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## FAMILY LIFE, CONSIDERED IN CONNECTION WITH THE PROPOSALS FOR THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT OF MOTHERHOOD.

MUCH has been heard lately of schemes for the national endowment of motherhood. Since schemes of this nature affect the most sacred and vital relationships of life, it is essential that all thoughtful members of the community should consider most carefully the proposals that are being made and their probable effect upon the good life of the nation.

The problem is one of the most difficult that a nation can have to solve, being that of securing with marriage adequate means for the healthy up-bringing of a family. Were the question purely a financial one, its solution would be fairly easy. No State would grudge the expenditure, short of being landed in bankruptcy, were a mere grant of money all that was needed to secure the best possible home conditions for all its children; but problems that involve the deepest things of life can seldom be solved by money. Most certainly we all wish that every man could earn enough to ensure a satisfactory home life, with leisure and opportunity for the fullest possible development, spiritual, mental, and physical, together with the desire to use the money earned in this way, for without this desire untold riches will not produce a good home or a good citizen. Most certainly, too, we feel that the return for a man's labour should not even indirectly be based upon a consideration of his home claims, but upon his value as a worker and upon the profits that each business is able to share after a

fair return to capital and an adequate reserve for development. Surely this is the obvious and natural way in which to settle the vexed questions of equal wages for equal work. If the real value of the worker as such, together with the amount of profit that employers and workmen consulting together decide that the business can bear, is the basis of wages, then the work of each individual man or woman will be justly paid.

His proportionate value to the State as a worker and as a man is a different matter, and one for the State to settle by such methods as a reduced income tax in proportion to the size of the family, or the taxation of the unmarried to meet some of the educational and social needs of the rising generation upon which the State depends. By some such methods the desired result could be obtained without the risk of undermining family life, upon which the whole fabric of Society is built.

Surely all who desire a more equal distribution of wealth and better conditions of life for all classes cannot fail to regard proposals for State endowment as a retrograde step. Is it not better from every point of view that the adequate income should be obtained as a direct payment in wages for work done rather than partly given as a State dole, which is in reality only out-relief under another name. By no means yet devised could such supplementation of wages prevent the reduction of earnings for a large number of the population, and the endowment thus becoming a subsidy to employers. It is further obvious that money required for taxation is to a large extent withdrawn from industrial development, with the consequent reduced prosperity of the country. It is easy to see why a nation with the ideals of Germany should desire to force its citizens into the position of State dependents, but is it conceivable that the English ideal could ever be that of a nation of pensioners? Is not freedom, national and individual, essential to English institutions and character?

It is suggested that payment should be made to all classes and inspection thus avoided, but no sane government

would accept the position that there should be no security that the money should be used for the purpose for which it was granted. Is it thinkable that English common-sense would stand the sight of money carried straight to the public-house or gambling-den, while the children went without food or clothing, or were relieved from yet another State source? Having gone so far, it would be difficult to prevent State interference from going yet further, and some of those who believe in State-sanctioned marriages are welcoming this proposal as an indirect method of securing their end. Certainly a State subsidy to enable people in advanced consumption, or threatened with insanity, to produce a family would be hard to justify, and yet to prevent this would involve an intolerable interference, according to English ideas, in the private life of the individual. If this scheme is adopted, let it at least be realised where it is likely to end.

Politically, the temptation will be obvious, to those who need votes and to those who have them to give, to promise and demand increased rate of endowment, while already we have heard the scale proposed by the Mothers' Endowment Committee adversely criticised as being inadequate to keep the family, all idea of self-support having immediately disappeared.

To remove from those who are the cause of bringing children into the world the responsibility of providing for their material needs is to remove one of the most natural incentives to work and to self-restraint. By this scheme the population would increase by leaps and bounds in just those families where the standard is lowest, where the only recognised reason for the need of self-restraint is the material one. Remove this, and one of the chief problems before the country will be its worn-out mothers and its weakly children. The reply is made that in the lowest homes the total inability to support the family is no restraint, but, even were this so, there are a vast number of borderline families where the material possibilities do have some influence, and when this influence would cease so soon as

any means, however inadequate, of supporting more children were forthcoming. Moreover, even in the lowest homes, where no restraint is exercised, there comes a point when the income is so wholly inadequate that the home as such can exist no longer and refuge has to be sought in a State institution. The increase of these families then ceases automatically, and only the most unthinking sentimentality can desire otherwise, for the sake of the country and for the sake of the miserable children who have no other chance of becoming decent citizens. It is contrary to all that we know of human nature to suppose that a gift of money can transform the home life of such families. No State fund will save from cruelty and neglect the children of those parents who do not choose to do their part. The production of unfit children would be multiplied until self-defence would force the State to intervene. This scheme is said to save the wife from the cruelty of a bad husband, but no precautions could prevent the father who so wished from living on the grant made to his wife, with the consequent semi-starvation of the whole family. The right course would seem to be, not to pour money into such a home, but to remove the man to a detentions colony, strictly reformatory and educational in character, and yet acting as a strong deterrent by means of the discipline and work demanded. By this means the home can be maintained in the father's absence, while the penalty and reforming influence are brought to bear on the real culprit—the man himself.

