

turn into another pipe dream, another excuse for relapsing into inactivity.

Pessimistic or not, the play involves a system of thought, the same one, in fact, that has underlain all O'Neill's plays. O'Neill's formula (for perhaps it is less a system than a formula) is: all good forces are those of love and life, all bad forces are those of hate and death. Like *Strange Interlude* and *Mourning Becomes Electra*, *The Iceman Cometh* portrays only the forces of hate and death. But the Hickey episode shows in a weird way that the opposite forces lie slumbering beneath the surface. Could they be quickened into motion by someone with no pipe dream like Hickey's and no death wish like Larry's? Mr. O'Neill does not pose this question. But obviously his play does "mean something." It means several things. And those who have followed O'Neill's account of human aspirations and attachments, horizons and roots, from his earliest plays on will have no difficulty in finding the principal meanings. Those who come newly to the dramatist I advise to listen to Hickey, for, whatever his behavior and his motive, his gospel of love and life is O'Neill's own.

How good a play is *The Iceman*? As an experience in the theater it is likely to be less "terrific" than the *Interlude* or *Electra*; yet I find it a more interesting play. To everyone except O'Neill-worshippers the two earlier colossi seemed contrived, labored, overloaded, and at times false. It was not that there was too much Freud but that there was too much ham melodrama. Though such roles as Nina and Lavinia have a sound and fury that must impress every actress and every theatergoer, the new play is the cooler, the steadier, and on the whole the better, for their absence. The two women whose lives have much to do with *The Iceman* are dead before the first act opens. All the chief roles are male. This fact, the low-life setting, and the slangy vernacular of the dialogue give us an atmosphere quite unlike that of O'Neill's other "big" plays, though not so unlike that of his earlier pieces in which, as here, a remarkable working union was effected between naturalism and symbolism.

New and old also is his use of Ibsen's analytic exposition — *Emperor Jones* was an early exploitation of it. New and old is the political-social motif. As in *The Hairy Ape*, Mr. O'Neill's approach to society and politics is neither sociological nor political. Politics provide a background for a "timeless" theme, thus annoying the Marxists who look in vain through O'Neill's works for a social message. Nevertheless, the political disillusionment of Larry Slade and young Parritt, not to mention one of the minor characters who is a hostile portrait of a power-mad radical, will mean something to a generation that knows Arthur Koestler and George Orwell.

The Iceman Cometh, for all its length, is not an "experimental" play. The masks of *The Great God Brown* and *Lazarus Laughed*, the double appearance of John Loving in *Days Without End*, the allusions to Greek myth in *Electra*, the asides of the *Interlude* —

all these seem to have been experimental not in the true sense of being part of a process of discovery and development but in the cheap sense of being freakishly unorthodox. None of these devices is used in the new play. Yet one thing about *The Iceman* is of technical interest.

I allude to the effect of the Ibsen technic, to the concealment from the audience of the play's starting point — the fact that Hickey has killed his wife and the fact that he too has his pipe dream. Of course the modern audience, inured to the thriller, is used to histrionic concealment. And, as a thriller, the value of *The Iceman* is not impaired by mystery so long undispelled. On the melodramatic level, this play, like all of O'Neill's, is grandly successful.

But what of its interpretation of life? Is the theme as impressive as it is simple? Is it perfectly presented? Many theorists of the drama have questioned the advisability, in a matter of dramatic irony, of keeping the audience as well as the characters in the dark. Their objection seems germane here. What is gained by keeping us in the dark except an added mysteriousness of atmosphere? Mr. O'Neill might claim that his intention was to let a wrong view settle gradually in the mind and then to drive it out with a sudden dramatic shock. But, in the first place, the shock is so sudden and laconic, the preparation so slow and loquacious, that an audience might well be bewildered rather than enlightened. In the second place, very much is lost by the delay. Not knowing what Hickey really is, we are in no position to appreciate the irony of his evangelical efforts while they are in progress. Possibly Mr. O'Neill has damaged his drama to save his melodrama.

Over twenty years ago the poet-playwright Hugo von Hofmannsthal complained that there was something labored, ponderous, and crude about Mr. O'Neill's plays. He found the dramatic repetitions so numerous that they canceled each other out — a point not without relevance to *The Iceman*, which is hampered with too many exact symmetries — character balanced against character, plot against plot, Act against Act. Since most of the characters are rather wooden and diagrammatic — the whores are stage whores, and so on — since the raciness of the speeches is the raciness of Broadway convention rather than that of great realistic dialogue, we have the impression less of fine dramatic form — which is, so to say, organic — than of a skeleton's rigidity. Of course there is much emotion in the play. But you cannot pass off a skeleton as a man merely by enveloping it in a cloud of emotion.

