

**THE EVOLUTION  
OF MARRIAGE  
AND OF THE  
FAMILY**

BY  
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## **PREFACE.**

A few preliminary observations in regard to the aim and method of this work may be useful to the reader.

He will do well to begin by persuading himself, with Montaigne, that the "hinges of custom" are not always the "hinges of reason," and still less those of reality in all times and places. He will do better still to steep himself in the spirit of scientific evolution, and to bear in mind that incessant change is the law of the social, quite as much as of the physical and organic world, and that the most splendid blossoms have sprung from very humble germs. This is the supreme truth of science, and it is only when such a point of view has become quite familiar to us that we shall be neither troubled nor disconcerted by the sociological history of humanity; and however shocking or unnatural certain customs may appear, we shall guard ourselves against any feeling of indignation at them, and more especially against a thoughtless refusal to give credence to them, simply because they run counter to our own usages and morality.

All that social science has a right to ask of the facts which it registers is that they should be authentic; this duly proved, it only remains to accept, classify, and interpret them. Faithful to this method, without which there could be no science of sociology, I have here gathered together as proofs a number of singular facts, which, improbable as they may appear according to our pre-conceived notions, and criminal according

to our moral sense, are nevertheless most instructive. Although in a former work I have taken care to establish the relativity of morality, the explanations that I am about to make are not out of season; for the subject of this book is closely connected with what, *par excellence*, we call "morals."

On this point I must permit myself a short digression.

No one will pretend that our so-called civilised society has a very strict practical morality, yet public opinion still seems to attach a particular importance to sexual morality, and this is the expression of a very real sentiment, the origin of which scientific sociology has no difficulty in retracing. This origin, far from being a lofty one, goes back simply to the right of proprietorship in women similar to that in goods and chattels—a proprietorship which we find claimed in savage, and even in barbarous countries, without any feeling of shame. During the lower stages of social evolution, women are uniformly treated as domestic animals; but this female live-stock are difficult to guard; for, on the one hand, they are much coveted and are unskilful in defending themselves, and on the other, they do not bend willingly to the one-sided duty of fidelity that is imposed on them. The masters, therefore, protect their own interests by a whole series of vexatious restraints, of rigorous punishments, and of ferocious revenges, left at first to the good pleasure of the marital proprietors, and afterwards regulated and codified. In the chapter on adultery, especially, will be found a great number of examples of this marital savagery. I have previously shown, in my *Evolution de la Morale*, that the unforeseen result of all this jealous fury has been to endow humanity, and more particularly women, with



the delicate sentiment of modesty, unknown to the animal world and to primitive man.

From this evolution of thousands of years there has finally resulted, in countries and races more or less civilised, a certain sexual morality, which is half instinctive, and varies according to time and place, but which it is impossible to transgress without the risk of offending gravely against public opinion. Civilisations, however, whether coarse or refined, differ from each other. Certain actions, counted as blameworthy in one part of the world, are elsewhere held as lawful and even praiseworthy. In order to trace the origin of marriage and of the family, it is therefore indispensable to relate a number of practices which may be scandalous in our eyes. While submitting to this necessity, I have done so unwillingly, and with all the sobriety which befits the subject. I have striven never to depart from the scientific spirit, which purifies everything, and renders even indecency decent.

Like the savages of to-day, our distant ancestors were very little removed from simple animal existence. A knowledge of their physiology is nevertheless necessary to enable us to understand our own; for, however cultivated the civilised man may be, he derives from the humble progenitors of his race a number of instincts which are energetic in proportion as they are of a low order. More or less deadened, these gross tendencies are latent in the most highly developed individuals; and when they sometimes break out suddenly in the actions of a man's life, or in the morals or literature of a people, they recall to us our very humble origin, and even show a certain mental and moral retrogression.

Now it is to this primitive man, still in such a rudimentary state, that we must go back for enlightenment on the genesis of all our social institutions. We must take him at the most distant dawn of humanity, follow him step by step in his slow metamorphoses, without either disparaging or poetising him; we must watch him rising and becoming more refined through accumulated centuries, till he loses by degrees his animal instincts, and at length acquires aptitudes, inclinations, and faculties that are truly human.

