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BROKEN HOMES

By

Francis P. Le Buffe, S.J.

THIRD PRINTING

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THE AMERICA PRESS

New York, N. Y.

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Broken Homes¹

THE long day has waned over the whirling city, and out from the fastnesses of the business world where men fought so lustily for the gold that buys the playthings of time, tired men have hurried home to seek short respite from their gruelling game. The roar of the world has been hushed a bit and as the sun robes itself in dying splendor, flicking its last rays across the Pacific waters, evening settles down and all seems wontedly peaceful. Within the homes loved ones tell loved ones of what the day had brought in sorrow and in joy. Other some look to a night of sleep to ease their pain-racked bodies, and other some have hurried forth to drink in their fill of pleasure where sweet music speeds the lagging hours and drowns out the serious notes in life's deep harmony. Peace there is upon the surface of the earth whereon life throbs, but there is much fateful brooding in nature, for down, deep down, the depths are stirring and there is no man to note their stir. Here a stress and there a strain, here a thrust and there a yielding, and then as though some huge giant turned restlessly in his sleep, the very foundations of the unthinking city slipped and with one vast roar of crashing walls that silenced the very death-cries of the doomed, San Francisco lay in ruins. The fault in the bed-rock had given and man and the works of man lay heaped as broken toys when wilful children play.

Seismologists today begin to plot and plan the ways of earthquakes and place their finger warningly now on this spot, now on that, and tell us that some day—it may be soon and it may be late—wreckage will be strewn upon the earth's fair surface because the bed-rock gave. Other some will tell us that the earth will rise and shake itself free from the puny incumbrances of man, because, seeping down into molten rock through the crevices in the floor of

¹Paper read before the Twenty-sixth Annual Session of the New York State Conference of Charities and Correction. Hotel Roosevelt, New York City, Dec. 9, 1925, and reprinted from the *Catholic Mind*.

the ocean, the waters are turned into expanding steam which disrupts and rends asunder the solid crust above.

CIVILIZATION'S BED-ROCK

So too in the life and ways of men, there are certain things that are the bed-rock of civilization and when that bed-rock shows a fault and slips or when disruptive forces rend the ways of men, disaster stalks the land. There is little need, it would seem, to stress the importance of that unit which lies at the very foundation of our societal life. Whatever may be our religious creed, whatever may be our political views, whatever may be our sociological outlook, before us stands the gaunt, stark problem of our family life. That this unit, primordial both biologically and sociologically, is not in its aforesaid vigor, that thereby one of the greatest, if not the greatest dynamic is inoperative to the intense harm of the social whole, is the conviction, growing both in intensity and in expression, of all thinking men.

Surely none of us will deny that the family is the very bed-rock of civilization, that with it pure and intact, civilization is intact, and with it gone, civilization is no more. Furthermore, we may safely state that to all the family is indeed more than an aggregation of folk who pool their resources and eat and sleep beneath the same roof. There are deeper and more abiding values in the family than can be read upon its surface, and these are the real values, the values which make that unit the primary unit of civilized societal life. They are the very warp and woof of family life and give it that strong texture by reason of which it supports civilization itself. In the loom of societal life, as the shuttle of custom and social standards swings back and forth, it is from the family that the intertwining life-threads are drawn and as these lives are strong and true, so too will the finished cloth of our social whole be sound and so too will it wear well under the friction incident to existence; but be these lives weak and frayed, so too will the social whole be a sordid thing with no attractiveness to right-minded men.

And what, may we ask, are these real values which give to the family its worth? They are unseen, intangible indeed and yet most seen, most touched, most realized. As Francis Thompson has well said of even higher spiritual things:

O world invisible, we view thee,
O world intangible, we touch thee,
O world unknowable, we know thee,
Inapprehensible, we clutch thee!

The things of sense are real; but many another thing is more real to the spirit of man and to the life of man that overtops in many ways the things of sense and time.

