

# Family Life Through The Ages

(In Three Parts).

## PART I.

THE Marxian Socialist understands the social system in which we live. He does not find it necessary to consult mediums or ouija boards in order to explain political and economic events. Since the appearance of the "Communist Manifesto" in 1847, we have a key that unlocks the mysteries of the past and present. This key is the Materialist Conception of History. A proper understanding of historical materialism is the only requisite for an explanation of how the present social structure evolved out of preceding forms, and what must take the place when it, in turn, ceases to function.

When the Socialist asserts that capitalism must eventually make way for social ownership of the means of production, the contention is not based on noise or rhetoric. A scientific analysis of the matter at hand leads inevitably to this conclusion. If we examine the various institutions of today and yesterday, laying particular emphasis on the laws behind their changes, we can easily see the lack of permanency in the system which those institutions reflect.

In the early years of capitalism there was naturally a harmonious response between "the social requirements" and their "means of fulfillment." The institutions may be classified as the organs of society and, so long as the social system remains in perfect working order, those organs can be depended upon to function smoothly and well. But, under adverse conditions, the opposite obtains. The decaying tendencies of the system are certain to manifest themselves through the machinery of society.

No matter which institution we enquire into we get the same results. Half a century ago, the various modes of legislation in vogue throughout the capitalist world were well fitted to the requirements. Senates, Congresses, Commons, Lords and Reichstags, adequately functioned in legislative matters. During the recent war, however, a drastic change became necessary. Business specialist, and technical expert, were called into action to co-operate with, or usurp the function of, the old established legislative institutions. Also the necessity for labor representation in capitalist councils became apparent, and practically all the belligerent nations drafted into service such labor leaders as they could safely trust to maintain intact the present system of class rule.

In the financial, educational, religious, artistic, legal, and other institutions the same absence of harmonious response between the requirements of society, and the means for satisfying those requirements reveals itself.

In this essay we will endeavor to explain the nature of the domestic institutions of today, and trace its development through the ages. Like all the other sections of the social machinery referred to, the family system, in twentieth century capitalism, is sufficiently rotten to correctly portray the condition of the social structure in which it operates.

Look where we will along the trail of human development we cannot discover a more putrid, incongruous, repulsive state of affairs than that which exists at present in the family relations between men and women. The only instances in which anything approaching the present family relations can be unearthed pertain to the closing years of other social reforms.

Prior to the French Revolution of 1789, as well as back in the years previous to the collapse of the Roman Republic, a replica on a smaller scale of present family conditions is encountered. The abortions, sexual excesses, and perverted desires, rampant among all sections of society in France and Rome, have been lavishly dilated upon by the satir-

ists, poets, dramatists and historians of those times.

Today we view a condition similar in kind, but magnified a thousand-fold over the darkest period of any previous system. A glance at the columns of the daily press anent marriages, separations, divorces, and clandestine arrangements between the sexes suffices to warrant our contention in full.

In Britain during the anet-bellum days divorces were rarely obtained. There was no great incentive to prompt the members of any section of British society to sue for annulment of marriage. Among the nobility and aristocracy, monogamy was always more of an assumption than a reality. They had no necessity for divorce as they only cohabited on State occasions. Among the proletariat the urge was also lacking, but for other reasons. In the industrial centres where men and women left their huts and hovels in early morning to slay in mills, mines, factories, and fields till late at night, they were not together long enough to start a fight of sufficient magnitude to warrant divorce.

But the war, here as elsewhere, played a notable part. Men conscripted into the army had ample leisure to shatter their conjugal fidelity. Women at home, either the recipients of a state allotment, or working under comparatively favorable conditions, had new opportunities for light coquetry, and loose amours. With such a favorable soil for their development, little wonder that divorces are now such a common occurrence in the British courts. Formerly three-quarters of the applicants for divorce were women. Today the majority are men. The prosperity is accountable.

Even in staid, Presbyterian Scotland, where womanly chastity was second only to the sanctity of the Sabbath, the conditions have drastically changed. One judge, as reported in the British press, stated that he disposed of more than a hundred divorce cases, in the city of Glasgow, where almost all the applicants were men, and the charge adultery. The great prominence given to divorce bills, and other measures of domestic importance, in the recent session of parliament removes all doubt as to the gravity of the situation.

