

THE CRIME OF BIRTH CONTROL

TWO dates in the present year are likely to be of great moment to the historians of this country. On Thursday, March 17 (St. Patrick's Day) there was opened at 61 Marlborough Road, Holloway, N., the first "Mothers' Clinic for Birth Control." Its founders were "Humphrey Verdon Roe and his wife, Marie Carmichael Stopes, D.Sc., Ph.D."

On Tuesday, May 31, the Queen's Hall held a large and sympathetic audience at a "Meeting convened by Dr. Marie Stopes, author of *Married Love*, *Wise Parenthood*, and *Radiant Motherhood*, on the theme of Constructive Birth Control: its Ideals and Helpfulness to the Individual and to the Race."

Neither of these events can afford to be overlooked by the historian who is concerned to trace the causes of a nation's decay. In themselves the two events were of no greater bulk than a small room in Holloway, or a large hall in Langham Place. The significance of the two events was not in their being great, but in their being primary. The Mothers' Clinic is the first Birth-Control Clinic; the Queen's Hall meeting was the first great public meeting of its kind.

The methods of Birth Control which Dr. Stopes and her fellow neo-Malthusians advocate is old enough even in our land to have a literature of its own. But this literature has been hitherto publicly banned, and the writers of the literature have been liable to public prosecution and imprisonment. For good or for evil and, as we think, for evil rather than for good—the two events which hardly ruffled the serenity of modern news-seekers, betoken that in the course of ten or fifteen years a change has come over the public conscience. Some of us are old enough to remember the storm of horror that overwhelmed Charles Bradlaugh's attempt to anticipate the propaganda of Dr.

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Marie Stopes. In those days hardly any name of public weight could be found in conjunction with the ill-sounding name of the Member for Northampton. But since then so much has happened to our public conscience that whereas Charles Bradlaugh had to fight his neo-Malthusian battles alone, Dr. Marie Stopes can print amongst her list of patrons a Privy Councillor like the Rt. Hon. J. M. Robertson, a prominent Labour Member of Parliament like the chairman, the Rt. Hon. G. H. Roberts, J.P., an admiral like Sir Percy Scott, a publicist like Harold Cox, M.A., an author like Arnold Bennett, a singer like Clara Butt, a social worker like Lady Glenconner, a Catholic (?) like Mrs. Despard, a Church of England woman preacher like Miss Maude Royden, and, needless to say, a doctor like Sir James Barr, and Sir Archdall Reid. A movement supported by men and women of this position must not be judged by the comparatively insignificant names of the two founders of the first neo-Malthusian Clinic.

To Catholics more than to any other section of the community is this new activity of neo-Malthusianism significant. The Church looks upon Marriage not only as a contract, but as a Sacrament; and indeed as a Sacrament wherein the Bridegroom and Bride are not only the recipients but the very ministers.

With this high ideal of Married Love the Church might be expected to have a high yet human view of the duties which are the normal accompaniment of a high and definite human state. The Church's teaching on the duties of husband and wife was one of the earliest of its gifts to the decaying Pagan world. No little part of the New Testament is taken up with this doctrine which was to pour a new wine of life into Paganism's shrivelling veins. But this doctrine of the Church is too ample for us to do more than summarize what it teaches on the matter of Birth Control.

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The Church's teaching on Birth Control may be summarized thus. "The only Birth Control which is not sinful is that in which both husband and wife willingly agree to abstain from marital intercourse." This voluntary and agreed abstention may be temporary, as in so many wedded lives of to-day; or it may be perpetual, as in the case of St. Edward the Confessor.