ONENESS OF FAMILY BOND

The first of these spiritual values we take to be the oneness of the family spirit. In every biological sentient unit there is oneness of consciousness which makes it a psychic whole. Are we not right then in demanding such unity of consciousness in that biological unit which it is our duty to consider now? There must be a oneness of mind, born of a oneness of purpose and rooted in a oneness of love, that unites father with mother and both of them with the children. Father and mother must indeed be "of one mind and one heart," if they are to have happiness in their home, and are to bring up children who will be well-mannered before God and man. Yet it is precisely this harmonious blending of two distinct and yet mutually complementary souls that presupposes and partially causes, and at the same time follows, as an effect, the numerical oneness of the marriage tie. There can be an adequacy of equal love only where there is reciprocal undividedness of love, and this presupposes numerical unity. Indeed at the very basis of the family lies monogamy, the abiding union of one man and one woman. There have been and are deflections, many and varied, and at times degrading deflections from this ideal, but, as it was the original, so it has been the enduring, and now exists as the most universal form of marriage.

Of course, for years it has been customary to assert with Bachofen, McLennan, Morgan and others that the human race began with a state of sexual promiscuity wherein men and women mated as animals do. The falsity of this position has been adequately shown by no less an evolutionist than Westermarck and accepted and confirmed by another of the ranking evolutionists of today, J. Arthur Thomson. We read in Westermarck (*The History of Human Marriage*, Vol. I, Ch. iii, p. 125): "Even if there really are or have been peoples living in a state of promiscuity, which has never been proved and is exceedingly hard to believe, these people do not afford evidence whatever for promiscuity having ruled in primitive times." Again (Vol. I, Ch. ix, p. 336): "It is not, of course, impossible that among some peoples the intercourse between the sexes may have been almost promiscuous. But the hypothesis according to which promiscuity has formed a general stage in the social history of mankind, instead of belonging—as Giraud-Teulon puts it—to the class of hypotheses which are scientifically permissible, is in my opinion one of the most unscientific ever set forth within the whole domain of sociological speculation." Again Prof. Thomson, than whom there is no better known writer in matters scientific, says (*What is Man?* Ch. ii, pp. 59, 60): "The general result is that we may with a clear intellectual conscience brush away the nightmare picture of primitive man as indulging in promiscuity like rabbits. He was a married man. Nay more, there is a very strong case for regarding monogamy as primitive." This unity of marriage which underlies the unity of conscious purposefulness of the family is tremendously important these days, for Prof. Thomson again tells us (p. 59): "What civilized man requires to depart from is indulgence in polygamous habits behind a screen of formally monogamous marriage." The scandals that increasingly soil our daily papers and which of late years have almost torn apart our social fabric, the sordid tales heard in our Domestic Relations Courts, ill-smelling scandals that our yellow-journals gloat over with carrion-instincts, and the privately confessed wrong-doings of those

whose public reputations are still more or less intact, warn us that the family is not secure. It profits one little to be an alarmist, but prudence itself bids us raise our voices in warning protest when our folk, young and old, are taught to excuse their sex delinquencies by the invocation of "atavistic reversions" to "caveman" ancestry, when too we are blatantly greeted day by day with tales of "soul-mates," "affinities," "co-respondents" and other soft-names for repellent facts. Nasty things become less nasty when we meet them often, and so the current fashions of marital infidelity and its inevitable disruption of family unity both physical and psychic will grow more prevalent if the unity of the marriage-tie between one man and one woman, abidingly respected and abidingly observed, be not insisted upon.

RENDING THE FAMILY BOND

But this spiritual and essential fact of oneness of mind and oneness of heart is offset not only by lack of physical oneness, it is offset or rather adequately nullified by the dissolution of the marriage-tie, for breakage of this bond means disruption of the family. Just as in the purely physical order male and female are the principles of bodily generation, so too in that higher order of the unfolding of the latent soul-life of the child, father and mother must, through the years, blend all their efforts that shielded childhood may grow into stalwart youth, and youth developing gracefully must give way to maturer years of useful service to God and man. Some of us hold to the absolute indissolubility of the tie which unites man and woman as husband and wife; others hold to an exceptional dissolubility for reasons exceedingly grave. Yet back of these differences of position, we are all agreed that the ideal which every true man holds before him is that of the wife whose love will be his undividedly forever, whose sole thought will be for the little ones who are the enduring evidences of their mutual affection, whose supreme effort will be to give him that sweetest of all havens—a home! We are all likewise agreed that the dream of every noble-minded girl is that of a man whose heart she will

