BIRTH CONTROL

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There's a dear little home in Good-Children Street
Where my heart turneth fondly to-day;
Where tinkle of tongues and patter of feet
Make sweetest of music at play;
Where the sunshine of love illumines each face
And warms every heart in the old-fashioned place.

For dear little children go romping about
With dollies and tin tops and drums;
And my! how they frolic and scamper and shout.
Oh, the days they are golden and days they are fleet
With the dear little folks in Good-Children Street.

—Eugene Field.

In view of the widespread interest manifested in the so-called birth control propaganda, by professional and lay persons, it is the desire of the writer in presenting a brief review of the subject, collected from the literature which has been so widely circulated, to emphasize the necessity of maintaining a very conservative attitude regarding this more or less sensational movement. The writer differs in opinion from those who believe that family limitation will eliminate the difficulties which exist among the poor. There are other factors which contribute to this unfortunate condition, among which may be mentioned poor housing conditions, an insufficient living wage, and the cheap saloon. While the advocates of birth control claim that they do not seek to distribute information regarding family limitation promiscuously, but wish only to make it legal instead of criminal for properly authorized clinics to instruct the poor who are overwhelmed with children, it must be admitted that any relaxation of legal restrictions will lead to an increase in immorality and also an increase in the number of abortions, and thus add mental and physical burdens even greater than those now existing. There can be no doubt that the dissemination of birth-control knowledge has a direct bearing on the birth rate and also, indirectly, on infant mortality, and owing to the lack of organized opposition the propaganda has spread in a most alarming manner.

That there is justification for the control of offspring in certain instances no one will dispute, but where medical reasons demand the same, the physician is now legally empowered to exercise his judgment in giving his patients whatever information is necessary.

The departures from the normal type of individual, like the poor, are always with us, but their welfare and happiness depend largely on other factors than the avoidance, by artificial methods, of undesired children. It would be to much better purpose if an effective means of increasing our population were under discussion, rather than means for diminishing the same by contraceptive methods. The law as it stands serves a useful purpose and to-day when the country is confronted with a rapidly falling birth rate and an increased rate of racial degeneracy, is it possible for an intelligent person to consider that contraceptive measures ought to be taught in clinics or any change made in the law which would make it possible for contraceptive knowledge to be more generally practised?

There are women with tuberculosis, heart and kidney disease, and certain mental disturbances, for whom conception must be prevented, but physicians have already the power to prescribe methods for preventing conception in such cases. The voluntary control of pregnancy is practically impossible, but self-control and common sense are very effective and harmless formulae, and may be safely prescribed to such mothers as desire to avoid the responsibilities of motherhood, as they do not come under the class designated as "crimes against nature."

In considering the social aspects of the question, Major Darwin, president of the Eugenics Education Society, makes the following assertion:

It is immoral and unpatriotic to limit the size of the family when both the parents are fairly healthy, except to insure that there shall be an adequate interval between births, and that the family shall be brought up in comfort, but not in luxury, without external aid.

This condition can be accomplished by self-control and by instilling into the minds of the people a more profound sense of the duties and obligations of parenthood. The marriage relation is entered into for the benefit of the state and looks forward to the perpetuity of the nation and of the race. It is generally admitted and statistics indicate that the birth rate in the United States, especially among native women, is greatly reduced. Selfishness, love of luxury, and a lack of moral sense and responsibility are factors to be considered in this respect. Mothers need an appeal to their spirit of patriotism, we are depending entirely upon immigration to populate our country. It has been well said that the world has a great need of men but it has a far greater need for mothers. If what the authorities tell us is true, there is only one in twenty unfertile among foreign women, while among American women one in eight is childless. It must also be remembered in this connection that contraceptive measures continuously practised, even for a comparatively short period, will bring about a

condition of sterility. It might be well to ask if any information has been put forward by the birth-control propagandists that would contribute any permanent value to the life of the world. The methods advocated by them to limit the size of the family would have a decidedly immoral effect on any community and, as healthy babies demand healthy parents, instruction not only in prenatal care and in such forms of hygienic living as develop healthy bodies, but that combination in the marriage relation that is known to produce a race endowed with a vigorous mentality and a sound physique are what are needed. When mothers are taught to appreciate and demand only the best obstetric care and when prenatal clinics are established and patronized in every community, much will be accomplished in reducing the maternal and fetal mortality which is to a great extent preventable and therefore constitutes no justifiable argument for refusing to rear a family. It must be admitted that there are mothers who find themselves greatly exhausted with an ever increasing number of children and we all agree that it takes a long time to rear and educate them so that at last they are a comfort to their parents and an asset to the country, but every woman has the power within herself to determine to a certain extent the size of her family and she does not require the help of the law to accomplish it.