The Church does not teach that all wedded folk must beget children; nor that all must beget as many children as possible. She wisely leaves this matter to be decided by the mutual agreement of the husband and wife who by their wedlock have given to their partner power over their body. But she promulgates, as a divine law, the absolute prohibition of any sexual intercourse which is voluntarily robbed of its relationship to begetting offspring. For this reason she forbids by the divine law the use of contraceptives which have no other end than the reconciliation of sexual intercourse with the prevention of offspring. In promulgating this principle as a divine law the Church is consistent with her high view of the Sacrament of Marriage. Her doctrine of the indissolubility of marriage means that, provided all the conditions of a valid marriage have been observed, the resultant marriage has passed beyond the power of the Church to unmake. So, too, the conditions under which marital intercourse may or may not take place are not in the power of the Church to make or unmake. They belong to that great virtue of Justice between two human beings and God which the Church is commissioned to safeguard, but not to change.

It is, then, significant that at the Queen's Hall meeting the only religious body attacked by the speakers was the Roman Catholic Church, and the only (feeble) opposition came from a small body of Roman Catholics who felt an overwhelming need of decrying a crime against God and their country.

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As one of those who took part in this protest, I can witness that we had no great conceit of its value. There was no doubt that the neo-Malthusians had filled a large London hall on a fine summer's evening with such an enthusiastic crowd as perhaps no Catholic meeting could attract. Moreover, it was evident that the Catholic protest, coming from only two or three Catholics scattered here and there amidst a great crowd could but accentuate our weakness. Yet the protest arose from a sense that duty called for a symbolical and official act which would at once register and strengthen the official opposition of the Church.

The present writer is amongst those who feel that in this land for the moment the victory is, and for some time will be, with the neo-Malthusians. Birth Control is not a passing fashion. It has come to stay ; and it will stay until it has brought upon the country some great national hurt which will arouse the nation to a sense of national sin.

Amongst the reasons why we think that neo-Malthusian Birth Control has come to stay until some great doom befalls us, may be cited the following.

1. Neo-Malthusian Birth Control in England is no longer a crime of the rich ; it is now a crime of the poor. Part of the simple Eugenics of Nature was that sterility was a characteristic of that "small number of very rich men who are able to lay upon the labouring poor a yoke little better than that of slavery itself." This group who were financially the most capable were morally the most unwilling and therefore incapable of begetting a numerous offspring. Their low birth-rate and their high lunacy rate was a standing refutation of the assertions of modern Eugenics.

But in their sterility they were hitherto a class apart. The middle classes, and especially the poor, had no mind to lessen their families. But the neo-Malthusian rich, alarmed at the high birth-rate of other classes

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than their own, began to spread abroad their neo-Malthusianism. So successful have they been that men become, as the Labour Member G. H. Roberts chairman of the Queen's Hall meeting became, almost dithyrambic when he invited his fellow-workers to share that knowledge which had hitherto been "the sole possession of the rich."

2. A second reason why we think that Birth Control will last is that this intellectual propaganda is almost irresistibly recommended by modern conditions. Under modern town conditions, Birth Control seems the one thing possible and necessary.

To feel this fact at its full we must contrast here, as in all supreme economic questions, modern town-life with the irreducible economic unit of country life. The normal country homestead and home has for its normal efficient power *the family*. The modern factory has for its normal efficient power not the family, but the *individual*. It is obvious that if every system tends to discourage what is not its unit, then the modern factory-town (which is now the normal English town) will tend to discourage the family.

Hence most of the necessities of family life which are so amply provided by the country are stunted in the town.

Until town ideas of sanitation, etc., invaded the country, houses could be built by unskilled labour. It was rare to have two country families, even of the poorest, under one roof. Under modern town conditions, and in spite of town sanitary principles, many town families live a family in one room and many families under one roof.

The breakdown of the housing system in the modern town is making it impossible for even the middle classes to find room for a large family. Birth Control comes to such people almost with the call and sanctity of a gospel.

