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Henry Bordeaux: the family as a basis of French society

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Henry Bordeaux: The Family as a Basis of French Society.

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Frances Cecilia Laughrea

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Henry Bordeaux: The Family as a Basis of French Society.

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Henry Bordeaux: The Family as a Basis of French Society.

It is an unfortunate fact that the recent visit to France of some two million or more Americans tended to confirm rather than to eradicate the notion that "the French have no home". No other writer presents so convincingly the truth concerning the French "foyer" as does M. Henry Bordeaux. He is not only a writer of the first rank, but he represents a phase of French literature which is not as well known on this side of the Atlantic as it should be.

In the construction of French society the force of the past has been emphasized by various writers who have recognized it as the fruit of the experience of the ages—experience which has tried various forms of society and has retained but one, the family, as that at once most likely to endure and best qualified for the development of the nation. Profound changes, drawing their inspiration from the Revolution, have manifested themselves during the past thirty or thirty-five years in the French family. The truth is that, since the Revolution, a veritable battle has been going on in France between the old form of society, wherein the family occupied the foreground, and the new, where the individual claims precedence.

In all the ancient forms of society, the family was a little hierarchy, with its responsible chief and its obligations. Somebody had to be the leader of the group, and this direction was entrusted to the husband and father. His marital and paternal power arose to complete the order established by marriage. This order established in the family was the only institution already organized and prepared to come to the rescue. In the sixteenth century, the State was defined as: "all the households taken together form what we call the people. It is only by the succession of families that the people is rendered immortal. The republic cannot possibly stand fast if the families which are its pillars have weak foundations". The family is thus considered as the foundation of society and the symbol of government itself. This is not merely a theory for "philosophers to wag their heads over" but a fact proved by experience in the course of those many perilous and glorious centuries throughout which the might of France was revealed.

The economic development of the family is an important factor in early French society. The family settled permanently in one place, taking root through inheritance. Its wealth consisted only of real estate. The land conquered by the labor of one generation was transmitted to the next, the father appointing an heir—who varied according to the different provinces and their customs. Thus the property was handed down with the name, and became the visible image of the family's continuity, sometimes even to the point of becoming confused with it. A series of circumstances, economical and social, were favorable to this condition of things: custom, law, the peace and quiet of life on the farms, and the difficulty of communication. The right of inheritance brought with it heavy burdens. It implied the subordination of the individual's life to the existence and continuance of the family.

The family of ancient France has left the written evidence of its vitality in the "livres de raison", which were originally simple account books in which were enumerated the details of the division of the property. Gradually the habit grew of writing in them the dates which were of importance to the family,—dates of marriages, of births, of deaths. Later these dates were accompanied by commentaries; and with the aid of these alone, it has been possible to reconstruct the past existence of the family. We find in them also evidence of a double creed,—which perhaps can be considered as but a single one,—faith in God and faith in life. There are shadows in the picture of the French family. Indeed, the history of nations, as of individuals, offers few examples of powers which, if put to the test, have not been abused. The husband and father, with his double authority, did not always use it justly. There were cases where wife and children were reduced to slavery. Although the family is not composed of a series of individual happinesses, still it cannot, without danger to itself, rob its members of those rights which the human conscience holds most sacred; and the right to the pursuit of happiness is one of these. Compulsory vocations and forced marriages are a result of a wrong attitude toward the individual.

The Revolution did not come like a bolt from the blue, but like a bolt from a sky gradually overcast by clouds. The first cloud on the family horizon was caused by the Reformation, which opened the door of the home to individualism. Destroying the eternal promises, it

substituted the possibility of divorce for the principle of indissoluble union. This was the first alteration of marriage. Until the Reformation, there was no doubt of its permanence; now there came a new doctrine, which struck at marriage in its essential principle as a definite engagement entered into in the presence of God. After a stubborn struggle the Reformation was rejected in France, and Catholicism triumphed. But the foundation of the family had become a subject of argument; and the idea of impermanence was destined to gain ground. It gained ground throughout the eighteenth century, and became involved with a more general doctrine, that of the rights of the individual. According to the theories of Jean-Jacques Rousseau the individual was to be unshackled. He was to be born with rights, not with duties. He was to be dependent on neither his father nor his mother. It was to the State that Rousseau assigned the paternal power. As for marriage, how could two persons pledge themselves for the future when they were not sure of their own hearts? Feelings may change; liberty alone does not change.

Marriage, since it was a sacrament, had been bound up with religion. That bond was snapped by the Revolution. The law of September 20, 1792, made of marriage a purely civil contract, which the institution of divorce terminated. This law established three kinds of divorce: divorce by natural consent, divorce pronounced at the demand of one of the conjoined,—merely on account of the incompatibility of temper or of character,—and divorce for fixed causes. But in May 1816, divorce was abolished. The Civil Code, then, was a compromise between the ancient constitution of the family and revolutionary authority. In appearance it sustained the traditional family founded upon marriage, the marital power, the paternal power, and inheritance. But it altered the essential principles. It secularized marriage which ceased to be a religious act and became a civil contract. Finally, the nature of the marital and parental power was changed. The first belonged to husband only by right of marriage, ceasing to be his perquisite in his capacity as head and director of the community; the second was established in the interest of the child. Both became dependent upon law, instead of being simply recognized and protected by it. This fact shows how the new spirit was making itself felt.