I am cognizant of the fact that these remarks do not answer satisfactorily all the questions that might be brought forward, but they are presented in the hope that some intelligent reason may be given for opposing any change in the law relative to contraceptive knowledge and for maintaining a conservative attitude regarding the same. The medical profession is for the most part opposed to it and as co-workers, nurses should take a decided stand against any movement that tends to bring about a doubtful social and economic result.

BIRTH CONTROL¹

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Birth control is a subject most difficult to define and limit, for it deals with one of the two fundamental instincts of mankind, the propagation of the species. It has nothing to do with the question of the production of abortion. Though really a misnomer, the term birth control, for the purposes of discussion, may be defined as "the limitation of offspring by the prevention of conception." The solution of

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the problems involved, in the domains of physiology and psychology, of custom, law and morals, of medicine and eugenics, of economics and sociology, are of tremendous and far-reaching importance and influence on the individual and the race. It is in only a slight degree a medical problem. In no wise is it a nursing problem and, frankly speaking, it has no place on your program. But it is an age-old subject of compelling interest and great importance. It is impossible to even attempt its full discussion. Let us consider it from a few of the more important viewpoints.

No one denies the desirability of improving, if possible, the human breed. To the favoring of the production of good stock and to the prevention of the production of the mentally and physically unfit, there can be no objection. This is the study of eugenics, a science still in the formative stage, but of great promise. It is eminently worthy and constructive. A few of its recommendations are now possible by legal enactment; the most will become feasible only by slow and patient education of the people, of all grades, degrees and stations in life.

The science of medicine touches the problems of birth control at three points. One is through eugenics, with which it is indissolubly associated. The second is through the prevention of conception in those to whom pregnancy is a peril and menace to health and life. The third is through the determination of the methods to be used in the prevention of conception. From the strictly professional standpoint, the science of medicine has no further authority or interest in the problem of birth control.

The economic, social and humanitarian aspects of the birth control problem cover a field scarcely touched by earnest or honest investigators. In recent years we have been subjected to a frightful noise about this thing. A group of agitators has taken the center of the stage, calling themselves contraceptionists or birth controllists, forming Birth Control Leagues, Neo-malthusian Leagues, Limitation of Offspring Societies, with a history, a literature and a following. Who are they, what do they want, and what do they claim to be able to accomplish?

Apparently they are seekers after cheap notoriety, or mistaken or misguided enthusiasts, with no conception of the immensity of the problem, with a narrow and often perverted outlook, a gushing sympathy, and a "cure-all" for the ills of society. To scientific investigation and wise foresight they are practically strangers. Of the principles and ideas of Galton and his disciples they have little knowledge and scant courtesy. They furnish another example of the waste

of vast amounts of energy with which this dear, foolish country of ours is blessed and cursed.

They wish, primarily, the repeal of the penal law that forbids the dissemination of knowledge about and means for the prevention of conception and of the Federal law that forbids the transmission of such through the mails. As yet these agitators have brought forward no valid reason why these laws should be set aside. It is not the first time that a statute has served as a cross for self-made martyrs.

The laws repealed, they propose by pamphlets, lectures and "birth control clinics" to spread their doctrine of the prevention of conception. If this is to be done, it is only fair to require that accurate information be given by qualified informants, and that the information reach the proper persons. The birth controllists have given no evidence that they are qualified as informants on the subject, by either knowledge, training or experience. Apparently little or no effort has been made to procure facts. The methods advocated by them for the prevention of conception are generally useless or uncertain, often filthy, and from a medical standpoint potentially harmful. As a matter of fact, most of the methods advocated are pretty generally known, and if they have not been applied it has been from lack of will, not of knowledge.

Granting, for the purposes of discussion, that such information should be given out, to whom shall this "blessing," as it is termed, be dispensed? Because a woman does not want pregnancy is no valid reason for instructing her in its prevention. The decision whether to bear children or not can scarcely be left to the judgment of the ignorant, among whom the birth controllist wish most to spread their gospel. Ill health, vice and crime can, and in due time will, be solved by the spread of medical and eugenic knowledge. Poverty is preventable, and *per se* is not a reason for the limitation of offspring. These problems do not constitute a Gordian knot, to be solved by a single stroke.