hold as hers unreservedly and irrevocably, upon whose strong shoulders she may lean when the strain of life is hard and at whose side she may walk merrily when laughter abounds. That is the ideal—one man and one woman journeying through life, each an abiding keepsake unto the other. Yet where is that ideal in the world at large today? Again, let us glance at the so-called primitives, those poor fellows invoked so often to prove that our ancestors were a wild and motley crew of animal profligates. What is the condition of marriage there? L. T. Hobhouse tells us (*Morals in Evolution*, Vol. I, p. 150): "Marriage is indissoluble among the Andamanese, some Papuans of New Guinea, (certain tribes) in Sumatra, among the Igorrotes and Italonos of the Philippines, the Veddas of Ceylon, and in the Romish Church." Philo L. Mills, in his epoch-making book, *Prehistoric Religion*, commenting on this passage, says (p. 35): "And he might have added—among the aborigines of Malakka, among the Aeta of the Philippines, among the Wild Dyaks of Borneo, among the Toalas of Celebes, among many of the American and Australian aborigines and among the Negrillos of Central Africa."

Before looking at our own country, let us glance at Europe. According to an Associated Press dispatch of July 21, 1924, the Soviet Government of Russia grants within five minutes at the cost of \$1.50 a divorce which is desired by both parties and with only a single restriction, viz., that one must not be divorced and remarried more than three times in one year. Indeed of late, press reports have told us of the intent to do away with marriage altogether. In Switzerland, where divorce is as easy to obtain as in the United States, there is only one divorce to every sixteen marriages. In other countries the divorce ratio is still lower. In France, there is one divorce to twenty-one marriages; in Denmark, one to twenty-two; in Germany and New Zealand, one to twenty-four; in Norway, one to thirty; in Sweden, one to thirty-three; in Great Britain, one to ninety-six; while our neighbor, Canada, has only one divorce to every 161 marriages. Even pagan Japan had in 1919 a lower divorce rate than

the United States, for it had only one divorce to every eight marriages.

Now for our own record which furnishes food for much serious thought. In 1890, there was but one divorce for 17.1 marriages; in 1900, one divorce to 12.7 marriages; in 1906, one divorce to 9.3 marriages, and in 1922, one divorce to 7.6 marriages. The whole range is run from South Carolina, where none may obtain a divorce on any grounds whatsoever, to Nevada, wherein we had the alarming spectacle of one divorce for every nine-tenths of a marriage. Put in another way—for the ten years ending with 1876, there were 122,121 divorces in the United States; from 1876 to 1886, 206,595; from 1886 to 1896, 352,263; from 1896 to 1906, 593,362; from 1906 to 1916, 975,728, making a total of 2,250,069. Picture what that means: 2,250,069 homes broken and we social workers are schooled to try with infinite patience to heal over the breaches that we find in even one home! 2,250,069 life-dreams shattered, for say what we may, the normal man and woman have a distinct dream in their hearts upon their marriage day. It is right, indeed, to grow thoughtful over individual cases and to picture the sorrows of a weary mother shielding her tender brood against a drunken father, and to limn in appealing colors the broken husband folding in at night his little ones from whom the fateful lure of a mad world's pleasures have torn a forgetful mother. But again, whatever be our principles touching on such cases we must face facts and look at the Frankenstein monster that is loose upon our people today, sapping the very vitals of our family life. We execrate three marriages a year at the dissolution cost of three dollars for the two prior ones, but what of our own good country? 2,250,069 broken homes and yet we feature in our daily papers, the fifth so-called marriage of a prominent woman to one who is to carry the decent title of husband. 2,250,069 broken homes, and yet hear our younger folk pleading for a larger liberty; read the works of many professors who hold indissoluble marriage to be but a social convention to be set aside at will; glance at newspaper and magazine articles which favor trial mar-

riages and of course divorce at will; listen to the popular cant upon separation, whereby as Chesterton says (*The Superstition of Divorce*, Ch. iv, p. 53): "So the unfortunate man who cannot tolerate the woman he has chosen from all the women of the world is not encouraged to return to her and tolerate her, but encouraged to choose another woman whom he may in due course refuse to tolerate."