These are rough words. I should make it clear also that I am judging Mr. O'Neill, as he deserves to be judged, by standards far above those of Broadway. If we were to follow the critics' formula: "*The Iceman Cometh* is the best American play since *x*," then *x* could only be some earlier play of Mr. O'Neill's. The present season will show how he holds his own against such European playwrights as Sartre, Camus, and Brecht.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THE FAMILY?

by DELLA D. CYRUS

1

SOMETHING is wrong with the family. It is a subject on which almost everybody is ready to express an opinion in newspaper and pulpit, on platform and street corner. The trouble is the breakdown of character, they say. People nowadays think they should be happy. It's time they got back to the old-fashioned virtues of responsibility and adherence to duty. The trouble is with modern women. They should stay home and take care of their children. Alcohol is the key to it all. People don't believe in God and don't go to church. There aren't enough parks or playgrounds. The war accounts for it.

Everyone seems to know the answer, and almost everyone knows what should be done, but the symptoms continue to become more alarming, and actually nothing is done to stop the steady statistical disintegration of the family.

We are so fascinated just watching and denouncing the symptoms of family disease that we fail to see the source of the infection — the family itself. The family falls apart in modern urban life not because human nature is more depraved than it used to be, but because the family is out of harmony with the modern world and no longer meets the most vital needs of its members. The statistics which we all view with so much alarm reflect the simple fact that the family lets people down, and there is nothing else to supply the values and satisfactions which the family once supplied.

Family life was well adapted to the ways of Europe in the twelfth century, and even to the ways of the isolated American pioneer in the nineteenth century. Then it provided its members with work, food, clothing, shelter, education, love, companionship, religion, and social life. The family was the community and the community was the family.

"My qualifications for doing an article on the American family," writes DELLA D. CYRUS, "are not orthodox, but I believe they are qualifications. After graduating from Tufts College and taking graduate work at the University of Chicago, I was for five years a case worker in various Family Welfare agencies, where I knew at first hand the problems of several hundred families. For ten years I have been married to a Unitarian minister and I am the mother of two children. Because of my interest, I have in a sense been preparing this article for ten years, and bring to it the experience and opinion of many friends."

The family as a unit produced the things necessary for its life as a unit. A man without a wife was as crippled economically and as lonesome as a woman without a husband. The more children a couple had, the better living they could make and the more secure was their future. It was a life which set the family against the world, and for its survival it cultivated strong feelings of possessiveness within the family, and strong feelings of suspicion and hostility toward outsiders.

In the heyday of the family there was incompatibility, of course, and frustration and boredom, but these things were offset by a common cause and the knowledge that every member of the family was essential. If, in the past, families faced up to their problems and stuck together, it was not because they had more character or more religion than we have, though they did have more assurance about what they believed, but rather it was because they had no alternative.

Clearly the family is no longer an independent world of its own, but completely dependent on the rest of society for the necessities of its life as well as for most of its education, culture, and amusement. Nor is the individual any longer dependent on the family for the satisfaction of his own needs. On the contrary, both men and women with earning power are better off without a family. Every child they produce decreases their standard of living. Both men and women can live comfortable lives, filled with friendships, social activities, and even love, without ever taking on the responsibilities and restrictions of family living. Even children and the aged, if sufficiently neglected, will be taken care of at public expense in the modern city.

If the family has nothing distinctive to offer in the modern city, which cannot be obtained more cheaply and less painfully elsewhere, why do people still cling to it? The fact is that no adequate alternative to family living is available for the man and woman who love each other and who want to have children.

This then is the sole cohesive element in the modern family — the love of a man and a woman and their love for their children. Not economic necessity, not to produce together the means of staying

bit of wisdom is, all unwittingly, the most devastating comment which could be made on the prevailing ideal for the mother. It amounts to smug acceptance of the fact that in those years the mother loses the value of her education and training for other work, loses touch with the large problems of a larger world, and loses confidence in herself as a mature citizen of the world who might have something of value to contribute to it. It is acceptance of the fact that women really have nothing to live for after their children are grown, and that if they do, by the grace of God, allow their children to grow up, they are faced with long empty years which they must fill somehow as best they can. And so they fill them with keeping their houses cleaner than ever, or by joining organizations which, though they may have social value, are too frittering and inefficient to give any strong and capable human being a clear sense of usefulness or integration in society.