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Moreover, under modern town conditions the confinements of poor mothers are almost impossible in the one, two or three rooms which are called a home. To a degree which has now become a national danger, the mothers of the poor have their confinements in an institution. Under the steady, well-directed, and heavily financed propaganda of the Eugenists, these institutions are becoming more and more open in their profession of neo-Malthusianism. This spirit is seen in the following quotation from the monthly periodical, *Maternity and Child Welfare*: "A resolution has recently been passed by the Herefordshire County War Pensions Committee to prevent the issue of treatment allowances for the children of neurasthenic or tuberculous pensioners if the children are born during a time when the parents are undergoing a prolonged course of treatment. So evidently Hereford does not believe in the survival of the unfit" (March, p. 92).

Again, Dr. Killick Millard, Medical Officer of Health for Leicester, one of the chief speakers at the Queen's Hall, gives to every patient discharged from the Tubercular Sanatorium a letter urging them not to have children and offering to give them suitable advice!

The modern growth of Medical Centres for the poor is likely to make neo-Malthusian Birth Control stable. The ruin wrought in France, where there was nothing but personal propagation behind the movement, has become at length of national concern. But almost everything in England points to the fact that what in France was individual propaganda will be with us a national concern, through the network of Maternity Centres, Infant Welfare Centres, Infants' Clinics, etc., which are now so powerful amongst the poor by their doles of medicines and baby foods.

In our crusade against this latest and most successful neo-Malthusianism we Catholics are quite content to be on the side of the divine law. It is a substantial

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though a lesser consolation that this crusade is blessed by the more thinking doctors. Thus, at a meeting of the Section of Obstetrics and Gynæcology of the Royal Society of Medicine, held on May 5, three of the leading London specialists on diseases of women deprecated the contraceptive method of Birth Control, which is advocated, amongst other sinful expedients, by the modern neo-Malthusians. Dr. Giles, who read a paper on "The Prognosis and Treatment of Sterility" summed up the opinion of these specialists in these words by remarking "on the great unhappiness resulting from deliberately childless marriages, and he had always warned patients of this. Those who wanted to have a child for a convenient season often laid up trouble for themselves. He would like the opinion to go forth from the section that the use of contraceptives was a bad thing."

In this weighty opinion of one of the chief medical men of the country, the word *bad* has only a medical import. But it is none the less a word of great import for those who have and for those who have not any moral categories. The moral practitioner, who is so often called upon to warn his fellow-beings away from paths of ease or delight, cannot but be gladdened by the fellowship of the medical practitioners in the hard task of safeguarding the future of the race. It will seem to him that when the men who alone professionally deal with the body and the soul are agreed to condemn some practice as hurtful to body and soul, a nation which refuses to accept their wisdom must perish by its folly.

P.S.—Since writing the above we have read the following in the *Times* of June 18.

BIRTH CONTROL

"The Malthusian League, which has opened new offices at 124 Victoria Street, S.W., is starting a lecture

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campaign among working men and women, beginning at 84 Blackfriars Road on Monday. It is intended to open clinics all over London."

VINCENT MCNABB, O.P.



FREEDOM

"In an ordered and free country, such as ours . . ."—FRANCIS R. MUIR. *Blackfriars*, April, 1921.

IT is not generally known that this is a free country. Englishmen do indeed stand up when the band plays "God save the King," and feel emotions of pride and benevolence as they see the Union Jack suspended from the balcony of the Mansion House or draped over the Cenotaph. The clock tower at Westminster is photo-engraved upon their hearts as upon their Bradburies. Festooned with Tudor roses and ribs of beef, a cornucopia of Liberty empties itself at the feet of Nelson, Dizzy, John Peel and the Iron Duke as, in scarlet, they follow the hounds and trample our defeated foes! Rule Britannia, the men in blue, St. Paul's Cathedral, the Derby, the M.C.C., and Aston Villa, not to mention the playing-fields of Eton, awake those emotions of freedom which no coal strike can destroy nor Ireland dim. But, in spite of these telling facts, I fear we English have forgotten that we are free. We complain, at times, that our freedom has, in some measure, been taken from us.