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EDITORIAL

WAGES AND MARRIAGE.

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AS one manifestation of the panic which has quadrupled the number of unemployed in the country {from} a year ago, is the fact noted by the town clerks and registrars that the number of marriages has fallen off from two-thirds to three-quarters.

How there can be sanctity of the home without homes is a mystery our capitalist friends must solve for us. How capitalism can be worshipped and kowtowed to as the preserver of the sanctity of the home, when it persistently tends to destroy both homes and sanctity, is another nut to crack, no easier than the first.

While the absolute number of marriages is, of course, increasing with the population, the relative proportion of married persons to unmarried is continually falling. The hard times at present descended and descending on the country will send this proportion rocket-like, earthward.

That, it is true, is an abnormal accentuation of the relative decrease of marriage and the even-stepped increase of immorality necessarily accompanying it. But even aside from the abnormalities of panic times, the whole trend of modern competitive society leads none the less surely because slowly in the same direction.

There are two tests by which the mating period of an animal, of whatever rank or species, is determined. One is the test of physical maturity, or the proper development necessary for the proper functioning of parenthood; the other might be called the test of economic maturity, or the proper development necessary for the animal to provide for his mate and the offspring.

In the lower animals, from the earthworm up to the manlike apes, these two maturities coincide. As soon as a jellyfish, a gull or a tiger has reached the growth which will enable him to become a parent, he also has the powers that will enable him to catch or kill food for those dependent upon him. Needs are few, the plane of

life is not high, if, indeed, there can be said to be such a thing, often in the lower forms the young are able to take care of themselves from the moment of individual existence; often the mother, in nowise incapacitated by the duties of procreation from those of the chase or forage, can at once take up the task of providing for herself and the new arrivals. Every circumstance tends towards the spontaneous exercise, as soon as mature, of the functions of generation.

With mankind, however, the matter stands differently. Here mind enters into the problem, and upsets all previous working rules. Man must have started out in the beginning the same, in this regard, as his nearest ancestors. But, being a tool-using animal, he soon learned to accumulate stores of provisions against the time of need, and to build him shelters against the inclemency of the elements. Nature, taking advantage of this, in her desire to spread all species rapidly, before long removed, in man's case, the seasonal limits set to the mating of the animals of lower type. In other words, the reproductive impulse was made constant instead of intermittent. As man grew in mental stature, as literature, poesy, music and arts blossomed, artificial agencies came to second these natural impulses. Finally, in modern society the impure and stimulating foods, the crowded living, the tainted life forced in some way or other on nearly all, have assisted in driving back earlier and earlier the age of physical maturity—of course, reproductive maturity is meant.

On the other hand, what do we see happening to the age of economic maturity? Here, also, Nature took the lead in causing a variation. As animal forms ascend the scale, it takes the young a longer and longer period to become independent individuals. A young oyster is an oyster in a week or two after hatching; a pup is capable of self-support in a month, a horse in six months. In savage tribes the child of ten or twelve assumes the labors of adult-hood; civilized man has almost universally, both by laws and by opinion, set the age of independence at twenty-one.

With modern man the expansion of the scale of living, the increased cost of commodities, the lowering of real wages, and the general insecurity surrounding the making of a living, have forced still further on the age of economic maturity. A century ago in America, the majority of men married between twenty and thirty; today, it is more like thirty to forty. Thus, while the age of that maturity which fits man physically to enter parenthood has been steadily shortened, the age of

economic ability to sustain a family has actually been lengthened in much faster tempo. The conflict between physical impulses and the material possibilities of satisfying them honorably and morally has been drawn sharp. To overload the brimming cup in the attempt to conjure down the ogre of its own creating, capitalism has established the house of ill repute, sometimes upheld even by ministers of the chaste Nazarene as “necessary to society.”

The picture is dark, but it need not remain so. Proper and universal education, a change to purer and more wholesome methods of diet and living, the establishment of a system of production which will assure to every adult person willing to work a competence sufficient for all needs—that will solve the problem, and abolish from the earth the long blot of woman’s debasement. But that means Socialism; hence he who stands and works not for Socialism is a drag on the wheels of race morality.

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