One might believe, judging from appearances, that family life had not been altered by the turmoil of the Revolution, and that the experiment of individualism

had completely failed in France; either because individualism was not workable, or else—supposing that the social life of the nation could take other forms than that form of "collectivite familiale" put to the proof by so many centuries—because it was simply premature. But this was only apparently; for the battle continued, and the campaign for individualism set in again as early as the end of Restoration. It was directed from the first by the literature of the romantic movement, which had scarcely any ideal other than to champion the rights of the individual and to deify passion. The partisans of individualism finally triumphed. On July 27, 1884, divorce was put back into the body of the French law, and it began at once to produce its disintegrating effect upon the family. Thus there is a whole body of phenomena which testifies to a voluntary overthrow of tradition. The tendency is to pass systematically from a form of society based on the family to a form of society based on the individual. The individual takes the place of the family, which is thrust into the background.

It is in reference to this struggle that M. Bordeaux' literary career must be reviewed. In him we find an ardent champion of the cause of the family; andhis entire work in the field of the novel before the war was called by Fidus, a critic, "le roman de la famille francaise". This devotion to the cause of the family was not the result of mere chance, for there never was a writer better fitted by birth, training, and environment than was Henry Bordeaux.

He was born at Thonon-les-Bains, January 29, 1870. Thonon lies on the southern shore of Lake Geneva at the northern extremity of the old province of Savoy. This location is of great significance in the case of Bordeaux. At a very early age a fine sentiment for nature and the beautiful which gives an added charm to all he writes was awakened in him by a youth spent in a country of harmonious beauty, where the landscape unites in one grand panorama, fertile plains, wooded mountains, and snow-capped peaks, all reflected in the ever-changing waters of the beautiful blue lake. He loved his native province so profoundly that he has always remained true to it, and in all his writings the very soul of Savoy seems to be present. Savoy is a province full of vigor and charm, and out of a beautiful historic past, it takes a strong personality. Although its borders have been continually threatened, it has always won out; and because of its rugged land, it has exacted hard work of its laborers. And so, by this two-fold struggle, the Savoyard has kept a rough and vigorous character.

The family into which Bordeaux was born has done the most toward forming a suitable background for his later writings on the family. His father was a lawyer, a man of high standing in the profession and the community. He was an incomparable father—of a large family of five sons and three daughters. Although in 1870 he was already the father of four small children, he served as a volunteer in the Franco-Prussiam war, witnessed the ignominious defeat of France, and was quick to diagnose its causes. These were, according to him, first, lack of belief or faith in anything, be it God or any definite, inspiring principle; second, lack of discipline. In other words the humiliation of France was due to the same individualism which his son was to combat so vigorously. The principles contributed by this father to Henry Bordeaux and his brothers and sisters were; "a taste for belief, love of order, respect for right and authority".

Of Bordeaux' mother we have little knowledge by him, chiefly because the bond between mother and son was too close to allow of the public being admitted to the secrets of their intimacy. Thus Henry Bordeaux maintains a discreet silence regarding her. However it is safe to assume that she furnished many traits for Bordeaux' ideal mothers, such as Madame Guibert in "La Peur de Vivre". The fact that all five sons have been conspicuously successful is a fine tribute to the excellence of this home training. Two of the daughters are married, the third gave her life in the Orient as a Sister of Charity. Thus we know from what a source Henry Bordeaux drew his qualities; in what a country his principles are rooted; and we know where is the guarantee of that sincerity which we find everywhere throughout his work.

At the age of seventeen, Henry Bordeaux went to Paris to study law, and it was at this time that the city was saturated with individualism. He took with him from Thonon a note-book full of verses which he timidly submitted to Alphonse Daudet, showing that even at this early date the literary instinct had awakened in him. At Paris he found time not only for his law studies, but also for an enormous amount of reading of a varied character, thus laying the foundation for the broad literary career which has always characterized him as critic and author. He made his first bow to the Parisian public, while a law student, as a journalist, writing the daily account of the Paris Exposition of 1889 for the Petit Journal.

After completing his law studies, he returned to

Thonon in 1890 and became an "avocat stageaire" or probationary lawyer. His year of military service was spent at Annecy. During the years he now spent in the provinces, he continued to read widely, and to write, now in prose. He contributed articles to several journals, and in 1894, at the age of twenty-four, published a collection of critical essays on some of his favorite authors—Rod, Heredia, Ibsen—under the title of "Âmes Modernes". Shortly after this, Bordeaux returned to Paris where he became attached to the law department of the Paris-Lyon-Méditerranée railroad. However this career in Paris was abruptly cut short by the death of his father in 1896. A new duty now faced the young writer. He alone of his brothers was in a position to take up his father's career, continue the family tradition, keep the home intact. Fully convinced that to return to Savoy meant death to all his literary ambitions, Henry Bordeaux was too much the son of his father, too thoroughly trained in respect for duty, to hesitate before this call. So once more he found himself a member of the bar at Thonon, and not until a younger brother was ready to take his place at the law did he feel himself free to return to Paris.