Nothing is better adapted to exemplify the evolution which binds our present to our past and to our future than the sociological history of marriage and of the family.

After having spoken of the aim of this book, it remains for me to justify its method. This differs considerably from what the mass of the public like far too well. But a scientific treatise must not take purely literary works for its models; and I can say to my readers, with much more reason than old Rabelais, that if they wish to taste the marrow, they must take the trouble to break the bone. My first and chief consideration is to assist in the foundation of a new science—ethnographical sociology. Elegant and vain dissertations, or vague generalities, have no place here. It is by giving way to these, and in attempting to reap the harvest before sowing the seed, that many authors have lost themselves in a pseudo-sociology, having no foundation, and consequently no value.

Social science, if it is to be seriously constituted, must submit with docility to the method of natural science. The first task, and the one which especially falls to the lot of the sociologists of the present day, is to collect the facts which will form

materials for the future edifice. To their successors will fall the pleasure of completing and adorning it.

The present work is, therefore, above all, a collection of facts which, even if taken alone, are curious and suggestive. These facts have been patiently gleaned from the writings of ethnographers, travellers, legists, and historians. I have classed them as well as I could, and naturally they have inspired me here and there with glimpses of possible inductions, and with some slight attempts at generalisation.

But whether the reader rejects or accepts my interpretations, the groundwork of facts on which they rest is so instructive of itself that a perusal of the following pages cannot be quite fruitless.

CH. LETOURNEAU.

**THE EVOLUTION OF MARRIAGE  
AND OF THE FAMILY.**

# CHAPTER I.

## THE BIOLOGICAL ORIGIN OF MARRIAGE.

I. *The True Place of Man in the Animal Kingdom.*—Man is a mammiferous, bimanous vertebrate—Biology the starting-point of sociology—The origin of love.

II. *Reproduction.*—Nutrition and reproduction—Scissiparity—Budding—Ovulation—Conjugation—Impregnation—Reproduction in the invertebrates—The entity called Nature—Organic specialisation and reproduction—A dithyramb by Haeckel.

III. *Rut and Love.*—Rut renders sociable—Rut is a short puberty—Its organic adornment—The frenzy of rut—Physiological reason of rut in mammals—Love and rut—Schopenhauer and the designs of Nature.

IV. *Love of Animals.*—Love and death—The law of coquetry—The law of battle—Jealousy and æsthetic considerations—Love amongst birds—Effects of sexual selection—The loves of the skylark—The males of the blue heron and their combats—Battles of male geese and male gallinaceæ—Courteous duels between males—Æsthetic seduction among certain birds—Æsthetic constructions—Musical seduction—Predominance of the female among certain birds—Greater sensuality of the male—Effect of sexual exaltation—A Cartesian paradox—Individual choice amongst animals—Individual fancies of females—General propositions.

## ***I. The True Place of Man.***

We have too long been accustomed to study human society as if man were a being apart in the universe. In comparing human bipeds with animals it has seemed as if we were disparaging these so-called demi-gods. It is to this blind prejudice that we must attribute the tardy rise of anthropological sociology. A deeper knowledge of biological science and of inferior races has at last cured us of this childish vanity. We have decided to assign to man his true place in the organic world of our little globe. Granted that the human biped is incontestably the most intelligent of terrestrial animals, yet, by his histological texture, by his organs, and by the functions of these organs, he is evidently only an animal, and easily classed in the series: he is a bimanous, mammiferous vertebrate. Not that by his most glorious representatives, by those whom we call men of genius, man does not rise prodigiously above his distant relations of the mammal class; but, on the other hand, by imperfectly developed specimens he descends far below many species of animals; for if the idiot is only an exception, the man of genius is still more so. In fact, the lowest human races, with whose anatomy, psychology, and sociology we are to-day familiar, can only inspire us with feelings of modesty. They furnish studies in ethnography which have struck a mortal blow at the dreams of "the kingdom of man."