"Only a few years" in the life of the child means the most crucial years of his development, during which he is cramped and lonely and pushed away and overwatched by a mother who is too tired and too busy and too unhappy to give him the kind of mothering he needs. Sometimes an honest older woman will recognize this fact by expressing deep regret over the lack of time she had for her children, and, above all, the lack of energy she had for just loving them and enjoying them when they were young.

Young mothers themselves are often the most timid about expressing dissatisfaction with their lives. Because it doesn't occur to them that anything could be wrong with the family, they suppose the fault lies in themselves. They want desperately to be good mothers, and when they get too much of it, they are ashamed of their unhappiness. Haven't they everything they want in the world? A home, a husband, children? Of course they have, and so to cover up their disappointment and confusion, they concentrate on all the small materialistic devices which are supposed to make a home beautiful and happy—flowered stencils for the kitchen cupboards, lace and satin for the bassinet.

Young mothers will discuss for hours the problems and irritations of home and children and will express with feeling their frustration at being tied down and their frank relief at getting their children in bed for the night, but such discussions are guiltily ended with, "Children are a lot of fun, though." This is their wistful way of saying that they know children are supposed to be a lot of fun, and could be a lot of fun, but somehow they are hardly any fun at all.

4

MEANWHILE, what is happening to the marriage during these years? If the husband is a mature and sympathetic person who can throw himself into the spirit of the rough-and-tumble life of babies,

diapers, chaotic meals, and sleepless nights; if he is vocationally adjusted, economically secure, hopeful for his future, not too overworked, and takes the attitude that things are temporarily a bit too tough for his wife, they can grit their teeth and pull through without irreparably damaging their relationship. When these favorable conditions prevail, they can, on occasion, laugh and have fun together. But obviously these are rare conditions.

Too many men in the modern city get too little satisfaction from their work, are worried about money, overworked, and apprehensive of the future. These are just the years when men are trying hardest to make a career or to make money. Far from being able to wade happily into the noisy discontent which is their homes, most men have far too little energy for their children and almost none for the problems of their wives. Instead, they need someone to sympathize with *them*, someone to allay their fears and listen to their plans. Above all, they need someone to play with, laugh with, and relax with.

So they come home to a physically exhausted, nervously taut, emotionally dissipated woman who still has several hours of work to do. Both are so aware of their own needs that even when they understand the needs of the other, there is little they can do about it. Both know that somewhere there should be help for this situation, that somewhere in the world there should be rest and laughter and love. Almost in spite of themselves, they hit out at each other, because it was in their marriage that both had expected to find these things.

Both are caught in a situation too painful and too difficult to understand, and the air rings with accusations, demands, resentment, or hysterics. Finally the marriage falls to pieces in fact, if not in court, or it settles down into the quietness of resignation and despair. Couples caught in this situation often feel that it could be saved if they could leave the home together and go somewhere to dance or drink or talk in a new atmosphere. But even this kind of shock treatment too often is unavailable, because it is too difficult and too expensive to get anybody to stay with the children.

Playing at home is more difficult still. If the children don't shatter the relationship between husband and wife—and very small children are capable of breaking into life's most poignant moments at any hour of the day or night—still the home is the wife's eternal workshop and she, at least, cannot experience there the sense of freedom and new experience which she and her husband both need. Because playing together is so hard to arrange, a frequent solution is for the husband to go off to bowl or to work overtime, or to make love to someone who is available and gay and will take him the way he is, while the wife stays home more lonely and resentful than ever.

Add to all of these difficulties of marriage and children the problems of emotionally warped individuals who demand an abnormal amount of love