Fortunately this sojourn in the provinces did not have the result Bordeaux had anticipated. Instead of ending prematurely his literary career, it proved a veritable blessing to him as a writer. As practising lawyer, and later as mayor of his commune, he had an unsurpassed opportunity to acquire the very thing he needed most, that is, a close grip on realities. He was able to accumulate a wealth of information and observation concerning the people and the country. He learned to know the peasants as they really are. He became initiated into the mysteries of petty provincial politics, which he later satirizes so charmingly. It was this sojourn in Savoy that furnished him with the types encountered everywhere in his family novels, characters which are really observed, and always drawn true to life, almost with photographic accuracy. Also these years at Thonon enabled him to escape the danger of being swallowed up by Paris to the extent of forgetting his native province, a fate which has befallen a great many writers.

It was as a critic that Henry Bordeaux began his career, and hence a few words about Bordeaux the critic will help us to understand Bordeaux the novelist and his treatment of the family. In his first volume of criticism, "Âmes Modernes", he lays down the principle which underlies nearly all his works in this field. "L'admiration

est la base de la critique. L'auteur de ce livre n' a que la prétention de l'enthousiasme". His policy is to write only about what he admires. His criticisms are imbued with the same moral earnestness that is noticed in everything he undertakes. His choice is significant, since he admits that he writes only about those authors whom he likes. He devotes studies to Barrès, Loti, Lemaître, Rod, Faguet and Bruntière. The writers who attract him are those who have fundamentally respect for the past, concern for the moral life, care for form, taste for classical tradition, and use wholesome language.

Bordeaux the novelist is a writer of moral courage and seriousness, with the firm conviction of the social duty of the artist. He does not preach, his novels are not propaganda for a previously conceived program, but he always has a thesis to maintain. He is thoroughly wholesome both in plot and in language. He is Savoisien to the core. Contrary to the general trend of the novel, he does not limit himself to Paris; in fact, his stories have little or nothing to do with the capital, nearly all his plots centering in his native province. His characters are real, normal, wholesome individuals. He makes us feel that they are never imagined, but rather depicted from keen and direct observation.

The underlying theme of most of his work is the solidarity of the family, while along with this he teaches other forms of loyalty, to home, to province, to country, and to religion. His plea is always to respect the past and to retain the best fruit of the experience of the ages—the family—as that at once most likely to endure and best qualified for the development of the ages. M. Bordeaux recognizes only one unit of society, the family. As described in the struggle between the old and the new form of society, the family is a partnership, a corporation, a clan. It is something more than the sum of the individuals whom it comprises in all their human and fallible complexity; it has a dominant, supreme claim to devotion for its own sake. The human beings who compose it, like those who at any time may compose a nation, must pass into oblivion; but the family itself can outlive them perennially. The first of human duties thus becomes not individual, but self-abnegating and social. Upon the solidarity of the family depends all civilization. With the picture of the family constantly in his mind, divorce and other modern manifestations of individualism inspired horror in Bordeaux.

The conception of the family is treated more or less

directly in Bordeaux' novels of the family cycle up to the outbreak of the Great War. In his first novel of importance, "Le Pays Natal" which appeared in 1900, he struck the note which characterizes nearly all his work in this field. A young man returning from Paris to his estates near Annecy, in order to sell them and return to the capital with the money, feels the call of his native soil, and ends by retaining and settling down on the family homestead, and devoting himself to the good of the commune. It was the success of this novel, in spite of many evidences of the author's inexperience, which induced Bordeaux to give up law and devote himself exclusively to literature.

Of the novels dealing with the family, "La Peur de Vivre", which appeared in 1902, is the most widely read of all Bordeaux' works. It has had the distinction of being "crowned" by the Academy, the highest official recognition that can be given to a novel in France. It is a bold and deliberate attack on the individualism so rampant at the time it was written. The title represents the author's diagnosis of the disease which was bringing France to the verge of dissolution, and was making the world, even France herself, accept the German-inspired idea that France was degenerate and decadent.

The fear of living is a disease which extends its ravages principally to old civilizations. The symptoms of this moral phthisis may be outwardly contradictory; for there are two ways of being afraid to live as there are two kinds of selfishness.

The first, the most frequent today and the most cowardly, has already been denounced by Dante, who in the third canto of the Inferno, brands it with the red-hot iron of his scorn. Guided by Virgil the poet arrives at the Gate of the City of Tears. He has not yet entered the door when he hears, rising up from the bottom of the abyss, groans, shrieks and cries of despair, which resound under a starless sky. From what lips do these sounds proceed, these sounds which come from near Hell, but not from Hell itself? Dante in his destress asks his master for an explanation.

"Master", said Dante, "what do I hear, and what is this crowd which seems so crushed by sorrow?"

And he said: "This is the miserable fate of the sad souls of all those who have lived without blame and without praise. They are mingled with that dread chorus of angels who were neither faithful to God, nor rebellious; but who

existed for themselves only. They have been banished from Heaven, because they spoiled its beauty, and the depths of Hell would not receive them because the damned would gain some glory by their presence".

And Dante said: "Master, what is the torment that is crushing them and makes them weep so bitterly?"

He answered: "I will tell you briefly. They have no hope of dying and their dark life is so vile that they are envious of every other fate. The world has no memory of them. Do not speak of them, look and pass on....."