But how are we to understand the problem and arrive at a satisfactory conclusion? Skimming along the surface and merely noting the effects, may be an interesting pastime and afford mental relaxation for the literary rabble, but such a method can never supply the reasons for this phenomenon. We must dig beneath the surface and examine the very foundation of society. A Shaw, France, Ibsen, London, or Drieser can present a vivid picture of domestic affairs as they appear today. The changes that are taking place in society; the new relationships that are being established between classes due to the development of the machine; and the advanced means of investigation available, have resulted in a prolific crop of novelists, dramatists, and poets, who specialize in presenting pictures of home and family happenings.

But, startling as may be their disclosures, satirical their presentation, or lurid their coloring, they only, at best, hover around the effects without ever molesting the causes behind them. Perhaps no literary man of any age has contributed more toward erasing the rough spots in capitalist society than Charles Dickens. His consistent onslaught on such institutions as debtors prisons, boarding schools and orphan's homes, will long be remembered by an army of reader. But what was the result? Even when these antiquated domiciles were entirely eliminated, what did it profit the workers of Britain? Were they not still wage slaves whose physical and mental energy had to be peddled in return for a bare subsistence? Is it not reasonable to suppose that the degree of exploitation was accentuated rather than retarded by the introduction of these remedial measures?

We find it necessary, then, to get down to rock

bottom and analyze the economic base before attempting to decorate and illumine the superstructure. To do this we must have access to works on biology, ethnology, sociology, and other branches of science. Morgan, Engels, Marx, Darwin, and many other lesser lights have all contributed useful matter on the origin and development of family life.

The marriage rules, and moral codes, of evolving man were undoubtedly on a par with those of the other organisms in the world around him. Such things were absent in all cases. There must be a stage of considerable development attained before it becomes possible to formulate even crude and simple regulations of human affairs.

The consanguine family is the first to merit our scrutiny. This form, as the title implies, was one of blood relationship, and founded upon the intermarriage of brothers and sisters in a group. Such a family system has not existed anywhere during the historical period. But sufficient evidence is obtainable to warrant us making the deduction that this system of consanguinity did exist at one period in ancient society.

In fact there is every reason to believe that previous to the existence of even this primitive group form, that a much more loosely constructed order of sexual relationship prevailed. Promiscuous intercourse, or free sexual license, is the logical deduction we must draw if we impartially retrace family development back from the earliest authentic mode. All the tendencies point to this one conclusion. That even in this relationship there may have been some order established, eliminating the idea of a haphazard, catch-as-catch-can form of intercourse, is a reasonable supposition. The term **unrestricted** can be utilized only in a broad sense, and implies that subsequent barriers erected by custom did not then exist.

From the earliest known form of sexual relationship, up to that of today, the tendency has ever been in the direction of limiting the dimensions of the group, and gradually contracting the circle, till one man and one woman became the established unit of family life.

The first diminution of group activity, in matters sexual, came with the barrier drawn between persons of different generations. Mutual sexual intercourse between such persons was prohibited. Next came the exclusion of brothers and sisters, followed by that of first cousins and, then, into more remote degrees of relationship.

Just as to what motives actuated primitive man in placing restrictions in the way of any person, or groups, we cannot say for certainty. Any reasons adduced are still a matter of conjecture. However, it does seem logical to suppose that even while the power of abstract reasoning was outside a possibility among our early ancestors, still, that their powers of observation were keen and alert is clearly deducible from the data at hand.

If they could not argue and explain they could observe. The deteriorating effects of close inbreeding would, through time, become visible to savage man. To curb the continuance of such an injurious manner of intercourse would be the natural sequence to a proper estimation of its effects. As to who inaugurated the change, or when it first took place, we do not know. We cannot easily ascertain. The revelation is enshrouded by the misty darkness of the past. But one conclusion seems well founded. Some comparatively advanced peoples instituted the innovation. By so doing they enhanced their own progress, and the more backward tribes, or packs, either saw the necessity of following suit, and did so, or continued their previous mode of relationship till they finally disappeared from the stage of events.

What transpired along the remainder of the journey, and why, will occupy our attention in the next.

J. A. McD.