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CONTENTS

THE ATLANTIC REPORT—ON THE WORLD TODAY

Enemies of Production	ROBERT R. YOUNG	39
President Neilson of Smith MRS. DWIGHT WHITNEY MORROW		43
A Scientist Looks at Tomorrow		
The Atomic Bomb Tests at Lake Sindorsk	LOUIS N. RIDENOUR	51
Dahl's Boston	FRANCIS W. DAHL and CHARLES W. MORTON	55
The Integrity of "Top Secret"	RALPH INGERSOLL	61
The Return of Eugene O'Neill	ERIC BENTLEY	64
What's Wrong with the Family?	DELLA T. CYRUS	67
Poems	HELEN BEVINGTON	74
Education for the Modern World	SIR RICHARD LIVINGSTONE	75
Beach Boy. A Story	ANN CHIDESTER	80
The Survivors. A Poem	VIRGINIA HAMILTON ADAIR	85
Growth in Years	ROLLO WALTER BROWN	86
Uncle Deck. An Atlantic "First"	JOHN WATSON	90
Vulnerable. A Poem	JULIA MCGRANE	94
Not So Bonnie Scotland	ROSS CAMPBELL	95
The Girl Without a Name. A Story	ALAN MARCUS	100
Thanksgiving. A Poem	LERMONTOV translated by VLADIMIR NABOKOV	108
Ducks	T. MCKEAN DOWNS	109
The New Era in Giving	F. EMERSON ANDREWS	114
Accent on Living: Clyde Brion Davis — Georgie Starbuck Galbraith — Sergei Prokofiev — Crosby Gaige — Russell Maloney		119
Books and Men		
The Fun of Don Marquis	CHESTER T. CROWELL	129
Arthur Koestler	RAYMOND MORTIMER	132
Henry Thoreau in Our Time	STANLEY EDGAR HYMAN	137
Atlantic Bookshelf: Edward Weeks — Richard E. Danielson — Jane Cobb and Helen Dore Boylston — Short Reviews		150
THE ATLANTIC SERIAL		
Command Decision	WILLIAM WISTER HAINES	173

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and consideration, the sexually repressed or mal-adjusted, the physically ill who cannot carry their share of the load, and it is hard to understand, not why so many families break up, but why so many still hang together.

Men are even less critical of the family than women because, superficially, they are less affected by its shortcomings. Men suffer because women suffer, and, suffering, cannot give them what they need and expect to find in the family. But although men are aware of the disappointing contrast between what they want and what they get, they are so blinded by the traditional promises of home, love, food, and fireside that when these things are cold and unappetizing they look everywhere but at the family itself for the trouble. If, night after night, the children are crying and the living room is a shambles and the dinner isn't ready and his wife snaps at him to stop reading his paper and lend a hand, the husband is likely to conclude that his wife is the nervous type, or women are funny, or life is hell, and let it go at that until he can get away.

That he might find what he wanted in a very different kind of family life rarely occurs to him, and he resists changing the family pattern long after his wife is willing to do so or in fact has changed it by going to work outside their home. His resistance is not difficult to understand, because young mothers who work at outside jobs can almost never make arrangements for home and children which are satisfactory for everybody.

If a good nursery school is available for the children and the family can get and pay for a first-rate housekeeper, the woman may work at an outside job she likes, to the greater satisfaction of everybody, including her husband. But desirable housekeepers and nursery schools are available to only a select few. Most mothers must resort to make-shift arrangements which are bad for the children and leave the mother with most of the work to do at home in addition to her other job. Under these circumstances, women may be more tired and demanding than when they stay at home all day, thus justifying their husbands' reinforced conviction that home is where their place is.

The family's failures have not ended when it has sent its last child off to school. The mother may have gained a few blessed hours which she can fill according to a plan of her own, but she is still bound to the same pattern of life and cannot, for several years, engage in any interest or work which requires more than two or three consecutive hours of her time. Because this is true, and because "there is always something to do around a house," and because most mothers by this time don't believe there is anything else they can do anyway, women continue to live an isolated, undernourished, haphazard life within the family, brightened now and then with meetings, bridge parties, and shopping tours.

The young child, if he is still reasonably normal,

is so happy to be in school and among his contemporaries that he takes life in his stride for several years without causing anybody too much anxiety. But what about the older child and particularly the adolescent? What does the family do for him? It may have disintegrated altogether, leaving him without any real ties to anybody. Or the parents may be hanging together by threads of grim duty or resigned boredom waiting for him to get old enough so that they can stop pretending to be a family. Or the mother may have thrown all of her longing for life into plans for her adolescent child so that he is unable to have any life of his own. But even if none of these frequent conditions exist, the very best family cannot meet all the needs of an adolescent in the modern world.

The adolescent suffers as much from the social isolation of the family as he does from its individual failures. Adolescents, by definition, are trying to out-grow the family and their problem is that they have nothing to grow into. Delinquents are not delinquent because their parents don't watch them, or because they haven't any place to play basketball, or because there are too many beer joints on every corner. They are delinquent because, in addition to their tension over the individual failures of their individual families, they have no real part to play in the life of the world. They are boiling over with vitality and ability which our society does not want or need.