If the Inferno describes worse torments, it contains no words more scathing in their disdain than those which describe "those inert ones who are pleasing neither to God nor to his enemies". The misers who carry burdens, the evil-tempered who struggle in a bog, the voluptuous dragged into an endless whirlwind, the rogues plunged into a lake of boiling pitch, have deserved their punishment by their acts, and have asserted themselves neither in evil nor in good. Neither virtuous nor vicious, we do not know what they were. Dull, flabby and soft, they have not left behind the memory of any personality. They scarcely lived; they were afraid to live.

For the fear of living means precisely that,—to deserve neither blame nor praise. It is the constant all-prevailing desire for peace. It is the flight from responsibilities, struggles, risks, and efforts. It is the careful avoidance of danger, fatigue, exaltation, passion enthusiasm, sacrifice, every violent action, everything that disturbs and upsets. It is the refusal of life's claims upon our hearts, our sweat, and our blood. In short, it is the pretence of living, while limiting life, while setting bounds to our destinies. It is that passive selfishness which would rather diminish its appetite than seek the food which it requires; the selfishness which is meanly content with a colorless, dull life, provided it is sure of meeting with no shocks, no difficulties, no obstacles, like the traveler who will only journey along plains and on rubber tires.

It is the fear of living which inspires a young man in the choice of a profession, which shows him the special advantages of an official career providing him, in return for work that is moderate in amount and does not take up much time, with a fixed salary and a pension; that modest dream which inspired Goncourt to make this epigram——

"France is a country where one sows functionaries and reaps taxes".

It is certainly this fear which, when it does not lead to a comfortable, selfish, practical bachelor's life, prompts those marriages wherein one consults one's lawyer rather than one's heart, and thinks of income rather than of the advantages of beauty, physical and moral health, education, courage, ability and taste. Certain theories of the day, which on their critical side are not without justification, pretend to purify the sources of marriage by suppressing the consent of parents which is often too apt to overlook personal characteristics through consideration of the advantages to be gained, and by multiplying the facilities for union with the facilities for divorce; in a word, by associating marriage with those other unions which have no regard for the social order, into which they introduce anarchy. But marriage is the foundation of the home; its aim is to complete two lives by joining the one to the other and to bring other beings into the world.. It cannot rely solely on that love which is commonly represented with bandaged eyes; for it is not purely an individual act, in that it both continues a tradition and perpetuates a race. Is it the importance of this race and this tradition which has to be considered, or is it only a petty ideal of practical happiness, confortable and ignoble? Can man not feel himself fit to guide, guard and direct the destinies of his own? Can woman not deprive herself of luxuries that are useless, or at least merely accessory? Would life stripped of so many accessories and so many useless things, simplified but not diminished, become unacceptable? Must the place of moral force be taken by the heritage handed down by one's father?

After marriage, we find again the fear of living in the dread of having children and the restraint of parenthood. To create life has become too heavy a responsibility, too irksome a burden, above all a nuisance; and it is thus that France has been called the "land of only sons". By suppressing the choice of making a will, the Civil Code has struck a heavy blow at the coherent unity of the family, grouped round its head and supported by its land. But we have lately been told by "La Reforme Sociale", of the method employed by the Normandy peasants, after having already been employed by so many of the bourgeoisie of France for the preservation of the inheritance. For the heir nominated by the father, or according to custom, is substituted the only son. A child is such a rarity that it is watched over and spoilt. Thus the fear of living has its effect even on those destinies which depend, so far as their beginnings are concerned, upon us only. So

many fathers and mothers cannot consent to be separated from their children, and turn them aside from careers that are wider but more adventurous, from marriages which would take them far away but which would be morally advamtageous to them; they weaken them, enervate or wear out their courage instead of arousing it, and in their sentimental selfishness impose on them a servitude which lowers their characters.

Of this fear of living examples are to be found in our public life, in our social life, in the art which expresses the feeling of our times, in our institutions, even in matters of our health.

In the life of a modern nation, rightly or wrongly, everything reduces itself to politics or is influenced by politics. "The really useful work," said Mr. Roosevelt, "is not accomplished by the critic who keeps out of the battle but by the man of action who bravely takes part in the struggle, without fear at the sight of blood or sweat". There are so many of these critics who keep out of the battle, and who read the papers every morning in order to be able to discuss the affairs of the nation in a superior tone, who mainly regret the past, sigh over the future, and discourage those who undertake to show them the way.

The mere fact of living in society, of enjoying social rank, creates social duties. No one has the right to arrange his life separately, for no one person can dispense with the rest. To pay one's taxes, grumbling all the time, is not enough. The wealth which represents accumulated work in the past does not exempt one from work. Since it furnishes the means of better and greater production, it should result, not in a class of people who enjoy it, but in a class of leaders, and a leader is one who understands how to take on himself the greatest share of the work and responsibility. But to judge from observation, it would seem that wealth is only a factor in selfishness, an occasion for petty and ridiculous pleasures—as though they were more difficult to bear than poverty. The latter constantly furnishes examples of solidarity and devotion. In strikes we often see workmen suffering from hunger and poverty for the sake of one another, or subscribing a tithe of their modest wages to help their comrades in other towns and other trades. There is no doubt that poverty is very painful to look upon. It disturbs our peace, our comfort, our natural forgetfulness of all that does not minister to our pleasures. People even consent to be generous—through the medium of someone else—to escape the inconvenience of sorrowful spectacles. We have our nerves, our refinement, our horror of the unfortunate, and

we adroitly evade the demands of charity, although we can never deny the power of its appeal. "I do not want to see either illness or death", says Hedda Gabler, Ibsen's most morbid heroine, to her husband". "Spare me the sight of everything that is ugly". And this aesthetic person, at the moment when she kills herself in disgust after having lived for herself alone, sees that ridicule and low ideals have infected like a curse everything she touched.

