriage and Divorce.* These and similar studies of the family and its problems have supplied firm foundations for later investigations of this important social institution.

Furthermore, the rise of newer theories in respect to the family, such as that involved in socialistic discussions, and the changes involved in the rapid growth of urban centers with their many problems, make it evident that the family is breaking away from its semi-patriarchal basis of the last two centuries and is passing into a period of transition. These changes may to some indicate retrogression, to others they suggest the possibility of a higher and more ethical type of family. It is essential, therefore, that these changing conditions and standards should be understood, not merely out of intellectual curiosity, but for the reason that such information becomes the basis on which society may develop definite ideals of domestic standards and

a policy of improvement for existing conditions. If modifications in the family must take place, it is the part of social wisdom to keep these modifications under control, so as to eliminate evil tendencies and to strengthen what experience and reflection favor as good. It is never wise to allow important changes in social institutions to develop unheeded. Forethought and insight should characterize a high civilization, and every important modification taking place in fundamental social institutions should be subjected to the careful scrutiny of scientific students. Social causation is no longer considered to be beyond the ken of man, a fiat of fate to be accepted submissively and blindly; on the contrary, the causes of social change are comprehensible and subject to human control; and the social forces at work can be resisted, modified, or guided through scientific knowledge so as to accomplish ends desired. This scientific point of view becomes all the more necessary since on all sides, as attention becomes directed to the study of domestic problems, may be heard warnings of the decadence of family life. Sexual vices and diseases seem to be sapping the physique of the race and destroying mutual confidence and love in the domestic circle. "Race suicide" and an alarming increase in the divorce rate seem to be closely allied factors in weakening the sanctity of home ties. The

demand for the labor of women and children in poorly paid industries is ominous for racial vigor, and the crowded conditions of modern urban environment weaken the ties of kinship and make impossible the close domestic circle of homely fellowship like that depicted in Burns's *Cotter's Saturday Night*. Yet this gloomy and pessimistic outlook may itself be a harbinger of better things. In a changing social order the evil first attracts attention, but later comes a knowledge of constructive tendencies, and a comprehension of the question in all of its aspects. The essential thing is that careful attention be given to the study of existing problems with the belief that larger knowledge will result in wiser conclusions and a safer social policy.

The family historically has been and presumably will continue to be the heart and center of social life. Long before religion and the state existed at all, the domestic group flourished as the germ and nursery of all modern institutions. It may be traced far back even to the instinctive groupings of our animal ancestry, and finds even yet some of its truest exemplifications in the conjugal and parental affection displayed among the most highly developed of our distant kin, — the birds and the quadrupeds. In these humble forms of life are found many of the simple, homely virtues of domesticity, but without the

vicious accretions added by a more intelligent but an unmoral and at times immoral humanity. Though the human family in its higher grades has become nobler and finer than those of its remote kindred, yet society as a whole would even to-day be greatly improved if human parents trained their offspring for life with as much insight and devotion as higher animals use in rearing their young. The sluggard may well go to the ant to learn industry, but husbands, wives, and parents may learn many lessons of fidelity and self-sacrifice from the beasts of the field and the winged creatures of the air.

These inherited animal qualities supplied to primitive society the starting-point for human achievement. Slowly these instincts broadened through reflection into sympathy and altruism and now find their best expression in the deep love of a mother for her child — unless perchance this be eclipsed by the less instinctive but more intellectual affection of a father for his children, which religion has taken as the highest type of the love of God toward man.[1] Yet these parental feelings in their higher forms evolved but slowly among human kind, since for thousands of years the family has been struggling upwards, sloughing off from time to time some crude survival of savage conditions, though handicapped by the

[1] Ps. CIII, 13; John III, 16.

acquired vices of sexual morality and by an environment only dimly comprehended. Nevertheless, the family as an institution has moved steadily forward, developing collective helpfulness among its members and multiplying altruistic affection so as to include within the kinship a constantly widening circle of humanity. Very early in civilization was established the hearth or gathering-place of the kindred, and in the rude homes of that time developed language, the industrial arts, and the ability to domesticate animals and to cultivate the soil. By reflection also came beliefs in the supernatural, a recognition of the sanctity of custom, and the growth of a civic unity safeguarding life and property. Gradually all that made life worth living centered in the home and the kin, so that an outlawed, homeless man was abject in his misery — a man without kin, country, or gods, against whom the hand of every other man was raised. Religion, in its attempts to attract men, has alternately pictured the other world as a paradise, an elysian field, a heavenly city, or a valhalla of feasting and battle, but a belief in immortality never proved attractive to the average man until heaven was depicted as a country of homes for reunited kin, since by common experience home and family ties have come to represent the highest form of human happiness,

well worthy of being translated from an earthly to a celestial habitation.

