

## EVOLUTION OF THE SCANDINAVIAN FAMILY \*

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Le Play described the family that was typical of Scandinavia between 1830 and 1880 as a «complex but prosperous» one. It consisted of six or seven members who were engaged in free wage labor or worked as farm tenants. Among these people the «stem family» was prominent. In this system, the family's place on the land or in a vested occupation is passed on without fail from generation to generation, but extra sons or daughters may migrate to cities for work, coming back from time to time<sup>1</sup>

In rural<sup>2</sup> Scandinavia, the family has functioned as an economic unit<sup>3</sup>. Practically everywhere the sexes within this unit and outside of it were considered as equal<sup>4</sup>.

In Denmark the woman, on becoming engaged, ceased to be a wage-earner and began to study household economy. Some women even went to friends' homes for certain period in order to practice household management<sup>5</sup>.

In all Scandinavian countries, premarital intercourse has long been a common practice. In 1916, for instance, 34 per cent of all brides

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(\*) Part of a major project dealing with comparative family sociology. See, for instance, papers on Greek family, *Sociology and Social Research*, Vol. 40, No 1, and *Deltan*, Winter 1956.

(1) Joseph K. Folsom, *The Family and Democratic Society* (New York : John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1943), p. 94.

(2) At present, about 30 per cent of the Norwegian population work in agriculture. See *Norwegian Social and Labour Survey* (Oslo : Royal Norwegian Ministry of Social Affairs, 1950), p. 3.

(3) Alva Myrdal, «Swedish Women in Industry and at Home», *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 197 : 217, May, 1938.

(4) Henry G. Leach, *Scandinavia of the Scandinavians* (New York : Charles Scribner's Sons, 1915), p. 223.

(5) *Ibid.*, pp. 83-84 ; For further details on the home life of old Denmark, see pp. 83-88.

were pregnant<sup>1</sup>. The illegitimacy rate has accordingly been very high. This was partly due to the long engagements that have been very common in Scandinavia<sup>2</sup>.

Courtship customs were liberal even in old Scandinavia. In Sweden, for example, *frieri* or «night courting» was practiced in almost every agrarian community. This custom permitted great physical intimacies. A girl, sleeping in a separate «girl house», was visited by a group of boys, who left one of their number to sleep with her. Of course, this type of courtship frequently led to physical experimentation, but complete freedom was unknown. The community had regulated «night courting» rather strictly. Complete undressing, for instance (the skin apron should never be removed), or intercourse were often punished severely. Punishment was also provided for boys who went courting alone, or who came from another community. Likewise, a girl who had «slept herself away», often could not be suitably married. This custom, however, was rather «safe», since pregnancy usually resulted in marriage. Sometimes, in the course of *frieri*, a boy and a girl selected each other, thus entering the stage of *fria visst* («courting certain», «going steady»). Their new relationship was accompanied by an exchange of presents, particularly spoons. Parents usually avoided influencing the selection of courting mates. In fact, they even facilitated *frieri* by providing separate sleeping quarters for their daughters. This custom, some authors assert, was invented by the wise old men of the agrarian community for «testing fertility». Anyway, «night courting» gradually broke down when industrialization and mobility began, since migrant laborers did not have the same respect for the girls as the local men did<sup>3</sup>.

At present, the emancipation of women in Scandinavia is more extensive. In Denmark, for instance, the girl is free to be courted, not at home, but in clubs, restaurants, parks and other places outside of

(1) Folsom, *op. cit.*, p. 207 ; Per Ramholt, «Nuptiality, Fertility and Reproduction in Norway», *Population Studies*, 7 : 61, July, 1953 ; Sydney H. Croog, «Premarital Pregnancies in Scandinavia and Finland», *American Journal of Sociology*, 57 : 364, January, 1952 ; Harvey J. Locke and Georg Karlsson, «Marital Adjustment and Prediction in Sweden and the United States», *American Sociological Review*, 17 : 16, February, 1952 ; and Kaare Svalastoga, «The Family in Scandinavia», *Marriage and Family Living*, 16 : 374-75, 377, November, 1954.

(2) Olive D. Campbell, *The Danish Folk School* (New York : Mac-Millan, 1928), p. 321.

(3) Folsom, *loc. cit.* ; and Alva Myrdal, *Nation and Family* (London : K. Paul, Trench, Trubner and Company, Ltd., 1945), pp. 42-44.

the home<sup>1</sup>. In Sweden, mothers are enjoying considerable legal, hygienic and economic protection<sup>2</sup>. A Swedish law of 1939 forbids the dismissal of a woman employee because of engagement, marriage, pregnancy, or childbearing<sup>3</sup>. A single standard of sex behavior is accepted<sup>4</sup>. and, in general, due to Teutonic influences, the sexes are considered as equal<sup>5</sup>.

The divorce rate is high<sup>6</sup>. The grounds for divorce are bigamy, adultery, exposing the partner to venereal disease, sentence to long imprisonment, conviction for alcoholism, three years of insanity and others<sup>7</sup>. Divorce by «mutual consent» was introduced between 1918 and 1922<sup>8</sup>. In general, the theory of divorce is more liberal in Scandinavia than it is in America. Marriage and divorce are much freer from religious control than elsewhere<sup>9</sup>. The actual divorce rate, however, is still less than half the American rate<sup>10</sup>.

