

THE ORIGIN OF SOCIETY.*

The "general promiscuity" theory of the origin of society bids fair to follow its predecessor, the "patriarchal" theory, to the limbo of unjustified hypotheses. Set up by McLennan, Lubbock, and Morgan, as a complete explanation of the phenomena of marriage and kinship, it has not even that partial justification in fact which makes the theory of Sir Henry Maine true over a limited area. Sixteen years ago Mr. Herbert Spencer, in his "Principles of Sociology," dealt it a staggering blow when he impeached its assumptions, its method, and its conclusions. Two years ago Mr. Staniland Wake and Dr. Starcke, in works of independent treatment, set up in detail the newer theory which Mr. Darwin had hinted at, and which Mr. Spencer had outlined with a few vigorous strokes.

The starting-point of Wake and Starcke was biological in its evidence for the monogamic origin of society, while the development of the theory proceeded along purely sociological lines. Edward Westermarck, the Lecturer on Sociology at the University of Finland, now appears, in the volume which suggests this review, as an original worker in behalf of the new theory. The very pleonasm of the title — as the average reader would view it — is a key to the whole treatment. For Mr. Westermarck

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not only starts in biology, with the anthropoid ape as man's progenitor, but at every new stopping-place for data confirmatory and explanatory we are confronted with the physical strata underlying the sociological. This is the most scientific treatise yet produced in this special field of investigation, and we note three prime characteristics of a scientific method. The facts upon which its theory is based have been collected in enormous quantity from the literature and the observation of all ages, for, as the author says, the first condition of success is that "there should be a rich material; what is wanting in quality should be made up in quantity." Again, in the interpretation of existing phenomena the writer has sought to guard against the double danger of "putting into them a foreign meaning," and of "inferring, without sufficient reasons, from the prevalence of a custom or institution among some savage peoples, that this custom, this institution, is a relic of a stage of development that the whole human race once went through." Finally, Mr. Westermarck is never satisfied that a custom or an institution is explained until he has endeavored to trace it to something fundamental in the physical or psychical nature of the race. His theory is briefly as follows:

"Human marriage in all probability is an inheritance from some ape-like progenitor. . . . Marriage is the natural form of the sexual relations of man, as of his nearest allies among the lower animals. . . . I am strongly of the opinion that the tie which joins male and female is an instinct developed through the powerful influence of natural selection. . . . Monogamy is the more likely to have prevailed almost exclusively among our earliest human ancestors, since it does so among the man-like apes. . . . There is not a shred of genuine evidence for the notion that promiscuity ever formed a general stage in the social history of mankind. . . . It seems extremely probable that, among our earliest human ancestors, the family formed, if not the society itself, at least the nucleus of it. . . . All the evidence we possess tends to show that, among our earliest human ancestors, the family, not the tribe, formed the nucleus of every social group, and in many cases was, itself, perhaps the only social group. . . . Neither do I see any reason to believe that there ever was a time when the family was quite absorbed in the tribe. . . . Marriage is rooted in family, rather than family in marriage. . . . Two inferences regarding monogamy and polygyny may be made with absolute certainty: monogamy, always the predominant form of marriage, has been more prevalent at the lowest stages of civilization, than at somewhat higher stages; whilst, at a still higher stage, polygyny has again, to a great extent, yielded to monogamy."

It would be impossible, in the limits of this review, merely to indicate the array of evidence upon which this writer bases the state-

ments quoted above. Not only is the antiquity of monogamy maintained, but other forms of marriage, as polyandry and polygyny, are shown to be both late and occasional variations from the primitive form. The Levirate is not even a form of polyandry, but is a religious duty.

"Polyandry, although frequently practised in certain parts of India and Central Asia, nowhere excludes the simultaneous occurrence of other forms of marriage. . . . With the exception of the Massagetae, there is no people among whom polyandry is stated to be the only recognized form of marriage. . . . All the statements we have from the ancient world seem to indicate that polygyny was an exception. Almost everywhere it is confined to the smaller part of the people, the vast majority being monogamous."

The origin of exogamy is for the first time explained on a scientific basis. The old theory of its origin in the capture of wives from other tribes is upset, and its cause is found in an instinct born in the process of natural selection. Let us quote at length a fruitful passage:

"I cannot but believe that consanguineous marriages, in some way or other, are more or less detrimental to the species. And here, I think, we may find a quite sufficient explanation of the horror of incest; not because man at an early stage recognized the injurious influence of close intermarriage, but because the law of natural selection must inevitably have operated. Among the ancestors of man, as among other animals, there was no doubt a time when blood-relationship was no bar to sexual intercourse. But variations, here as elsewhere, would naturally present themselves; and those of our ancestors who avoided in-and-in breeding would survive, while the others would gradually decay and ultimately perish. Thus, an instinct would be developed which would be powerful enough, as a rule, to prevent injurious unions. Of course there is no innate aversion to marriage with near relations; but there is an innate aversion to marriage between persons living very closely together from early youth. The existence of an innate aversion of this kind is proved, not only by common experience, but by an abundance of ethnographical facts which show that it is not in the first place by degrees of consanguinity, but by close living together, that prohibitory laws against intermarriage are determined. Thus many peoples have a rule of local exogamy, which is quite independent of kinship."

Thus, marriage by capture, and afterwards by purchase, are explained. Endogamy, on the other hand, "never, except in cases of extreme isolation, seems to occur among peoples living in very small communities with close connections between their members. Many uncivilized peoples carefully avoid marrying out of their own tribe, the chief reason being the strong dislike which distinct savage and barbarous nations have for one another." However, Westermarck does not consider exogamy and endogamy as contraries. Rather, every

people has an inner circle and an outer circle, equally in both of which marriage is avoided.

We have only touched the theories of this important work. The reader must find for himself the biological argument here made against promiscuity, because it "tends to a pathological condition very unfavorable to fecundity." We also leave to the specialist reader the very interesting and convincing chapters on means of attraction and racial differences, where the writer's word of introduction is that "the concealment of truth is the only indecorum known to science." We lay the volume down with the conviction that it is a masterly contribution to a growing science, and that its author's argument will stand, even although one may not accept with him the anthropoid ape as a man and a brother.

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