

THE STATE FAMILY

THE modern theory of the supremacy of the State in all departments of life disposes of the fundamental principle of the Family as an independent unit of society. Prominent Socialists have pointed out the logical conclusion that State Ownership of Property is State Ownership of the Family. H. G. Wells has publicly said that the State would have no more scruples about taking over the Family than it would in taking over the private gasworks. Hence we have an altogether new conception of Society based on the idea of the State Family. As to how this will work out in practice remains to be seen. The Family is a natural institution, and mankind must inevitably return to it or perish. Meanwhile we can see the beginnings of the new system at work.

It is everywhere presumed in modern legislation that the State and not the parent is the final arbiter of the welfare and upbringing of the child. Nowhere, for instance, in our elementary educational system is there any reference to the parent's wish as to what his children are to be taught. Attendance of children is compulsory and the law is stretched beyond its limits in forcing such attendance contrary even to the parents' will. Thus frequently a mother may keep a child away from school because it is delicate or because there is some domestic emergency making it necessary for it to be at home. For this offence a mother is treated almost as if she were a criminal—she is dragged before education committees and police courts and fined by magistrates, as if she had violated every law of God and man. Yet all she has done is to retain the guardianship of her child for a few hours of school life, a privilege retained by the rich under the same laws without any difficulty.

Through the school, social reformers hoped to

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uplift the next generation of the working-class to a loftier ideal of hygiene and Sunlight Soap. They found out their mistake—it was not to be done even through the medical inspection of school children by specially appointed health officers. The home and *not* the school exercised the supreme influence in the child's life, and it was the home and not the school which now required to be captured. Hence the invasion of the working-man's home was planned by an army of uplifters. Every old maid, every health faddist, every young girl seeking a vocation was informed of the need for welfare work and health visiting. Advice *ad lib.* was to be poured like a stream of water to flush the Augean stables of the slums. Ignorance, dirt, and vermin were the great foes of the progress of mankind.

The investigation of home conditions on the card index system by a host of officials has been rigorously carried out. It has led to the remarkable discovery that the responsibility for the home conditions, good or bad, of the child is always to be traced to a certain person, and that person is the mother. Now it is impossible to abolish mothers since they are an extremely necessary factor in the existence of the State. Our masters of industry have also recently discovered that they are absolutely essential for the provision of labour in their factories. A lady Suffragette has voiced this opinion by saying that "mothers are the most important producers of the State—therefore the State should pay them a wage for their services." This is euphemistically termed "endowment of motherhood."

A mother, mark you, is a sound commercial proposition to the State—she is not even an animal—she is a machine, and a machine which is to be made to work on approved factory lines. She is to be supervised and controlled and her children regulated on the

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eugenic pattern. Large families are undesirable—quality not quantity must be aimed at. Standards must be fixed and the standard below which no human being should fall must be established by means of statistics.

To secure proper classification a large amount of medical inspection must be done. Ante-natal clinics, maternity clinics, infant clinics, school clinics, continuation school clinics, are all part of the machinery for grading the race. All these activities are being co-ordinated and centralized in the Ministry of Health, a department which is rapidly becoming a vast medical bureaucracy for the creation of records. But this is not its ultimate end—in the words of Sir George Newman, chief medical officer to the Ministry, the chief purpose of the Ministry is the establishment of “eugenics and sound breeding.” In other words, the reproduction of the race must be controlled on stud-farm principles. The people henceforth will be graded A 1, B 2, C 3, etc.—and the mothers? C 3 women will not be permitted to perpetuate the race. A 1 women, on the other hand, will be given a special State wage for producing a specified number of children and looking after them. Not the father, but the State, will support the Family.

The ceremony of marriage will be discarded as an antiquated system, and the Christian conception of the Family and all it stands for will be precipitated into the abyss of State Socialism. This will in effect mean a return to Paganism with all its vices and none of its virtues. Above all, it means the degradation of women, and the enslavement of mothers.

Even now poor women are being persecuted and oppressed by those who are childless because they show a strange perversity in preferring their own ways of looking after their little ones to those of welfare workers. These poor mothers are accused of killing

