BY NATHANIEL GOODMAN

Anna Karenina Revisited

Tolstoy's novel ennobling family life is much more than a beautiful and sad story of romantic attraction and attachment. The tragic story of Anna Karenina is meant to be understood in contrast to the vastly different tale of Konstantin Dmitrievitch Levin's successful and wonderfully happy relationship with pretty Kitty Shcherbat-skaia. Tolstoy's message lies in the difference between the tragedy of the one and the happiness of the other. Tolstoy attributes this difference to the institution of the family as a force in life. So dynamic and forceful a conceptions of family life deserves a reconsideration of this work by all of us interested in more effective family living.

In brief review, Anna Karenina is a charming woman caught in a cold formalistic marriage. She meets the handsome Count Vronsky and both are fatally attracted to each other to the end that Anna leaves her husband and son for the indelicate position of Vronsky's mistress. Tolstoy then shows that, despite their great love for each other, happiness cannot be theirs. Far more serious than the anticipated social disapproval of the nature of their relationship is Anna's awareness that to lose Vronsky means the end of everything for her since she had taken the step which she had. The pressure of this need to hold Vronsky simply forces her to extremes which thwart the objective she seeks. In addition, shorn of status as a wife and mother to his children, she cannot rely on these roles to enhance her security in his love. Vronsky, too, suffers from the lack of role as father and husband and family head. Energetic, capable, he becomes a man adrift in a sea lacking these moorings—wandering from one activity to another and never satisfied in any of them.

Levin's history, interwoven throughout the book as a contrast, is a more orthodox one of socially sanctioned marriage and legitimate children. Levin finds himself as he realizes his purpose in life is his newly created family—the care and rearing of his children. Tolstoy beautifully describes Levin's awareness that this care and rearing of one's children, this giving to them of an orientation to life, is that which makes possible their security and happiness.

The tragedy of Anna Karenina is the tragedy of love without familial attachment. But, make no mistake, this is not the timeless moralistic thesis. For Tolstoy, the attachment between Anna and Vronsky fails because it encompasses only themselves. Love must be present but for the relationship to endure, deepen, and enrich, it must rest on more than the attraction of a man and woman for each other. Children, in and of themselves, cannot become the answer, for children born of such a selfish attraction fail also to enrich the lives of the parents. The family as a motivating institution toward which certain alle-
Anna Karenina Revisited

giances are owed simply because it is respected, honored, and wanted, because it makes possible the rearing of children and the transmittal of the culture—this kind of family is required to complete the promise which inheres in heterosexual love. This is Tolstoy's message and one which bears reconsideration today.

It seems no accident that Tolstoy conceived his novel in the latter part of the nineteenth century. All works of art have in common their essential capture of a significant piece of the culture which spawned them. In the relative tranquillity of the still traditionalized family structure of that period, Tolstoy had caught the disturbing seed which has indeed blossomed too fully in the twentieth century. Has not the cult of personal attraction and personal accountability grown so great as to dominate marital selection and adjustment in our time? How different indeed is the message of the timely Marjorie Morningstar from Anna Karenina?

Divorce statistics in this country show increasingly that more and more children are becoming involved in more and more divorces. Sound marital counseling concentrates on personal feelings—whether they be anxieties, compulsions, frustrations, or satisfactions—and aims toward a sufficient freeing so that a satisfactory personal resolution may be derived. Except in hackneyed and trite pseudoreligious utterances, nowhere do we find that kind of searchlight on responsibility and allegiance, such as Tolstoy holds out, to something at least as equally important as personal orientation. It is recognized, of course, that such a sense of allegiance must come from within the individual and not be imposed upon him from without if it is to be successful in his life.

I wonder if a culture can ever achieve satisfying stability and integration in its institution of the family relying, as does ours, on personal happiness as the prime motivational force. I do believe, and the supporting sociological arguments would lead us too far afield, that the establishment of personal happiness to the level of a cultural value with commensurate motivational force is an accompaniment of cultural disintegration. The enthronement of hedonism as a positive value has been associated historically with the decline of civilizations. It is difficult to doubt that the social statistics measuring current family life do not raise similar cause for concern.

Yet these are strange words indeed to come from a social worker whose professional life is bound up with techniques which succeed by capitalizing upon realistic personal satisfaction and comfort—relief from anxiety. This is not to be understood naïvely. Casework techniques serve to free the troubled person to accept rules, traditions, cultural prescriptions when these are so deeply embedded in his personality just as they serve to free the individual to overcome them when this is his particular route to personal security. It is just as certain that the person who is truly adjusted to his cultural norms and traditions must have established his own personal security and must have developed an adjustment to life which is satisfying and comfortable for himself. That is to say that making one's peace with one's culture has to be part of making one's own peace with oneself. Thus, in order for cultural norms to succeed on the social level, they must also succeed on the personal level. Tolstoy's character, Levin, could find happiness and satisfaction in his marriage and in his family because he wanted to be obligated to the demands of the family. Had he not felt this way, no amount of exhortation on the part of society would have brought him this security. Make no mistake, an orientation of family roles as welcomed obligations, an orientation to family roles as an obligation to one's children and to society, must be an inward one to succeed.

I wonder, therefore, if we who are inter-
ested in good family living have not the function to work somehow to develop in people a feeling toward family life of obligation to achieve a successful role of the parent and the spouse. This is to say that we should educate people to good family living not only because an individual will be more satisfied by the consequences of an adequate assumption of his family role but even more that he has a responsibility to do so. Now, we do this in our individual therapeutic work to some extent but we always hark back to the individual's prodding bundle of pain. In problems of lack of responsibility to the role of parent, we come back to the pain of the consequent guilt or the pain of the consequent decreased self-esteem. This is fine in terms of our present state of knowledge of therapeutic dynamics which is such that we really have no substitute for anxiety as the motivating force for personal change. It does, however, appear to me that in our family life education this element of responsibility to family role gets lost and, in consequence, we try to educate for successful family living in terms of personal satisfaction. There is a difference between the "educative" requirements of therapeutic endeavor where the philosophical principle of pleasure-pain holds sway through the medium of the anxiety factor and the requirement of larger education endeavors such as the somewhat mass education for sound family life. Although understanding of the dynamics of family life has a place in this latter, the thesis here is that this sort of knowledge might more profitably be overshadowed by attention to the development of values which aim toward better family life. This is the meaning of the revisit to Tolstoy's Anna Karenina: that we had better begin to direct efforts toward creating in the public an orientation to the institution of the family which tends to bind them to an obligation to succeed in parental and marital roles. We have to begin to combat consciously the orientation that one must obtain happiness from family life, lacking which one is free to "try again." Not that one has not a right to happiness in family life, but rather that on an equal level with this right is the obligation to succeed as a marital partner and the obligations to one's children.

Concretely, this may be translated into the situation of the individual at the crossroads of a domestic quarrel, burning with his need to strike out or to retaliate. Counterbalancing this, there needs to be within him value-attitudes demanding conformity to behavior standards that aim more satisfactorily toward successful family life and that function as a control on the hostility needs. It is to the development of this kind of norm of moral obligation to behavior standards which are conducive to successful family living that family life education efforts should be addressed.

Perhaps the slavishness of the traditional obligation to family roles was too stringent to succeed after the industrial revolution reached its stride. Certainly it is true that the intense personal freedom of the twentieth century fails to foster good family life. Thesis and antithesis seldom succeed; but synthesis, which is what we need now, very often does.