Instead of giving them an important and useful social function which their growing maturity demands, we tell them to stick to their studies, help their mothers, and stay out of trouble. We insist that they stop acting like children but refuse to let them act like adults. Juvenile Court judges and Community Welfare Councils talk about uniting community facilities for combating juvenile delinquency, or uniting delinquents to solve their own problems, but no one says anything about uniting families into the kind of communities which might give an adolescent something real to belong to.

5

WHEN we are faced with so much tragic evidence of family failure, why do we keep telling people to make better families while we accept the defects of the family itself as if they were something final and inescapable? Why do we not look at the family with loving but dry eyes and see it for what it is, an antiquated institution designed for another time and another way of life, but now badly in need of remodeling if not actually remaking?

The isolated autonomous family in the modern world is not only a source of personal failure and loneliness, but it is also the breeding place of prejudice, ignorance, fear, and hostility. How can there be successful international relations, enlightened world government, or any world peace as long as society is made up of millions of ingrown, com-

pletely self-interested families? How can such families produce world citizens who alone can change a world psychology from murderous rivalry to rational coöperation?

All changes in family living must be in the direction of a more vital relationship with the community and the world. Anything which loosens up the rigid exclusiveness of the family, broadens its sympathies, brings its individuals into significant relationships with the members of other families, is contributing toward this end. But in a modern city the relationships between people and families are too often superficial and essentially meaningless.

Being a citizen of the world means forming relationships beyond the rigid boundaries of the family which have some of the meaning which family relationships have had in the past — meaning discovered in the sharing of vital experiences and common goals. The unit of the family must open enough of its doors and windows to make it possible for a larger group of people to form a larger unit which embodies the basic pattern of the family — combined strength to meet common problems. Only when families are willing to release the habit and the spirit of coöperation into the community can we begin to have a community in the true sense of the word.

Current efforts toward social improvement in urban areas made by social agencies, community funds, and citizens' committees, achieve the inadequate results one would expect in the absence of any community to improve. Such groups are always engaged in the struggle to get the lost and suffering individual or family in touch with "community resources." The community resource method is an effort to pick up the worst casualties of a society and to relate them to a pseudo-community made up of relief agencies, hospitals, clinics, clubs, social centers, family counselors, and the like. These resources are supported and sponsored by the fortunate for the unfortunate who have no real relation to each other or to the so-called resources.

Although this method helps many people who need help and saves some from complete disaster, it is no surprise that several years of applying community resources to a family so often fail to put it back on its social feet. Nor is it any surprise that so many families continue to get out of joint with society no matter how many new resources are added to the list. People who are out of joint with life do not want to learn ceramics at a social center or find a friend at the Y.M.C.A.; they want to get back into joint with life. There must first of all be a community for people to belong to, and the community, or in other words the people themselves, must together meet their own needs. The modern city is too big to make effective community life possible, but perhaps such a life could be created by groups of families within a city voluntarily banding into communities and meeting as a group the problems and needs of its individuals.

Sporadic and timid beginnings have been made in interfamily coöperation. Families have coöperated in running nursery schools, tot yards, and victory gardens. Whole communities have built common heating and refrigeration systems. Housing projects have included common nurseries, laundries, and recreational halls. During the present housing shortage, groups of families have been forced to live together as one family in the same house — with conspicuous lack of success. The horror of anything faintly suggesting communal living prevents even timid and partial coöperative projects from being taken up generally. But the need is not for half-hearted coöperative projects or for communal living. The need is for effective communities. Must we always wait for bombs, fires, and floods to see in a tardy flash that we all live together in the same world? Can't we see now that that old bus, the family, has broken down on a lonely road at night and that we are all in it together?

6

SUPPOSE a group of families in the same neighborhood of a large city decided to pool their problems and their strength. If they began on the problems of young mothers and children, they could as a group establish a child center for children of all ages in their neighborhood, to be run for as many hours a day as the group wished, perhaps twenty-four. They could secure a spacious building with ground around it, — perhaps a school, — get equipment, and hire a trained staff, perhaps some of the mothers themselves, who might be assisted by untrained mothers who wished to assist. This center could provide everything which children need: outdoor and indoor space, things to make and do, physical care, companionship, social experience, and supervision. It could be near enough to everybody's house to make it convenient for children to come and go easily at whatever hours fitted into their particular family plan.