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their children through ignorance—yet few appear to recollect that four-fifths of the children in the kingdom are the children of working-class parents and that quite eighty per cent of their children are born healthy. In industrial centres the children do not fare so well as in other parts—but is that the fault of the parents? Is it not rather the surroundings which are to blame? Why then proceed to institute State regimentation of the mother instead of securing to her the right of a healthy environment? Why inflict upon her a horde of officials whose chief work in life is to collect reports and cajole and bully their victims? Why imitate Bradford with its model State maternity clinics, an infant death-rate of 135 per 1000, and a dwindling birth-rate of 17 when the West of Ireland sets an example to the world with its high birth-rate of 32 per 1000 and low infant death-rate of 35? Is this not a proof that it is the conditions under which people live, rather than their educational facilities, which provide the nucleus of a healthy race? To sincere students it is becoming obvious that the system of State inspection has failed and will continue to fail to improve the health of the people one iota. Advice *per se* cannot cure—it can only be a means of cure if it is reasonably capable of being carried out. However good the advice may be it is not only absurd—it is cruel to inflict it on those who have no means of adopting it. What on earth is the good of telling a woman at an Infant Welfare Centre that her children need plenty of fresh air and ventilation when the whole family is perhaps forced to live, sleep, and eat in one room under conditions which make it a marvel that any of them survive?

Again, Care Committee ladies are very solicitous that the orders of the school medical officers should be obeyed and that a child of four or five years old should wear spectacles to remedy a squint. Do they realize the dilemma of the mother when out of her slender

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resources she has to provide boots for another child or keep it from school? She cannot afford both boots and spectacles. If she keeps the child from school because it has no boots to its feet she is summoned for its non-attendance. If she buys the boots and fails to get the spectacles she is prosecuted for cruelty—whichever way she acts she is bound to be penalized for the crime of being poor. Because of her helpless position she is unable to resist these acts of petty tyranny and injustice—yet these domestic tragedies constitute one of the chief worries of her life.

The patience and endurance of working-class mothers under almost intolerable conditions is marvellous. It is these women who toil day in day out with never a holiday, entirely for the sake of their children and their homes. With all their faults and all their weaknesses one bond remains unbroken and that is the unbounded affection to their children for whom they will make immeasurable sacrifices. We certainly do not give them the reward in this world which their heroism deserves. How does the State official regard them? As a rule he surveys them from the cold and bleak standpoint of hygiene. There are thousands of cases in which poor women are positively persecuted because in spite of their devotion children have become unclean or verminous. Anyone acquainted with slum conditions knows that this is almost inevitable under the circumstances.

These poor women are often prosecuted mercilessly for cruelty and neglect—they are sometimes even sent to prison with hard labour. Their children are then taken away from them and sent to State institutions. Yet these institutions deprive children of the individual affection which is their right and submit them to a stereotyped officialism crushing the mind and imprisoning the soul. Is this not greater cruelty to the child than a few flea-bites?

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The whole thing is topsy-turvy. Common sense requires that parents shall be the guardians of their children. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred they will not abuse these rights because of the natural relationship existing between parent and child. Unfortunately in England it is the habitual practice of modern social reformers to deprive the poor of their parental rights and to substitute for the care of the mother the care of the State official. The Labour Party in representing the working-classes has shown no disposition to defend the rights of the Family. Its leaders are smitten with the Socialist's mania for the State control of everything under the sun, hence they will not move an inch to defend the autonomy of the home.

Without combined action the poor are helpless to resist this oppression. Formed into a strong union for the defence of parental rights there is no reason why much of the official interference with the Family should not be held in check. The rights of the Family are well supported by the law of the land. The noted independence of the English home has been a byword amongst the nations. "An Englishman's house is his castle" is the motto of John Bull, and although modern legislation has weakened its force the old laws still hold good. Unless, however, they are made known and used they will rapidly become a dead letter. The people are willing to resist, but they are afraid of the harsh judgments of the police courts. In the absence of any opposition the aggression of the officials continues apace and threatens to destroy the very foundations of family life. To resist this encroachment the Mothers' Defence League* has been formed with Mr. G. K. Chesterton as its distinguished President, but a wide propaganda is needed to secure sufficient recruits for an effective opposition. In this fight the

* The Mothers' Defence League, 3 Fleet Street, E.C. 4.

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Catholic Church, with its doctrines upon the sacredness of Family life, is bound to play a prominent part. The time may soon come when it may indeed prove a life and death struggle to free the Family from the stranglehold of State tyranny.

AGNES MOTT.

THE MOURNER

LAST night the Sun was slain upon Earth's rim.
I saw the light of his imperial pyre
Threaten the proud tents of the Cherubim
With vast upheaval of insurgent fire.
The little men, released from the dull town,
By the sea's edge were strolling up and down,
Laughing and talking, while their Sun-god dyed
With his heart's blood the amethystine tide.

Then Twilight came with her attendant choir
Of muted sounds, soft mists and shadows grey,
And with pale reverent hands put out the fire
And gathered up the ashes of the Day,
And flung them over sky and land and sea,
Pausing a while in mournful reverie.
Then crept away, gazing with eyes of stone
Where pigmy stars swarmed o'er a Giant's throne.

J. R. MEAGHER.