

Family Life Through The Ages

Part III.

THE characteristics of maleness and femaleness have manifested themselves in human society from the earliest of times. The unrest and activity of the male member of the human family marked him for the position of breadwinner, or food producer, of the social group. He tamed the cattle.

He, in all probability, discovered the means of raising grains, vegetables, and grasses, as well as the improvements made in this field from time to time. He armed himself with crude weapons of aggression and defence, and marched forth against the male members of hostile tribes who, like himself, were seeking what they might devour.

While the male section was thus engaged, female man functioned in another capacity. She was the instrument of propagation—the means for keeping the earth replenished with others of their kind. Her natural quiescence adapted her for the position of keeping the home fires burning, while her restless spouse ventured on new investigations into the realms of the known and unknown. She cooked, milked, sewed, and otherwise attended to domestic affairs. Doubtless, many of the early inventions could be traced to woman did but history more legibly record their inception. Her manipulation of the methods and utensils pertaining to the home would equip her with the knowledge necessary to institute changes.

This restriction of woman to the confines of the home, prohibiting any participation in tribal, national, or world affairs, would naturally tend to accentuate the attributes of passivity and conservatism derived from a biological basis. Her narrow outlook on life was rendered still more narrow by the circumscribed boundaries within which she lived and worked.

The poets of antiquity have pictured tribes of women who lived by themselves. These Amazons would not brook the presence of males excepting at rare intervals. They were practically sufficient unto themselves. Recently, the magazine section of the Hearst Sunday papers contained an article written by an equally antique and poetic professor who claimed to have knowledge of a tribe of "wild women," veritable viragos, after whom the Amazon river was named. This phenomenal tribe had its abode in the forests of Brazil. Males were excluded from their society excepting for a brief period once a year. Then, they were forced to depart on penalty of losing their lives at the hands of the women warriors who were thoroughly trained in all the methods of warfare. The male children, as in Homer, were murdered if the men refused to take them back to their own tribes.

Such a condition, however, is found to be impossible when subjected to the acid test of scientific investigation, or an appeal to facts. There is no foundation for such a contention. There are physical and sociological barriers that preclude the possibility of such a tribe, and the spectacular tale of the poet-professor must be relegated to the ranks of legends, fables, and traditions with which so-called history is replete.

While the period of the Matriarchate existed, the dividing line between the functions of male and female was plainly marked. He worked on the outside and she at home. There was little overlapping of duties. A Roosevelt would have been quite correct, though superfluous, back in that age, in contending that "woman's place was the home." No one would dispute the fact. There she lived, moved, and had her being, so it was to that position that nature and society had consigned her.

But the period of maternal law did not last forever. Like all institutions it existed only as long as the economic conditions warranted. With the advent of property a change in sex relationship was made imperative. The new property made its appearance outside the home. Land, cattle, minerals, slaves, were all confined to man's realm. His social position was greatly enhanced by this newly acquired wealth. To leave his property to his children the father must be recognized. He must as-

sume the dominant position in the family councils. He did. Woman, deprived of a material basis for her authority in the home, soon relinquished her control. From the dawn of the property institution woman has been subjected to the will of man. Her position in the social organism was removed to a lower plane.

While this change from maternal to paternal authority appears to be such a marvellous transformation when viewed through the glasses of today, still it would not appear to be anything extraordinary at the time it happened. All the factors that brought about this transition had previously existed. They were slowly but surely moving in that direction. When the combination of forces reached a certain stage the old form merely merged into the new. It would not be regarded as a violent or drastic change.

Given monogamy, and paternal law, and many centuries passed with but slight variations in the relations between the sexes. Through the periods of chattel slavery and feudalism, with few exceptions, no very important changes are noticed. True, in the time of the Roman Empire, due to the fact that considerable wealth had come into their possession, woman's place in the social circle was greatly advanced. Her equality was again conceded. Economic security has always asserted itself.

It was not till the dawn of a new social system—capitalism—that a complete revolution in family affairs was accomplished. Slow, steady, scarcely perceptible at first, it soon became violent and sweeping in character.

Before the advent of the present system, while the domestic stage of industry existed, woman's sphere was still confined to the home. Her duties were to supply the domestic needs of the family. Industry of a manufacturing kind was still in its incipient form. The age of machinery had not arrived. Agriculture was the main occupation of the people. Work in the fields and about the home was conducive to a healthy, care-free, natural existence. The relations between the sexes had ample reasons to be pleasant. In such an environment it was just as natural to love as to live.