The objection that this takes the responsibility for children off the mother, where it belongs, and places it on the community, where it doesn't belong, is an irrational objection. Under our present lack of community, child welfare agencies, juvenile courts, reform schools, detention homes, and crèches testify to the fact that society is already taking unsatisfactory responsibility for too many children whose parents have given up entirely. Under a truly community plan, parents would not be relinquishing responsibility but would be pooling it. In a sense, all children would be the responsibility of all parents. Under such a plan, parents would be much less likely to give up entirely, because the burden would be shared by all. By freeing children for the kind of play and companionship which they need, a community plan would give mothers some time in which to use capacities of their own. And only when a

mother has some satisfactory life of her own can she give her children the unmixed love and unselfish guidance which are her special gift.

The next step for a group of families to take in creating a community life might be a coöperative house-cleaning plan. Commercial house-cleaning companies are already in existence in some large cities, but a community might have its own, composed of some of its own members, or several communities might form such a company together. Thus all general house cleaning would become a community business, carried on by people especially trained for the job, abolishing it forever as the lonely, unpaid, soapy preoccupation of some twenty-five million women.

Another experiment for such communities could be a coöperative kitchen and dining building. Immediately, of course, the noxious ogre of communal eating raises its ugly head. But there is no reason why a community could not run, or hire to have run, a coöperative kitchen without eating in common. A central kitchen could be located near enough to everyone, so that meals could be delivered to private homes. Or a dining building could be so arranged to permit families to dine in private intimacy if they wished. Or, since it is to be a democratic community, families who wanted to could go on cooking their own meals in their own kitchens. Most families would discover that their children would heckle them into eating with other children as often as possible. And wives, whether the working kind or the staying at home kind, when offered the choice of cooking a meal or eating out, often choose the latter. Whatever inevitable objection and resistance there is to anything so strange and unproved should be weighed against the freeing of human beings for a life of meaning and hope.

If families coöperated on the problems of child care, house cleaning, and cooking, women immediately would be free and obliged to make some choices about their own lives. Some who like to be homemakers could go on being full-time homemakers. Some could work in the community enterprises themselves, while others could follow part-time or whole-time careers for which they had been trained. Some could develop talents which now atrophy. But all would have the freedom and the responsibility to do something valuable with their time. All would have the freedom and the responsibility to be part of a world larger than the family. Can anyone doubt that women so freed and so responsible would contribute more to the gracious living of the family as well as to the good living of the world?

Community coöperation need not stop with meeting these problems alone. The community could have a recreational building or buildings for children and adults. It could have a sitters bureau or a clinic

or a theater. Adolescents could take an important part in group planning and administration. Many jobs could be the special responsibility of adolescents for which they would receive both pay and community status. Whatever common problems the group decided to meet, they would not be met by "resources" or by "facilities" applied from the outside, but by the people themselves working or paying in common.

The question of how poor communities could meet initial expenditures required for community projects is relevant but of incidental importance. If subsidies were required they would not change the essential pattern of common effort to meet common needs. The planning and the work would be done by the group. As a nation we pay for what we think we have to have, whether it be battleships or war memorials or institutions for the insane; and if we decided we had to have a better kind of community life, probably we could find a way to pay for that too.

Communities, to function successfully, should be planned from the ground up. At a time when so much new housing is being contemplated, it should be possible to build communities which fulfill the emotional requirements of family living, and to forget all about rows of neat little houses — this time with stainless steel sinks. Even communities without any wish for a coöperative life should be planned to eliminate many of the present hazards to family living. Houses in which there are to be children should be grouped around small parks with no traffic running in front of them. This one thing would revolutionize family life, free children for many more hours of outdoor play, and free mothers from the fatal mixture of children and housework as well as from the ever recurring nightmare of traffic accidents. Houses grouped around parks would form natural communities for groups who wished to do things in common, the park to contain all community buildings.

To name all the difficulties and probable failures of this or some other experiment in community life would be easy and endless but beside the point. The facts show that the family is failing on all sides because it is trying to live on an exclusive diet of ingrown emotion with no real common life. Since neither a common life nor a whole life can be lived within the family any longer, what but a community can revitalize and reunite the family for a common goal? Only this time the goal of the family will not be to protect itself against the world, but rather to enter into the world which is already on its doorstep. Man has split the atom and communicated with the moon. The time is now past due for him to try something more difficult and more important — living with his fellow man.