

The Question of Birth Control

The opinions of some prominent people

IN THE HOUSE OF LORDS on April 28th, 1926, Lord Buckmaster moved the following resolution, which was carried:—

“That His Majesty’s Government be requested to withdraw all instructions given to, or conditions imposed on Welfare Committees for the purpose of causing such Committees to withhold from married women in their district information when sought by such women as to the best means of limiting their families.”

In the course of his speech he said:—“Fifty years ago this was a new question; its advocacy was punished by penal law; it startled and shocked people. But to-day the only question left was this:—‘Will you withhold from the poor the knowledge that is possessed and practised by the rich?’

“Birth Control was exercised not because women were selfish and men were worthless and cared for nothing else but pleasure, but it was due to an increased respect for the sanctity of life, and prompted by the desire of parents to secure that their children should not be thrust out by the illimitable competition of the unrestricted number of their brothers and sisters, and by the hope that people would be able to make for their children an easier and a better place than they themselves once enjoyed. People who talked of the nobility of the struggle with poverty knew nothing of that struggle, for it was the most degrading and demoralising struggle human beings had to wage.”

Earl de la Warr said:—"The movement for Birth Control would go on, and it would be better for the country that it should be properly guided. Just as men in the industrial world were no longer content to be mere wage slaves, so women were no longer content to be mere machines for the production of unwanted children."

In the course of an extremely able article in "John o' London" of August 28th, 1926, Lord Riddell writes:—"Birth Control is usually treated as if it concerned only the welfare and comfort of the individual, whereas it is a matter of far-reaching and national importance.....Birth control has come to stay."

**Recent opinions expressed by the eminent Publicist,
Mr. Harold Cox:—**

"At last we have reached the point where Birth Control is recognised by the highest authorities in the land as necessary both for individual welfare and national progress. This plain issue cannot be avoided by any vague talk about improving the conditions of life for the poor. Under no conceivable scheme is it possible within any reasonable number of years to provide for the masses of the population sufficiently spacious accommodation and a sufficiently luxurious margin of living to justify the unrestricted production of children. Voluntary societies have been established, and with the aid of lady doctors are engaged in teaching married women of the poorer classes the best methods of birth control.

"The human value of this work can be best appreciated by reading some of the letters of thanks subsequently received from women who by the knowledge they have acquired have been saved from an ever-overhanging terror.

"Those who help in the work have the further satisfaction of knowing that they are also helping their own country. Our little England is vastly overcrowded.

Comparing acreage and numbers our population is doubly as dense as that of Germany, and four times as dense as that of France.

"Nor can we look to emigration as a remedy. While our home population is still rapidly growing by excess of births over deaths, emigration is declining, and for the very good reason that the classes who are multiplying most rapidly in England are just those who are least wanted in the Dominions.

"From the national, as well as the human, point of view the extension of conscious birth control is the most important of all social reforms."

**Women's National Liberal Federation Meeting at
Blackpool, May, 1927.**

IN a Resolution moved by Mrs. SPRING RICE (Walthamstow), seconded by LADY ACLAND, and carried by a large majority, it was stated that:—"Scientific Birth Control provides a means of increasing the efficiency of the nation."

Mrs. Spring Rice:—"The larger the family the larger was the proportion of deaths in child-birth."

Lady Acland:—"Mothers should have some choice in regard to the number of children they bear. Don't be shocked and push this question into a corner. Birth control is the basis of social reform."

Cambridge Women's Welfare Association.

Mr. Arthur Cooke:—"The knowledge of sound methods of birth control was urgently needed. A hundred years hence it would be thought that civilisation had hardly begun before the days of birth control."

Report of Manchester, Salford and District Mothers' Clinic.

Work in Salford:—"The desire for family limitation is the outcome of a profound sense of parental responsibility for the well-being of existing children, because of inadequate housing and wages."

The Chief Constable of Salford gave a categorical denial to the statement that an increase in immorality had resulted from the work of the Clinic in regard to birth control.

A resolution declaring that there is no evidence that the best contraceptive methods are injurious to health or conducive to sterility and that birth control by hygienic, contraceptive devices is physiologically, legally, and morally "absolutely distinct from abortion," was passed, with three dissentients at a meeting of 154 doctors held in London on 17th July, 1922.

The above pronouncements from people of eminence, and the great bulk of medical opinion expressed in the same direction, all tend to show that the supplying of the necessary contraceptives, which is already an important business, will become much more so in the near future.

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