Most certainly we all wish that the contribution the woman makes to the home should be recognised at its true value, as greater even in the personal demands made than that given by the man. For it is nothing less than complete devotion to husband, children, and home duties, together with the acceptance of periods of great physical suffering. Is it conceivable that any woman would consent to all that is involved in child-bearing if it were a mere matter of service to the State, untouched by the sacred gift of love? The position of the State in this matter is wholly secondary, and any payment in this connection would take from the

father the responsibility that he most undoubtedly recognises to be his, with the consequent deterioration that follows the shirking of responsibility. It is true that there are people whom nothing can injure, who will do their duty however great the temptation to shirk; but the ordinary human being needs all the strength he can get in the struggle to do right. It is for him that the State has to cater, and to offer him a means of avoiding his chief responsibility is to do him no true service.

But, for lack of clear thinking on this point, it would not be necessary to point out that separation allowances to soldiers' wives are in no sense State relief, but are wages paid by the State for very valuable services rendered. There are other ways in which the good life of the nation would be seriously undermined. Home life, even at its best, is not always easy. Often in the early years of married life the incompatibility seems too great to be adjusted, and it is only the love and dependence of the children that enables the struggle to be persisted in until mutual forbearance is gained, and a victory won for which no price is too high to pay. With some economic independence can it be doubted that in the weaker families the fight would not be fought, and the struggle would give place to separation, with all the far-reaching misery this involves. For the man it means greater temptations and often other ruined lives, other women tempted and other children brought into a world where they are not wanted. For the wife and children it means a mutilated home life, for which there is no compensation. None can doubt that the suffering caused to the wife and children by the break-up of the home is out of all proportion greater than that borne by the man; and yet it is women, happy in their own lives, who are advocating in many directions proposals that would increase the number of such separations.

The destruction of the home means the destruction of the best that life has to give. Can any doubt this who have seen where the soldier's thoughts turn when he is absent? The boy's longing for his family is hardly less than that

of the married man whose home is enriched by the presence of wife and children. All this is to be risked for the sake of a grant of money offered to purchase those things that money cannot buy, the things of the spirit. 'My fruit is better than gold—yea than fine gold; and my revenue than choice silver.'

Much can be and is being done to lessen hardships in the home in times of illness and unemployment without weakening the home tie. Such aids as unemployment benefit and national insurance should make impossible much of the misery of the past. Again, the demand for equal educational opportunities for all is one that no thinking citizen can reject, and there is practically no limit to what may be done in this direction without the interference in home life that anything in the nature of home relief inevitably involves. Can we not have patience to give these methods time to bear fruit without rushing into revolutionary schemes that may shake the whole foundation of society?

In conclusion, therefore, it is suggested that the size of a family is best determined by the capability to provide for it on the part of those who are responsible for its existence, rather than by any artificial means; and, further, that the ideal family life necessarily involves dependence, the dependence of the husband and wife upon each other, and of the children upon their parents, and that such a dependence, voluntarily accepted, produces the most highly valued of all human relationships.

#### PENSIONS FOR WIDOWS.

The C.O.S. has frequently called attention to the unsatisfactory position of many widows and fatherless children who are left unprovided for by the death of the man. Since the many problems, economic and otherwise, involved in interference with the normal family life are not present in these cases, no reasonable excuse exists for the absence of a well-thought-out plan by which these homes

shall cease to be, as is now too often the case, among the most wretched in the country.

In Occasional Paper, No. 14, 5th series, the C.O.S. sets out the plan that it regards as the most workable and the precautions that it considers necessary. Since these proposals are based upon the experience of the Society gained by some fifty years of daily intercourse with the people in their homes, they can hardly fail to be of a practical nature.

Much interest is taken in the scheme for pensions for mothers now adopted in several of the American States; and, although the conditions with regard to widows have apparently been very different in America from those in this country, the experience gained in connection with the working of the American scheme is of value.

The reports of the scheme show that as a rule the precautions have been taken that experience proves to be necessary, though in many cases the steps have not been taken to make these precautions effective.

The pensions are not paid as a right, they are granted only after investigation, and the recipients are subject to supervision. Without such precautions the pensions would in many cases defeat their main object, the welfare of the children. It is by no means all mothers who have as yet been educated to use wisely money that has been obtained by less effort than that earned as wages. Hence the importance of discrimination in the granting of pensions. In some cases work for the mother and day hostels for the children will have the best results. In others, where weakness of body or character makes the up-bringing of a large family an impossibility, boarding-schools for some of the family will be necessary. In large cities some regulation as to the nature of the house and street dwelt in is most desirable. A certain standard in the home should also be insisted upon, and attendance at a School for Mothers required where this is not maintained.

In England hitherto most of the attempts to provide a satisfactory home life for the children of widows have been

weakened by unwillingness to appoint sufficient women visitors to secure adequate supervision.

There can be no question that any scheme of pensions should under no circumstances be extended to deserted wives, wives of prisoners, or unmarried mothers, or far more suffering will be caused than it is hoped to alleviate. These cases need special conditions of such a nature that all possible suffering for the children is avoided, while nothing is done to make more easy the wrong-doing that has created the situation.

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