When once it is established that man is a mammal like any other, and only distinguished from the animals of his class by a greater cerebral development, all study of human sociology must logically be preceded by a corresponding study of animal sociology. Moreover, as sociology finally depends on biology, it

will be necessary to seek in physiological conditions themselves the origin of great sociological manifestations. The first necessity of societies is that they should endure, and they can only do so on the condition of providing satisfaction for primordial needs, which are the condition of life itself, and which imperatively dominate and regulate great social institutions. Lastly, if man is a sociable animal, he is not the only one; many other species have grouped themselves in societies, where, however rudimentary they may be, we find in embryonic sketch the principal traits of human agglomerations. There are even species—as, for example, bees, ants, and termites—that have created true republics, of complicated structure, in which the social problem has been solved in an entirely original manner. We may take from them more than one good example, and more than one valuable hint.

My present task is to write the history of marriage and of the family. The institution of marriage has had no other object than the regulation of sexual unions. These have for their aim the satisfaction of one of the most imperious biological needs—the sexual appetite; but this appetite is only a conscious impulse, a “snare,” as Montaigne calls it, which impels both man and animal to provide, as far as concerns them, for the preservation of their species—to “pay the ancestral debt,” according to the Brahmanical formula. Before studying the sexual relations, and their more or less regulated form in human societies, it will not be out of place to say a few words on reproduction in general, to sketch briefly its physiology in so far as this is fundamental, and to show how tyrannical are the instincts whose formation has been determined by physiological causes, and which

render the fiercest animals mild and tractable. This is what I shall attempt to do in the following chapter.

## ***II. Reproduction.***

Stendhal has somewhere said that the beautiful is simply the outcome of the useful; changing the phrase, we may say that generation is the outcome of nutrition. If we examine the processes of generation in very simple organisms, this great function seems to answer to a superabundance of nutritive materials, which, after having carried the anatomic elements to their maximum volume, at length overflows and provokes the formation of new elements. As long as the new-born elements can remain aggregated with those which already constitute the individual, as long as the latter has not acquired all the development compatible with the plan of its being, there is simply growth. When once the limit is attained that the species cannot pass, the organism (I mean a very rudimentary organism) reproduces itself commonly by a simple division in two halves. It perishes in doubling itself and in producing two beings, similar to itself, and having nothing to do but grow. It is by means of this bi-partition that hydras, vorticellæ, algæ, and the lowest mushrooms are generally propagated.

In the organisms that are slightly more complicated the function of reproduction tends to be specialised. The individual is no longer totally divided; it produces a bud which grows by degrees, and detaches itself from the parent organism to run in its turn through the very limited adventures of its meagre existence.



By a more advanced step in specialisation the function of reproduction becomes localised in a particular cell, an ovule, and the latter, by a series of repeated bi-partitions, develops a new individual; but it is generally necessary that the cellule destined to multiply itself by segmentation should at first dissolve by union with another cell. Through the action of various organic processes the two generating cells arrive in contact. The element which is to undergo segmentation—the female element—then absorbs the element that is simply impulsive; the element called male becomes impregnated with it, and from that moment it is fertilised, that is to say, capable of pursuing the course of its formative work.

This phenomenon, so simple in itself, of the conjugation of two cellules, is the foundation of reproduction in the two organic kingdoms as soon as the two sexes are separated. Whether the sexes are represented by distinct or united individuals, whether the accessory organic apparatus is more or less complicated, are matters of no consequence; the essential fact reappears always and everywhere of the conjugation of two cellules, with absorption, in the case of superior animals, of the male cellule by the female cellule.

The process may be observed in its most elementary form in the algæ and the diatomaceæ, said to be conjugated. To form a reproductive cellule, or spore, two neighbouring cellules each throw out, one towards the other, a prolongation. These prolongations meet, and their sides absorb each other at the point of contact; then the protoplasts of the two elements mingle, and at length the two cellules melt into a single reproductive cellule (*Spirogyra longata*).

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