Since modern social students emphasize the importance of the family as the starting-point or unit of society, it is necessary to understand the point of view from which the study of its development and its problems should be carried on. The family in its history has run through the entire gamut of human experience. It has been and is yet a group of economic workers engaged in the production and consumption of goods. From the standpoint of the state the family's chief function was once considered to be the payment of taxes and the production of men capable of serving in the army. Religion has emphasized it as a group organized for worship and for religious instruction, and social utopians of all sorts regularly desire to dissolve or to reorganize it in accord with some preconceived theory of the family's place in a perfect social scheme. But one-sided or visionary speculations have had their day and henceforth the study of the family is becoming sociological in kind, since this science aims to synthesize whatever knowledge may prove useful in attempts to further social progress. Since the end of the nineteenth century it is becoming increasingly evident that the family must not be considered as a mere economic tool for the production of goods, nor

its members mere hands in the labor market for sale to the highest bidder; nor is the family to be narrowly interpreted as a sort of annex to either church or state. From the social standpoint the family is more fundamental than any other aspect of social life and should not be subordinated to any of them except as they clearly voice the higher aspirations of society. The family is socially fundamental because from it must come each succeeding generation, and hence no other social institution should exploit it to the detriment of society as a whole. Society must, as a sacred trust, maintain a high type of family life for the sake of social progress and must safeguard it against the aggressions of other institutions which aim to subordinate the family to their own peculiar interests. From such a viewpoint the study of the family as a social institution naturally falls to the lot of sociology, which, using the scientific methods of observation and comparison, adds the knowledge that comes from the study of the evolution of the family as an institution, and its proper relationship to the other great fields of social activity. Sociology in its study should show the biological and psychological bases for the family, how its energies may be more wisely directed, and how the conditions that retard or expedite its further development may be utilized for social progress.

Within the family of higher civilization should be in germ those potentialities that under favoring environment should blossom and ripen into work and play, love and patriotism, aspiration and reverence, so that each member of it may take his place in the economic, civic, and cultural life of his time, not merely as a cog in some specialized field of human activity, but rather as a sort of microcosm in which is implicit the macrocosm about it, for the individual within the family, like the family itself, should center within his own soul the possibilities of the whole of life. The family with its members should be in very truth an economic band, a body politic, a nursery for religious aspiration, a school for the broader life of the world, and a home of coöperative activity. In being so, it shows itself to be the real social unit, the germ of society, the fundamental social institution on the welfare of which depends the hope of continued social progress. The twentieth century with its trend toward reorganization, recognizing that this is the true place of the family in society, has definitely taken up the study of this institution with all of its problems, and will not rest satisfied until family life is on a far higher plane in Western civilization than it has yet attained.

One obvious result from these modern studies is already manifest. As a survival from the era

of ancestor worship men have been prone to exalt the goodness of past generations and to idealize the men of that time by comparison with those of the present. Historical researches make it evident that, with due respect to our ancestors, there never was a past generation, taken as a whole, that could compare in quality with a modern generation. The evolutionary theory, furthermore, shows us that our best is before us, not behind us, and hence that if humanity must worship itself it might better worship its posterity in preference to its ancestry. At any rate, society is becoming much more deeply interested in the rising than in the passing generation, in the sense that it recognizes that the hope of human improvement lies in the progressive attainments of future generations. For that reason just as society once fought for the rights of man and now for the rights of woman, so in the future it will demand the rights of the child, insisting that each have the right to a vigorous and virtuous parentage, to an intelligent education, and to a fair opportunity for the development of inherent capacities. This demand will be achieved, not by any Platonic schemes of scientific human breeding on communistic lines, but by formulating wise standards and a system of social control such that the vicious part of mankind may be eliminated, and the conditions

environing family life so readjusted as to encourage higher standards of conjugal and parental obligations. Through scientific information imparted through education, and through the social control exerted through capable social institutions, the standards of family life can be so greatly strengthened as to make possible and probable the steady improvement of each successive generation of humanity.

# CHAPTER II

## THE FAMILY OF EARLY CIVILIZATION

MODERN problems in respect to the family cannot easily be understood, unless one has in mind, as a sort of background, the history of the family as an institution. Within the last fifty years a large amount of research has been given to this study, but many questions of fact are still unsettled. Rival theories, however, stimulate further research, so that ultimately there should result a scientific consensus of opinion, at least in respect to fundamentals, since knowledge of the family during the earliest stage of human existence must obviously remain inexact.

If mankind had developed its institutions uniformly among all races alike, as some theorists too easily assume, the problem would be fairly simple. But if environmental conditions play so large a part in determining development as modern theories would assert, then the widely differing physical conditions environing human races must have produced different kinds of development in different parts of the earth. Some notions of conditions in those early centu-