In the realm of art, the fear of living is mingled with the fear of feeling. It moves those (dilettantes) who wish neither to make a choice nor to give themselves up, who only yield themselves temporarily to all their intellectual or plastic impulses without ever surrendering to enthusiasm, and who consider themselves superior because they float on the top of things; for, deep as the subject be, love alone can penetrate beneath the surface. This fear also actuates those artists who, in the name of pure art, reject from their work all humanity and poetry; who substitute for those familiar conflicts of the soul, which are the life-food of ancient tragedy, the pretty but unsubstantial painting of pleasure, and are content to elaborate their style like the sides of a costly but empty vase—without the slightest suspicion that in art, as in everything else, there is a definite order of merit, and that they are seated on the lowest step.

It is everywhere, this fear of living; it provides inspiration for the effeminate novelists and the incapable dramatists, who can create none but inconsistent characters, incapable of analysis. The great human cries, in art, are cries of strength and courage, and are often forced into utterance by unhappiness; suggesting that perhaps the happy spirit lacks the depth that is to be found in the abysses of life.

Lastly, timidity, reserve, and a prudence that is sometimes legitimate but often excessive, find their expression even in our public institutions, which multiply our guardians, put us all into leading strings, and relegate to the State the duty of looking after and helping us on all occasions. They have even undertaken to replace the old Providence—by insurance companies! We insure ourselves against accidents, against risks, against death—indeed a far-sighted wisdom. Then why should we not be insured also against fear?

Fear stamps the faces of young men of the new generation, who appear to be anxious only about their health, and who open their mouths only to criticize and to disparage; who praise

nothing, like nothing, want nothing, as if they had fishes' blood in their veins. Why all this trouble to preserve and keep themselves, for all the good that they get out of or contribute to life?

Could youth set less value than it does upon life? The suicide of a schoolboy at Lyons added a fresh note—most terrible of all—to the indictment of the Déracinés, the uprooted ones, against an education which ignores the facts of family, race, locality and country. Before going to his death, the poor lad wrote on the blackboard, "I am young, I am pure, I am going to die". The teaching of his professor of philosophy had disgusted him with life.

They had taught him the beauty of reason, of science, of humanitarianism. Instead of being told to take his proper place in the order of things, he was called upon to destroy all in order to rebuild all again, to make a clean slate of the past, of tradition, of the destiny which had caused him to be born in a particular country at a particular time, in order to create a new personality for himself, a new universe, a new God. Besides preparing for his material future, they expected him, as of all Frenchmen, that he should create for himself a metaphysics, a politics, and a morality. He succumbed to all these burdens. Life did not appear to him in a shape with exact outlines, with beautiful lights and dark shadows, with the concomitants of effort, joy, and sorrow, with priviliges of working, of feeling behind one a past that one may carry forward, and of being able to count even on the future. It was for him a dense fog, which his reason vainly tried to pierce, in which he heard the call neither of God, of race, nor of country. He did not see his own importance, which was not merely individual but collective; he did not understand that everyone's duty is to recognize one's own place, that everyone's strength and profit are to be sought in the realities of existence on which he depends and which in their turn depend on him. And so he learned a new fear of living.

Even our health has suffered from the reaction of our moral weakness. Nervous illnesses, which for several years have been making such alarming progress, are nothing else than the result of disabled wills, of weakened personalities. Doctor Grasset, Professor of Medicine at Montpellier, who has gained universal renown by his special study of these diseases, clearly states the necessity of recourse to a moral treatment which consists in building up the personality and strengthening the will. "We must", he says, "give the patient the desire and the ambition to cure himself, and

with that purpose we must show him the object that life still holds for him, the missions that he still has to fulfill in this world".

There is yet another form of the fear of living. Here there is no shrinking from effort, from trouble, or from battle. Next to passive selfishness, it is necessary to drag into the light that active egotism which is capable of displaying the utmost vigor, but only to satisfy an individual aim, that of one's own pleasure. This puts to a wrong use our best weapon, which is energy. It claims to subordinate life to its will, to accept it for what it is actually worth, and therefore it fears life.

Doubtless this curious form of cowardice has more to recommend it than the other, and attracts by a pretence of merit. Its motto might be the celebrated definition of Mérimée: "Life is a green table which amuses us only when the stakes are high". Its defiance of life sometimes becomes a defiance of death, and we cannot restrain ourselves from admiration when we see Don Juan—the most brilliant incarnation of this bold selfishness—the breaker of all oaths, alone in the banquet-hall, rise and go forth, torch in hand and sarcasm on his lips, to meet the statue of the Commander, whose embrace is to crush him.

