

THE FAMILY MONOPOLY

In the current discussions about property, rights, and social relations, it is very rare to see any appreciation manifested of the connection between the family and property. Yet this connection lies at the root of the whole matter. The grandest and most powerful monopoly in the world is the family, in its monogamic form; we have sects which have perceived this and made it an object of their agitation. They are not large, and, for obvious reasons, they are regarded with suspicion and abhorrence by respectable people; but it is undeniable that when they inveigh against monogamic marriage as monopoly, and against the monogamic family as the hotbed of selfishness, they have facts to support their position which are as true and as much to the point as any of the current denunciations of monopoly and selfishness in reference to capital and the industrial system.

I beg the reader to note carefully the form and limits of the statement which I have just made. The parallel which I affirm is not rhetorical, it is in the essence of the facts; when I say that one set of assertions are as well grounded as the other, the force and point of the assertion lie in the "just as much as." Both are correct as to the facts in a certain measure and way; both are fallacious as they are ordinarily asserted and employed. It is not easy to deal with the matter from the side of the family within the proper restrictions, but the necessity of a better popular understanding of the general subject is so great that I am compelled to try it.

Speaking from the standpoint of social science, I hold monogamy to be the greatest step in the history of civilization. This opinion is, it is true, treated by some sociologists with ridicule; I, however, make bold to hold it and to believe that the present generation is not more false to its interests in any other respect than in its inadequate and distorted conception of what the monogamic family yet needs in the way of perfection and sanctity. I use the last term also with distinct intention, meaning thereby that religion has no higher function, in modern society, than to maintain all its institutional effect on marriage and the family.

The specific influence of the family is exerted on women and on children. The monogamic wife is the only wife who shares the life of her husband. Some other kinds of wives are greater than their husbands, and some are lower; the monogamic wife alone can have an independent and co-ordinate sphere, on an equal footing with her husband, yet different from his sphere. The children of a monogamic marriage alone have that home life, that atmosphere of affection and care, which produces the best human beings. They alone get true education; for it does not come from books and schools, it comes from tireless watching, patient training, persistent restraint and encouragement, at the fire-side and at all moments of life, weaving a tissue of unconscious habit into the fiber of the life of the future men and women.

This is, undoubtedly, an ideal, but it is not an ideal which floats in the air as a poetic vision alone. It is realized often enough and sufficiently in our observation for us to know that it can be, and is.

Monogamic marriage, however, is a great monopoly. It is grand and noble for those who get into it, but like

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other monopolies, it wins an advantage for those who are included at the cost of depression to those who are excluded; and millions, of course, in trying to attain to the heights of a monogamic marriage, fail. If they fall, they fall far lower than they would be under lower forms of marriage. The children of a monogamic family have a far better chance than those of any other form of the family, provided the monogamic family realizes approximately its own theory; but it is not impossible that the children reared in a Turkish harem may have a happier fate than the children of a monogamic household in which the parents quarrel or are divorced.

The monogamic family evidently owes its strength and value, then, to the fact that it constitutes a close and solid unit with greater internal cohesion than any other form of the family, and more complete severance externally from every other unit. Its exclusiveness is of its essence; it exerts an intenser educating power on its members on account of its distinctness and comparative isolation. Accordingly any form of communal life, any higher development of social relations, as in hotel life in this country, or in the case of fashionable life, where the attention of the parents is occupied outside of the family, causes the family life, the domestic influences, and the family education to suffer.

The people who, just now, are captivated by any "altruistic" notion cannot decide whether the family is to be included in the sphere of the selfish or the altruistic. Their quandary has its good causes in the facts of the case. The selfish and the altruistic sentiments are inextricably interwoven, and their interlacings or common ground lie in the family sphere; but the family institution, the isolated family group, as a unit, sharply severed and highly and distinctly developed against all

other family units, is, in fact, the hotbed of those sentiments which are denounced as selfish — above all such of them as are connected with social rank and property.

The facts are open to the observation of all. "He that hath wife and children hath given hostages to fortune." If you intensify his family affection, you will in the same degree absorb his energies in the determination to redeem those pledges. If, therefore, the growth of social institutions is in the direction of monogamy, if we thereby win a better position for women and a better education for children, we also intensify a man's feeling of cohesion with his own wife and his own children, aside from and against all the world; and his and their interests, while more absolutely identified with each other, are set in more complete indifference or more pronounced antagonism to those of other people than any other social arrangement. This consequence is inevitable and it plainly exists. The sentiments which are nowadays jumbled together under the head of "individualism," in accordance with the general confusion and looseness with which all these matters are treated, are, in fact, products of this family sentiment.

The selfishest man in the world will pour out his money like water on his children. A man who fights all the world with pitiless energy in the industrial conflict, will show himself benevolent to his family. It is for them that he fights. A man of fifty, alone in the world, might feel indifferent about the accumulation of wealth, or look with comparative indifference upon the danger of monetary loss, but a similar man, with a family dependent upon him, is eager to win wealth, or is overwhelmed by anxiety at the danger of loss. It is not for themselves that men in middle life work; it is for wives and children.

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I, therefore, agree perfectly with the socialists as to the facts of the case. They have always recognized the fact that property and the family are inextricably interwoven with each other from their very roots in the remotest origin of civilization. The more logical they are the more fearlessly they follow out this fact, and attack the family in order to succeed in their attack on property. It is to be conceded to them, at least, that they can see facts and estimate their significance, while the sentimentalists and semi-socialists only muddle everything. The issue is a plain one, and one which admits of no compromise whatever: property and the family stand or fall together; we must either maintain them both with the individualists, or overthrow them both with the socialists.

The people who talk about rooting out monopoly will never succeed in their undertaking until they root out that family monopoly which alone gives significance to all the others. It may be that in some abstract sense the earth was given to all mankind. What I want is a piece of it with which to support my family. When I get it (which I must do by going on until I find unoccupied land, or by a peaceful contract with some one already holding a monopoly, unless I propose to kill a monopolist family in order to put mine in its place) I shall want it as a monopoly, that is, I shall want to be sure that my children, and not any other man's, will eat the crop. There will, therefore, be "private property in land" there and I shall have no need of the "state," unless the state means simply that my neighbors will join with me in a mutual assurance that we can each guarantee the existence of our families by the monopoly of our land.