UNHOLY ANTE-NUPTIAL FREEDOM

These two spiritual aspects of marriage are the very bed-rock of family life and so of civilization itself, and yet it is clear to all of us that there is a far-reaching fault in that bed-rock and that the fault is slipping not gradually, but with the onward sweep of an avalanche and the worthwhile things not only of cultured life, but of life itself are themselves being swept away. But just as in earth convulsions, so too there are in family life disruptive forces that are seeping in and rending it asunder. This seepage of example of ante-nuptial freedom between the sexes is assuredly as wrecking a force as post-nuptial infidelity and divorce. How can there be that unity of life, that oneness of purpose in seeking the worthwhile things of life if there have been years of disregard for the very sanctities of life themselves?

We have often heard it said that a young man must sow his wild oats, and the modern young woman is unfortunately quite frank in like claim. This is a question about which most of us would prefer to remain silent, but the time has come to speak out bluntly, even where reticence would be far more to one's taste. Some will tell us that morals have no place here. But what after all is morality? Morality is the alignment of our actions as human beings with the ultimate purposes of our rational nature. To deflect any human faculty from its fore-ordained purpose is therefore immoral, for it is a perversion. Now, God has made man as he is, and woman as she is for one purpose—to re-people the earth and to secure this purpose He has planted in nature a strong impulse thereto and pleasure therein. Our young men and young women

must be taught that it is a degraded and degrading thing to misuse the primordial impulses of life or to act so frivolously that there is serious danger of grave lapses, and my own belief is that our girls imperatively need to be taught this most emphatically.

We hear many a protest against "the double standard." Of course, there is no double standard in morals. What is wrong for the woman is wrong for the man. But may I say that our instinctively higher standard for woman is rooted in the very make-up of her nature? Man may sin and none can find a trace of his unholiness, but when a woman sins her very nature bears the signs and frequently the shadow of her sin clings to her through life as the child of another unwed mother. No, no double standard for sin, but has not the God of nature kindly imposed a higher standard of virtue on those whose highest title is that of mother? If our girls are modest and respectful of themselves, if they have that proper restraint which is a protection to that fundamental virtue that every man demands in the woman who is to be not his concubine but his wife, then we need fear little for our boys. Our young women owe this to themselves for their own safety, first, because only the brute will take advantage of a modest girl, and again, because no man ever yet looked on a woman as his equal. Therein is the tragedy of the modern girl, for she tries to be a "pal" with the boys. By a law of man's mind, detectable by observation and confirmed by history, a man cannot look on woman as his equal. He either looks up to her, or down on her—and if he looks down on her, she pays the penalty.

The great difficulty facing the family today is the unholy freedom of our young folk, whose license prior to marriage refuses to be summarily checked by the few words of a marriage formula, hastily pronounced by them before a clergyman or licensing officer of the law. That young men and women can and do lead such a continent life is a certainty, as it is the privilege of one in my position to know. Moreover, even in the American Expeditionary Forces, it was found that 34 per cent of the 13,649 men who answered a questionnaire had remained chaste during the

time of their stay in France, a period varying from eight months to two years. And is it not the secret hope and cherished conviction of each one of you that your sons and above all your daughters, your brothers and more especially your sisters are such? And would you not fell the man that insinuated otherwise?