This energy which demands violent pleasure, is the energy of the bandit. This is the case in business, in politics, in society, to some extent everywhere, with men and even women, who in one way or another display their strength and courage. They are not necessarily bandits, but they all desire to get only joys, or at least violent sensations, out of life, and aim at throwing it away afterwards like a squeezed orange. These are the mad individualists who will not observe any measure in enjoyment, and see in the world only a personal inheritance to be wasted by them. Never has the possibility of a future life been so insolently rejected, and never have we exposed ourselves with such foolhardiness to all dangers of destruction, as though it were necessary to make a blaze of this, our only life, in order to discover in it some divine fire. We plunge it in the whirlwind of death, to increase its intensity for a few precarious moments.

Beyond the appetite for those passions, which, through their very violence, their risks, their mischances, have a certain grandeur, is seen among the symptoms of this disease the search for, the need of, distraction. One meets today, especially in Paris among the wealthier classes—for poverty suppresses this ardor—men and women who seem to flee from

themselves, so agitated are they. They confuse the meaning of agitation and action. We pass our time outside our homes, or we come back with a crowd, so as to avoid solitude for a single instant. We make out a program every morning, so harassing that we should refuse to go through with it if we were forced to do so. We must amuse ourselves, distract ourselves, forget ourselves. To withdraw within ourselves is to be bored when we have neither love nor faith nor definite aim. And we think we are living a great deal; which is the reason why so many Parisians, men and women, to whom a variety of spectacles and a feast of art are supposed to bring great intellectual development, have seen so much and have retained so little.

That is not living, to be always "out"--even to oneself, especially to oneself; any more than it is travelling when one rushes over the high roads at full speed in a motor without once stopping. Life is not perpetual distraction, and here we have another form of the fear of living.

The first form confused cowardly passivity, reserve, and parsimony with courageous resignation, while this militant egotism confuses strength with its display. The only true energy is that which is ordered and disciplined. Energy fits us to bear failure, pain, and effort. Thus this fine quality needs discipline. Its character depends on the use that is made of it. To cultivate it for itself would be to imitate those people who make sport of the aim of their existence. Sport maintains or increases our strength and our health, of which we have need in order to realize our life; but to take them for the actual realization of life would only be grotesque. Nature develops itself blindly and lavishly. Everything pertaining to the human sphere is subject to order. And, just as no work of art can be produced without submission to the loves of harmony, so there is no fine life without the acceptance of an order conditioned by our dependence and our limitations. But to regulate our energy is not to diminish it. On the contrary it is to possess and manage it as a horseman a well-trained horse. Life itself suffers violence. The luke-warm and moderate natures have never created anything; the creative are the passionate ones who have tamed their passions.

In order to live all our life, it is important to accept it in the past, the present, and the future as well. In the past, this means to recognize a tradition. Neither nations nor individuals appear suddenly in the light of day. We must recognize the ties that bind us to the country where we were born, to the race from which we have sprung. To get inspiration from the past does not mean to identify oneself with it. Every age has its own needs, which must be understood.

New conditions of life have sprung up, which need a new spirit of enterprise. The future, revealed in the faces of our children reminds us that our goal lies beyond us, and that we must prepare a shelter for our descendants.

It is not to be thought that, in developing in ourselves the love of life, we create a greater fear of death. Our life is not in proportion to its length. The more important thing is not to grow old, but to fill up all one's days unto the last, knowing well that the last will come and give to our life its finished form. For the acceptance of the whole of life includes the acceptance of death.

Our early youth, for which death scarcely exists, knows nothing of the value of days. It thinks our strength inexhaustible and squanders it idly. When we begin to see, around us and in us, the charm and the sadness of transient things, we feel life in all its fulness because we are amazed at the incessant flight of time. Our days are numbered. But the divisions of time are purely conventional. The last minutes that we are destined to live may be the most intense. They may become the important part of our existence if we know that they are the last. They have the tremendous power of summing up in themselves all our past days, of completing the design of our life, of defining the outlines, and sometimes of revealing them for the first time. They bring us the supreme opportunity to correct our faults, to perform the most imperative duties which we have forgotten. The man who is about to die should act like a man who is about to die, not as a man who has plenty of time left. Doctors think to soothe him by hiding his danger from him; but they take away from him a part of his life whose importance could never be measured in duration. He will waste his remaining strength in guessing at the truth, in scrutinizing the blank faces around him, in questioning the throbs of his pulse, the beating of his heart. He will be a prey to all the terrors of doubt, when he has the right to finish his life by preparing for death. A beautiful death is the indispensable complement of a beautiful life, and the ransom of a wicked one. We must raise ourselves above the fear of death, and for that we must begin to see life as it is, so that we may live bravely, fully, nobly. The fear of death is one with the fear of living, which makes us shrink from the great efforts, the boldness, and the sacrifices that life demands from us.

Life is, after all, such a precious thing that one must neither reject it entirely like those egoists, who soften and contract it to such a degree that it loses all its value; nor partly reject it like those vigorous egoists, who claim to subordinate it to their choice.

The very act of opening one's eyes to the light of day involves a debt of gratitude to those who have permitted us to see it. Formerly in the French family there was no doubt as to the goodness of life. The old French family wrote its own story in its "commonplace books"—humble volumes of accounts which soon came to hold the most important facts of private life. In them one would not find a denial of the goodness of life. Faith in the goodness of life, acceptance of all its burdens, confidence in the future, were formerly the code of the French family. Since Jean Jacques Rousseau, belief in the goodness of life has been replaced by faith in the innate goodness of man. It does not produce the same results.