As the birth rate is going down, the proportion of small families is constantly increasing<sup>11</sup>. Late marriages are very common<sup>12</sup>. Engagements are very long. Consequently, premarital sex relations and

(1) Edgar W. Knight, *Among the Danes* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press), pp. 215-18.

(2) Otto R. Wangson, «Maternal and Child Welfare», *The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 197 : 93, May, 1938 ; Johan Thorsten Sellin, *Marriage and Divorce Legislation in Sweden* (University of Pennsylvania, 1922), pp. 40-42 ; and Tor Jerneman, «Social Insurance in Sweden», *The Annals of The American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 197 : 83, May, 1938.

(3) Folsom, op. cit., p. 194.

(4) Ibid., p. 97.

(5) Ibid., p. 105.

(6) Franklin D. Scott, *The United States and Scandinavia* (Cambridge, Massachusetts : Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 122.

(7) Folsom, op. cit., p. 205.

(8) Ibid., p. 497.

(9) Ibid., p. 100.

(10) Ibid., pp. 498, 100.

(11) Alf Johansson, «Social Housing Policy in Sweden», *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 197 : 162, May, 1938 ; Gunnar Myrdal, «Population Problems and Policies», *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 197 : 201, May, 1938 ; and Henning Friis (ed.) *Scandinavia Between East and West* (Ithaca, New York : Cornell University Press, 1950), pp. 158-59.

(12) Folsom, op. cit., p. 194.

illegitimacy are extensive, especially in Sweden<sup>1</sup>. Abortion laws are very liberal. In Sweden, abortion on humanitarian, eugenic and medical grounds was legalized in 1939<sup>2</sup>. Adultery has ceased to be a criminal offense<sup>3</sup>.

At present, the secularization of Sweden is so extensive that, three years ago, when the Lutheran bishops opposed promiscuity, newspapers and citizens criticized them severely. Recently, a Swedish boy wrote to a Stockholm paper : «I have no real morals. And I would never marry a girl because I have made her pregnant. Why should I give up my liberty for the sake of a child ?» A psychiatrist reported : «Young people sleep together everywhere. We don't frown and tell them that it is sinful . . . If a girl finds she's going to have a baby, we don't ostracize her». Mrs. Elise Ottesen-Jensen, who superintends sex education in schools, says : «I tell the girls it is all right to sleep with a boy». It is no wonder, therefore, that in the beginning of 1955, there were 27.000 unmarried mothers in Sweden, the illegitimacy rate being 10 per cent<sup>4</sup>.

These changes in the family of Scandinavia have been brought about by the following factors : 1) industrialization<sup>5</sup>, 2) economic progress<sup>6</sup>, 3) progressive political programs<sup>7</sup>, 4) compulsory education<sup>8</sup>, 5) influence of progressive literature<sup>9</sup>, 6) feminism<sup>10</sup>, 7).

(1) Alva Myrdal, *op. cit.*, p. 35 ; and Dorothy S. Thomas, *Social and Economic Aspects of Swedish Population* (New York : Mac-Millan, 1941), p. 12.

(2) Folsom, *op. cit.*, pp. 195, 262.

(3) *Ibid.*, p. 205.

(4) Joe David Brown, «Sin and Sweden», *Time*, April 25, 1955. p. 29.

(5) Mauritz Bonow, «The Consumer Cooperative Movement in Sweden», *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 197 : 171-72, May, 1938 ; Waldemar Svensson, «Home Ownership in Sweden», *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 197 : 154, May, 1938 ; and B. J. Hovde, *The Scandinavian Countries, 1720-1865* (Boston : Chapman and Grimes, 1943), II, 683-84.

(6) Edgar W. Knight, *op. cit.*, p. 217 ; and Bertil Ohlin, «Economic Progress in Sweden», *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 197 : 1-6, May, 1938.

(7) Hovde, *op. cit.*, II, 684 ; and A Survey of Social and Labour Conditions in Sweden (Swedish Employers Confederation, 1950), pp. 11, 18.

(8) *The Scandinavian States and Finland* (London : Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1951), p. 20.

(9) Hovde, *op. cit.*, II, 684-87.

(10) *Ibid.*, II, 484, 684-87 ; Alva Myrdal, «Swedish Women in Industry and at Home», *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 197 : 216-17, May, 1938 ; and Leach, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-40.

political emancipation of women-in Finland they gained the right to vote in 1906, and in Norway in 1913<sup>1</sup>, 8) occupational emancipation of women<sup>2</sup> and 9) unrestricted circulation of contraceptives in Sweden, since 1938<sup>3</sup>.

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(1) Ibid., p. 234.

(2) Folsom, op. cit., p. 194 ; H. Gille, «Family Welfare Measures in Denmark», *Population Studies*, 6: 208, November, 1952 ; and Elsa Enajarvi-Haavio, «Science», *The Finnish Woman*, Anni Voipio-uvas and Kaarina Ruohutula, editors (Helsinki : Werner Soderstrom Osakeyhtio, 1949), p. 55.

(3) Folsom, op. cit., p. 195.