The plays of Shakespeare afford an opportunity of viewing domestic affairs in England. While shrews, viragos, and vampires frequently interrupt the pleasantness of the scene, and rudely remind us of the normal state of family life today still, beautiful female characters abound in profusion. Desdemona, Ophelia, Rosalind, Narissa, Cordelia, and Jessica are types apropos only in a mediæval setting. The poems of Burns portray the domestic situation in Scotland at a later date though in a somewhat similar stage.

But, at the end of the middle ages, a something of momentous import occurred in the social process. Society had reached that stage of development where the old feudal methods of production were no longer sufficient to feed, clothe and shelter the human race. A new age was dawning. Necessity demanded another mode of production. Machines previously unknown and unthought of because unneeded found their way into the productive process. Factories, mills, mines and workshops were now at the threshold of a great development. The industrial methods of other times began to appear crude and wasteful. The home was no longer the place for woman. It was soon noticed that the cheaper the slaves employed in production the greater the profits to those who owned the machines. This demand for cheap profitable labor shifted the location of woman's toil to the factory and mill. Her fingers, as well as those of the children, were found to be peculiarly fitted to the new machines.

Here in the dust, and noise, and work of factory life, a change was authorized in woman's condition. The new economic environment had asserted itself. The old female characteristics of passivity and ease were removed, and in their stead the male attributes of activity and unrest were instilled. She became more manlike as her social standing forced her into the position of performing man's function in factory and mine. This effect is seen in Engels'

"Working Class in England in 1844." It is emphasized in the reports of all the commissions appointed to review the industrial situation during the past century. The unnatural toil, and inhuman suffering, induced by close proximity to work, wrought a great havoc to woman's attributes. Many of them smoked, and most of them drank. The ale-house was practically the only source of amusement or recreation to which they had access.

In recent years this deterioration has not abated. It has on the contrary become more accentuated. The participation of women in industry during the great world war has hastened the evil effects. In a recent statement to parliament, the Chancellor of the Exchequer reports that the smoking and chewing propensities of the English women are responsible, to a great degree, for the increasing price of tobacco. Their drinking proclivities are likewise enhanced.

Now, the delightful, delicate, and ethereal creatures of which poets have incessantly sang, and spasmodically worshipped; those weaker vessels, drooping lilies, and clinging vines, clad in greasy overalls, and spiked boots, indulging in all the manly vices with feminine alacrity, present a rather inartistic and unromantic situation. The sweet and loving Desdemonas are transformed into the shameless and vicious Faustines. The bashful demure Ophelias make way for the advent of cruel and venomous Dolores. The winsome devoted Cordelia finds her successor in the grossly materialistic Felise.

The capitalist system has shattered the home and family. There is no opportunity for domestic bliss and harmony among the members of any section of society today. In the ranks of the bourgeoisie, woman has become a plaything in the hands of man. She is wholly dependent for her existence on the supposed partner of her joys and sorrows. She has no function to perform even in the home apart from being the legal mistress of her husband. Cooking, baking, sewing and mending, she knows nothing about. Hired servants attend to these details. Between husband and wife there is no basis for a harmony of inclinations, of mutual desires, or conjugal fidelity. Above the bourgeoisie, in the ranks of the nobility, and royalty, there is little necessity to investigate. Their mode of existence would only entail a repulsive and putrid story.

But what about the lower strata—the proletariat? Here, and here alone, we find that all the conditions that forced monogamy on the human race have been eliminated. The main essential—the possession of property—is lacking. Then, the development of the machine has caused the woman of the working class to take up a position around the wheels of industry and, consequently, become more independent, and self-assertive, than their wealthier sisters. Should success not attend her first matrimonial venture, divorce is cheap and easily obtained.

But, another dark cloud appears on the horizon in the shape of class society. Working men and women are both wage slaves. They have no other means of securing the requirements of life but by selling themselves piece-meal to a master. They must toil in the worst of conditions in order to exist. This situation places a damper on sex love. It makes impossible the proper development of inclinations, tastes and desires, that may exist in embryo.

What of the future? Morgan and Engels have both pointed to glowing possibilities when the conditions engendered by class society shall have been swept away. Then, and not till then can anything resembling love and happiness make their abode in the family circle. What can be accomplished at that time is vividly explained by Alexander Kollontay in the pamphlet "Communism and the Family." Giant strides have already been made in Soviet Russia towards domestic reconstruction. Greater still would be the achievements in this direction were it not for the attitude of the capitalist world.

Our function, as members of the revolutionary, working class, is to spread a knowledge of Socialism among our fellow workers, and hasten the downfall of class society.

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