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Maximilienne
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The Family Does Not Exist

Maximilienne

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“The Family,” “The French Family”...

These are so many cliché words, ready-made phrases, that serve the solid citizens when their spirits feel the need of some good, solid prop to lean on...

“The Family”; “The Fatherland”; “Morality”; so many beautiful mannequins draped in their formal attire of prejudice, ignorance, stock opinions...

Today, I would like to strip a few rags off of the “Family” mannequin...

Although the idea of family has changed profoundly in modern times, the remnants of all the hypocritical conceptions heaped upon it still give it quite a glamorous aura.

“The Family,” it is said, “is the foundation of Society.” Perhaps that’s so.

And perhaps it’s even because society has a poor foundation that it has become so sick!

However, it has so far found nothing better on which to found itself.

No doubt these are the considerations of public order that have cast an almost mystical aura around this famous institution.

But what remains of this respect when we analyze it? What can remain of it?

For some time, curiosity led me to collect news items under the heading of what are commonly called "family stories."

The ugly, the painful list!

Let us revisit them...

Yesterday, there was a girl from a good family, who, faking a robbery, stole jewelry from her mother to deliver to her lover.

The day before, the Assize Court of Cher sentenced to 5 years in prison a person who, after raping his stepdaughter, a child of fourteen, had forced his wife to take part in their sad antics.

At Onecourt, a drunken son seriously wounded his father with a gunshot; at Nancy, a husband stabbed his wife to death, and near Périgueux, a father saw his barn and crops burned down by his own offspring.

On October 19, in Montpellier, a divorcée stripped of her maternal rights obtained permission to see her child, a little boy of nine, whom the father had placed in a sanatorium.

Taking him for a walk, she threw him to the ground, and trampled him savagely...

In Bordeaux, meanwhile an unfortunate deserter was tried, a man who had disappeared so successfully that his name was listed on the monument to the dead. The poor fellow gave as the reason for his disappearance the terror he felt... of his wife, and he made his case so convincingly that the judges, moved, inflicted a paltry sentence on him.

On the same day, the Chamber of Indictments in Limousin made a dismissal in favor of a son who, with the help of his mother, had done his father to death.

On the 18th, the criminal court of Bordeaux condemned a couple of farmers who left their children, ages five, seven, two years, and six months, without care or food.

Also on the 18th, a day-laborer from Saint-Denis cracked the head of his sleeping wife with an axe.

A day or two before the Assize Court of La Charente-Inférieure sentenced a milkmaid to five years in prison for drowning her child in the river – because her husband had criticized him for having won a trial selling adulterated milk!

A woman struck her husband with an axe; an alcoholic wounded his sick wife with a revolver for refusing to get out of bed, then blew his own brains out. A 19-year-old Italian threw himself under a train after having, in the course of a squabble, severely injured his sister and killed his brother-in-law, an excellent worker and father of three infant children.

This was around the time of the trial of Marcel Lobjois, a poor little orphan, who killed the brute who had married the sister who had so tenderly raised him, and whom he adored. We recall that Lobjois was acquitted.

The day before, parents who hid in their house the skeletal remains of a six-month-old baby who had been starved to death were arrested in Perpignan.

In Paris itself, a young man of twenty-seven killed himself by jumping out of the window in despair over the death of his youngest son. He had never been able to get his young wife to stop going out shopping in order to take care of their two children, and he took into the void with him the heartbreaking certainty that if the little one, who had been ill, had died, it was because her mother had not wanted to bother to care for him.

To top it all off, here is the story that one of our colleagues told us:

A girl of 18, having been “seduced,” had two children.

The “seducer,” moreover, wished only to provide his partner and children with all the guarantees offered by the Civil Code: he was ready to marry her.

However, the wedding could not take place, and the girl remained disgraced, the bastards remained bastards...

Why?

Because the father of the poor girl stubbornly refused his consent. Now this father, an inveterate alcoholic, was serving a prison sentence for raping another of his daughters ...

The courts had forgotten to rule on his deprivation of paternal rights over her, or deemed it unnecessary.

In just ten days, so much blood, so many tears on the dress of this beautiful symbolic figure, the Family!

And I have deliberately overlooked all the “crimes of passion,” all the dramas of jealousy, all the shootings between spouses, fiancés, lovers...

What a dark mass of hatred and grief this proliferation of murders suggests in the countless families where things have not quite risen to the level of crime!

Households disunited; brothers made enemies; children morally or physically tortured; parents the victims of their sons and ungrateful or unnatural daughters; alas, haven't these all been common currency ever since the Greek legend of the Atreides established the frightful prototype of the Family?

The Family! But it does not yet exist, it cannot yet exist ...

Obviously, not all familial associations are like those that we see in the police blotters, and chance, which presides over marriages as well as births, sometimes creates charming and perfect households...

But why must this, to such a large extent, be left up to chance?

The Family, the true family, worthy of respect and envy, will only exist when enough men and women are sufficiently advanced to make an honest and thoughtful pact in which friendship and esteem will share that love, in which considerations of interest and caste will be hunted. None will need laws then: convicts are chained to one another, but we do not chain friends.

When a couple thus formed has – voluntarily – given birth to a child, all the more loved for having been expected, they

will form a family, and when these couples become numerous, Society will have a chance to take shape.

But until then, for a family, what ugly couplings, what shoddy compromises! Let us try, at least, to destroy the hypocrisy that would have us take them for the beautiful, noble reality. And let us find the strength to look the meanness and wretchedness in the face today, so that tomorrow may be more beautiful ...