The great minds in art, literature, and history, are only great when they animate us, when they quicken the movement of our blood, and stir our resolution. They realize for us the changing beauty of the world and the transient charm of our days. No artist is great without unlimited love of life. The example of Beethoven is the most touching. Financial worries, family troubles, a most cruel malady—that deafness which shut him up within himself—moral loneliness, unrealized love, such was the record of his life. A weak soul should have given way to despair. From the depth of all his distress he undertook to celebrate joy, and he did so in his Ninth Symphony. It is told of him that once, visiting a lady who had just lost her son, and not finding words both strong and gentle enough to express his sympathy, he sat down at the piano and played. He played a song of sorrow, but a song of hope also. Thus in our suffering the great masters of art come to our help.

In the life of La Play, that admirable defender of the French family, this anecdote occurs. He had just recovered from a serious illness, which had brought him to the brink of the grave, and the course of which he had traced with his usual clearness. After his recovery, when he was asked what thoughts the feeling of his approaching end had provoked in him, he replied in these memorable words:

"From the brink of the grave I measured, not the vanity of life, but its importance".

"La Peur de Vivre" is peopled with sufferers from both types of this disease. Every member of the group at La Chênaie, from the domineering, self-centered Madame Dulaurens to the sanctimonious Mademoiselle de Songeon, is afflicted with this malady, but no two have it in exactly the same form, which well illustrates how clearly the

characters are individualized. Opposed to this unsympathetic group is Bordeaux' ideal family, headed by Madame Guibert, the heroine of the story and one of the author's happiest creations. It is said that the whole action of the novel takes place in the soul of Madame Guibert. Nobly supported by her courageous daughter Paule, and upheld by her profound religious faith, this heroic mother exemplifies the highest type of true courage in the face of the most heart-rending trials. One critic justly calls Bordeaux "le romancier de l' energie féminine."

The finest appreciation of this family novel is that of M. René Doumic of the Acadamie Française published in the journal des Débats September 30, 1902 under the title: Un Romancier. According to Doumic "La Peur de Vivre" is one of the best novels that has appeared for a long time. It contrasts by its vivid originality, with everything that the story-tellers of today give us. It is a new and daring departure. It is that, primarily, through the philosophy of life which the author has expressed in it. Here is a writer who thinks that to live does not mean to bury oneself in a corner, nor yet to amass money and wear oneself out with pleasure. He thinks that a life in which one has struggled, suffered, and worked for others, not for oneself, that a life whose years are counted by emotions, sacrifices, devotions, and renunciations, is a well-filled life. He says it, he believes it, and while we read it, he makes us believe it. It may be absurd, extravagant, and romantic to the last degree, but it is not commonplace.

The characters in "La Peur de Vivre" are almost all respectable people. Now it is a dogma in literature that respectable people are not interesting. The heroes of a novel may be rogues, even mediocre and vulgar rogues, turned out "By the dozen"; their adventures may be reduced to some mean little act, commonplace, ridiculous, and sensational. It does not matter; they win our sympathy, and we are ready to find them amusing or touching. But a family that ruins itself to save the honor of a name, a mother who lets her children go one by one to do their duty, a young man who prefers the charm of a pure marriage to the temptations of a sensual love—what interest have such people for us? And even if we do meet the like in our daily life, let us leave them where they are, and not let them burden the novel with their sad faces! Such is the prejudice that M. Henry Bordeaux has not feared to face boldly. Finally he has tried to write a realistic work, and you cannot find a scene in it that is one of the commonplace situations in realism. No infidelity, no child-murder, no atrocious swindling. It has the air of

being written as a wager. We have come, indeed, to the point of limiting realistic art to the portrayal only of that which is trivial, low, and worthless. Reality has become a synonym for ugliness. A writer must be possessed of a rare independence of mind, combined with no ordinary confidence in himself, to maintain that both reality of soul and elevation of character are also realities.

This is the point of view adopted by M. Henry Bordeaux. There is more true realism in his book than in fifty chosen from among the works of the most famous "Naturalists". The figures in it all live. The study of provincial manners is very finely developed in it. Added to it all is a charming sympathy with nature. Both the people and the surroundings become our familiar friends in the modest home of Le Maupas, the peaceful setting of so many family scenes of sorrow.

Just as "La peur de Vivre" deals with the conception of the family, so do Bordeaux' later novels deal more or less directly with this conception. The most important ones of this family cycle, after La Peur de Vivre, are Les Roquevillard (1906), Les yeux qui s'ouvrent (1908), La Croisée des Chemins (1909), La Robe de Laine (1910), La Niege sur les Pas (1912), and La Maison (1913). La Maison is probably Bordeaux' masterpiece. It is a discreet mixture of autobiography and fiction, and may be said to summarize the author's ideas concerning the solidarity and sacredness of the family and the home, as well as the duties toward God and society which an influential position in the community imposes.

Politically, religiously, socially, Henry Bordeaux is a conservative, a traditionalist. In politics, he does not believe in universal suffrage, but rather in rule by a governing class, accepted as such, composed of the intellectual élite; but since universal suffrage is an accomplished fact, this élite is in duty bound to help the uneducated to learn the art of governing.