The birth controllists claim that they will be able to prevent poverty, to produce better babies, to improve morals, and to further the emancipation of woman. Let us briefly consider these claims in the order given.

The picture that the birth controllists most frequently throw upon the screen is that of a poor family, burdened with children, living in squalor, the mother broken in health by too frequent child-bearing. This deplorable condition, all too common, the agitators for birth control would ameliorate by teaching this mother how to avoid having more babies. They have eyes, but they see not that the poverty and the vice and the crime and the squalor and the ill health are rarely

caused by the number of children. Is it not more sensible to regard the ignorance and the poverty and all the rest as preventable? If she is potentially a good mother, is it not wiser to teach and support her, to make the burden and struggle to live easier for her and hers? Suitable medical and nursing care through her pregnancy, at her labor, and through the nursing period, would go far in conserving her health and her baby's life. All the powers of science and society should be employed to make a fit baby a fit citizen of the world. Whatever social creed this be, the changed and changing conditions of present civilization will demand it for our survival. Some time in the future, a day nursery, where a mother leaves her baby, to labor for a wage outside her home, will be looked back upon as a curious practice of an ancient day. I do not wish to detract in the slightest from the present worth of such agencies, but they are all makeshifts, and birth control as advocated would be the most useless and short-sighted makeshift of all.

The birth controllists claim that fewer babies would mean better babies among those in question. This is a fallacy, for better babies are not inherently determined by their number. Better babies are determined by heredity and by environment, both of which are largely controllable factors. We must have numbers, not only to do the world's work, but also to insure the survival of our race whose dwindling birth-rate is alarming. We can make them all better babies if we will.

The birth controllists claim that they will improve morals. They state that an unwelcome pregnancy is an immoral pregnancy. The mere statement does not make it a fact. An unwelcome pregnancy does not predicate an unwelcome child, for the mother instinct is usually too strong. Though painful to admit, the fact exists that some, possibly much, of sexual immorality is prevented by the fear of resulting pregnancy. It is hard to understand how a general, unrestricted, almost official extension of contraception knowledge would improve conditions. They claim that induced abortions would be lessened. This is also hard to understand, for the majority of such abortions are done among the idle, the better classes, with few or no children,—a group to whom the agitators give little attention. Finally, it is difficult to grasp the broad morality of a movement that seeks to stifle one of man's inherent instincts, the production of his kind, that seeks a purely individualistic world, that advocates ease and luxury, that inculcates dislike of sacrifice and effort, that tends to make maternity something to be shunned and feared.

Finally, the birth controllists claim to be able to give woman a fuller, freer life, to further emancipate her from the slavery of her sex.

Whatever may be the origin, the value, or the outcome of the modern woman's movement, woman possesses one inalienable right, the greatest gift ever bestowed upon a mortal being, the power to give life. It is woman who guards and hands down to posterity the torch of immortality. That class, or that nation, or that race, that forgets the immutable biological law, that the supreme function of womanhood is the bearing and raising of children, is doomed to extinction.

The writer is a staunch supporter of anything that will improve the human breed. He is a firm believer in a birth control that will ensure the health, the improvement and the continuance of his nation and his race. It is a problem that requires deep study, careful thought, wise action. It is a problem that cannot be solved by the minds or the methods of the present agitators of birth control whom we have considered.

We have today discussed chiefly the negative aspects of birth control. The writer commends to your thoughtful reading an article in the October number of the *Metropolitan Magazine* on the positive side of birth control by one who has been called the greatest of living Americans.

We are living in the time of the great war. The white race is being depleted as possibly never before. The white man's body and the white man's brain are inherently no better than of those whose skins are yellow or brown, a fact amply demonstrated in recent years but which our egotism and arrogance and self-satisfaction fail to note. There is surely coming a struggle for supremacy between the race to which we belong and those prolific races which we regard inferior. With our dwindling birth rate, with millions killed, starved, and dead from disease, across the sea, with our own country preparing to sacrifice, if necessary, thousands on the fields of France, with a world at war, it is indeed hardihood to propose or advocate the limitation of the white man's offspring. May that catch-word of reform, birth control, go, at least for the present, the way of euthanasia and twilight-sleep.

VASELINE IN ETHER ANESTHESIA

Carbolized vaseline applied to the nasal mucosa has been found to overcome post-operative vomiting and to do away with the unpleasant taste of ether while taking it and afterward. It is not infallible but in a number of cases it has been most successful and is worth trying.

North Carolina

M. P. A.