SOCIAL CHASTITY

But why this admitted breakdown in the morality of our younger generation? It is the seepage of the morally unwholesome atmosphere abroad in the community today that little by little infiltrates into the minds of our youth and sunders the forces of their moral being. It is of little profit for us to try to keep our own houses clean and hygienic if the atmosphere all around us is miasmatic and fever-laden. There can be no protection for the family if the atmosphere of the community at large be not morally wholesome, if there be not social chastity; for if there be no social chastity we have but a tainted race of younger folk who will not, cannot blend their lives in holy wedlock. That there has been decadence here is a fact that all men have noted. Fashions are tolerated today, pictures are printed in our daily papers and on the covers of our magazines which would have been matters for arrest a few years back. The motion pictures are frequently either lewd or frankly suggestive, and many of our plays on the so-called legitimate stage are utterly pornographic. Our boys and girls are arrested for sex-delinquencies and unmarried mothers are frequently social outcasts, and yet what have the boys and girls done? Only that to which we allow them to be openly tempted by what we permit in public. Play-juries may whitewash all they want and play-writers may prate about art and clamor for freedom in the name of art, but the fact remains that there are plays and movies and illustrations, and magazine articles and books today—and unfortunately many of them—that are open incentives to sin. Why prattle about “art” and, then when our young folk have followed out these “artistic” appeals, damn them as sex-delinquents? Why not then allow a plea for “art?” How illogical we are! Why

do we not do one of two things—either stop arresting our young folk for doing the very things to which we allow them to be provoked or clean up our stage, our movies and our literature? You tell me there is no absolutely certain way of telling whether a thing is bad or not? With this I beg leave to differ. May I offer you a simple test for the cleanness of a show or a book? Would you want your daughter or your sister to take the leading sinister part therein or be found reading the stuff that a man may write for her but dare not say to her in person? And if it is too bad for your daughter or your sister, why will you lower your manhood or your womanhood by seeing another man's daughter or sister debasing her priceless heritage?

Added to this degrading influence of the stage, we have to thank our prohibition laws for a further accentuation which is a blot on our country. High-school parties now are such that a public official said that no such things occurred in "red-light" districts years ago. Drink and immodest dressing and animal dances brought out from darkest Africa or borrowed from the houses of ill-fame of South America, these we permit and then meet, here and there and everywhere in solemn convention, to see how we can cure the inevitable effects which have worked themselves out upon young folk. Only recently in New York, a woman teacher congratulated an audience of young ladies that they had enjoyed a "freedom without anchorage." Yes, they have a "freedom without anchorage," for they have been taught that the Ten Commandments are mere outworn social taboos, that restraint is intolerable, that the old ways are foolish ways. But are they to be congratulated on this? As well congratulate a rudderless ship adrift in the whirlpool for its freedom from anchorage, as to congratulate our boys and girls because they know not these saving truths and stabilizing restraints without which the very fabric of individual life is ruined and the warp and woof of societal life is rent asunder. Because there is little of social chastity, there is little individual chastity. Because there is little social and individual chastity, our homes are ruined, fathers and mothers

are not faithful each to each, and the dockets of our divorce courts are crowded, children are bandied about from one divorcee to another or parked as automobiles are, parentless in an institution. Wealth we have yes, and food and raiment in abundance and much, over-much of the pleasures of life, but of the spiritual values which make for family union and cohesion, we of this generation take scant heed.

“KEEPSAKES FOR HEAVEN”

I have spoken very plainly, ladies and gentlemen, more plainly than is to the liking of one of my position, but it seems that the hour is here when those on the watch-towers should sound the words of alarm, prudently, of course, and temperately, yet strongly. If I have exaggerated, it has been quite unconsciously, and far from my intention. And the solution? There is but one—a reaffirmation of the sanctity of life, a re-stressing of the dignity of human parentage, a reiteration that life is worth living then only when we have made sacrifices, that we are happy not in proportion as we get things out of life, but only in proportion as we put worth-while things into the lives of others. The curse of today is individual selfishness, yet the happiest family life entails a deal of yielding and self-forgetfulness. The cure then of tomorrow, as it was the safeguard of yesterday, will be self-sacrifice. Only when the father realizes that it is his privileged duty to think for and toil for his wife and little ones; only when the mother is convinced that home-making is no “part-time” job, as a recent writer says it is, but the biggest, noblest life’s-work woman has ever done or ever can do; only when our young folk are taught that self-restraint means self-protection, and that purity is the priceless crown of youth and the cherished memory of olden years—then and then only will our family life be safe. And to those of us who still look beyond the grave for a home sweeter by far than the fairest home on earth, father will be to mother, and mother to father, and children to parents, loved ones who are loaned by God as “keepsakes for Heaven.”

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