In respect to religion, M. Bordeaux had the distinction of reintroducing into the novel persons who pray, and who find the deepest consolation in profound religious faith; furthermore, each of his large families contributes a daughter to the church. It is noticeable, however, that it is always his women who do the praying, and one sometimes wonders whether some of the exemplary of his men suspect that such a thing as religion exists.

During the war, Henry Bordeaux served his country faithfully and courageously as he had served her in peace. The outbreak of hostilities found him a captain in the army,

attached to the general staff. Later he was promoted to the rank of major. He was toogenuine a soldier, however, to be content as a staff officer, and repeatedly sought to be transferred to the line, a permission which was rightly refused, his ability as a writer making him infinitely more valuable behind the lines. Nevertheless, he always managed to be near the front line on some special mission or other in connection with his duties in the Section d' information. He was twice decorated, the first time "for having volunteered, on March 9, 1916, to accomplish a particularly dangerous mission which he executed under a violent bombardment"; the second time, "for having on October 22 and 23, 1917, while sharing in every detail the life, fatigues, and perils of the fourth zouaves in an attack on the Fort de la Malmaison, excited the admiration of all by his coolness and courage". But his service in actual battle was far outweighed by that which he performed in writing his inspiring accounts of the prodigies of valor, performed by the heroic poilu.

On May 22, 1919, Henry Bordeaux was elected to the Académie Française to fill the "fauteuil" left vacant by the death of the great critic Jules Lemaître. At the time of his election he had the honor of being the youngest member of that distinguished body, having attained to this, the highest honor that can come to a French writer, at the early age of forty-nine. Today Bordeaux occupies a well established position both as critic and novelist.

Summary.

In the construction of French society, the family has been recognized as the one and only force that is most likely to endure, and best qualified for the development of the nation. Many changes have been taking place in the French family, and a strong battle has been going on in France between the old form of society, where the family occupied the foreground, and the new, where the individual claims precedence.

The family is considered as the foundation of society and the symbol of government itself. The republic cannot possibly stand fast if the families which are its pillars have weak foundations. It is only by the succession of families that the people is rendered immortal. Faith in God and faith in life has been the creed of the true French family. Although it is not composed of a series of individual happinesses, still it cannot rob its members of those rights which the human conscience holds most sacred; and the right to the pursuit of happiness is one of these.

The first cloud in the family horizon was caused by the Reformation, which opened the door of the home to individualism. After a hard struggle the Reformation was rejected and Catholicism triumphed. But the foundation of the family had become a subject of argument, and the idea of impermanence was destined to gain ground. The sacred bond of marriage was broken by the Revolution. The Civil Code made of marriage a purely civil contract and brought in divorce. It was a compromise between the ancient constitution of the family and revolutionary authority. It altered the essential principles of marriage. The battle between the old and the new form of society continued, and finally the partisans of individualism triumphed. The individual takes the place of the family, which is thrust into the background.

Henry Bordeaux is an ardent champion of the cause of the family, and his devotion is due, not to chance, but to the fact that he has been fitted by birth, training, and environment to espouse this cause. He was born at Thonon-les-Bains, January 29, 1870. The location of Thonon is of great significance in the case of Bordeaux, its very soul being present in all his writings. The family into which he was born has done the most toward forming a suitable background for his later writings on the family. He studied law in Paris when that city was saturated with individualism, and here he began to lay his foundation for his attack on individualism later.

On the death of his father, he returned to the provinces and took up his father's career as lawyer, thus continuing the family tradition, and keeping the home intact. As lawyer, he

had an opportunity to acquire what he most needed—a close grip on realities. He accumulated a wealth of information and observation about the people and the country. It was this sojourn in the provinces that furnished him with the types found in his "families", characters really observed and drawn true to life.

The underlying thesis of his work is the solidarity of the family, and along with this he teaches other forms of loyalty to home, to province, to country, and to religion. His plea is to respect the past and to retain the family. Henry Bordeaux recognizes only one unit of society—the family. It is a partnership, a corporation, a clan. The human beings who compose it must pass into oblivion, but the family itself can outline them. Upon the solidarity of the family depends all civilization.

The conception of the family is treated in Bordeaux' novels up to the outbreak of the World War. Of this family cycle, La Peur de Vivre is the most widely read. It is a bold and deliberate attack on individualism. The title represents the author's diagnosis of the disease which was bringing France to the verge of dissolution, and was making the world, even France herself, accept the German-inspired idea that France was degenerate and decadent. The fear of living es present everywhere, and is breaking up families and destroying civilization. Bordeaux' ideal family is drawn in La Peur de Vivre, and is contrasted with the kind of family that exists today in France.

La Maison, Bordeaux' last novel, before the war, on the family, summarizes his ideas concerning the solidarity and sacredness of the family and home, as well as the duties toward God and society.

Politically, religiously, socially, Henry Bordeaux is a conservative, a traditionalist. He has the distinction of reintroducing into the novel persons who pray. Bordeaux served his country during the war, and was twice decorated. He was elected to the Académie Française on the death of Jules Lemaître, being the youngest member of that distinguished body. Today he is both a critic and a novelist.

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