



# EDITORIAL



## BIRTH CONTROL

**I**N one of the daily papers there recently appeared an account of a woman who pleaded guilty to a second charge of burglary and who gave in extenuation of her act a statement to the effect that she had six children, the youngest ten months old and expected shortly to give birth to another, that her husband had developed tuberculosis and that the Health Department would not permit him to continue his work as an operator on children's clothing; that she had worked as she could for the family's support until her condition made it impossible for her to work further and that the necessity of providing food for her family had driven her to theft. In his opinion the Judge of the Court of Sessions gave as a reason for suspending sentence on this second offense his belief that the circumstances warranted unusual clemency and went on to say "The husband is unable to work because of tuberculosis:

"Nevertheless he goes on becoming the father of children who have very little chance under the conditions to be anything else but tubercular, and, themselves growing up, to repeat the process with society. There is no law against that.

"But we have not only no birth regulation in such cases, but if information is given with respect to birth regulation people are brought to the bar of justice for it. There is a law they violate."

Judge Wadhams pointed out that many nations of Europe had adopted birth regulation with seemingly excellent results. He queried whether Americans had taken as common sense a view of the subject as we might.

"I believe," the opinion continued, "that we are living in an age of ignorance which at some future time will be looked upon aghast as we look back upon conditions which we now permit to exist. So that here we have a family increasing in number, with a tubercular husband, with a woman with a child at her breast, with other small children at her skirts, and no money."

Judge Wadhams in making a public statement of this kind from the bench has, as it were, brought to official attention a question which is being agitated in many quarters. Surely it seems wrong that a man afflicted with tuberculosis and of such a social development as to fail to recognize the wrong that he inflicts upon his wife and children by begetting fresh victims for a tuberculous environment and who lacks the mental development to exercise self control for their sake, should be allowed to go on in ignorance. Surely no more clear cut example can be asked for by the advocates of public instruction in birth control. It is a sin for such a man to be endowed with a father's privileges; it is a sin against the community to bring forth sickly children to become charges upon public charity; it is a sin against womanhood to degrade a mother as this woman was degraded. But is the problem to be solved by placing in the hands of such people definite instructions as to how they may pre-



determine and control the size of their family? There are many fundamental principles underlying this momentous question that must not be lightly brushed aside, for upon them depends the future of the race. Doubtless the question of marriage and its consequences has a spiritual and intellectual side that is no less important than the physical. One may question the wisdom of tampering in any degree with the spiritual development of men and women; there are big minded men and women who see in marriage not only the joy of mutual understanding and uninterrupted companionship, but the grave responsibility that rests upon them as sponsors for the next generation. To such the responsibilities as well as the joys of parentage bring a rounding out of character that fits them to be homemakers and trainers of a following generation that may be expected to have ideals as lofty as their own. There is another class of people of whom it may be said that marriage represents merely the gratification of purely selfish motives, increased comforts, increased luxuries, increased license. The fact that many such unions are childless and that among the wealthy there are many whose children are given over to the exclusive care of nurses, so that the social life of the parents may not be hampered, is the best evidence that selfishness and licentiousness are the underlying motives in their lives. Such people are not good citizens; it is the example of such that has gone far to cause the disappearance of the American home. The future of the United States as a nation depends more upon the moral character of its citizens than it does upon their physical fitness. In most of the discussions upon this subject which have been presented to the public, the major emphasis has been laid upon the overwhelming proportion of births among the poor and unfit and the argument is made to rest purely on the theorem that because the poor and ignorant multiply out of proportion to the rich and cultured and healthy, therefore, the future welfare of the country will be benefited by providing to the poor and ignorant a means of controlling their excessive birthrate. The rank materialism of this theorem is evident. If one removes parental responsibility there is also removed the mental discipline which makes for moral growth; and without moral and spiritual growth, future generations will relapse into luxury and licentiousness in this country as they did in ancient Greece, in ancient Rome, and in ancient Babylon. The motive underlying birth control is a double motive, gloss it over as one may; there is the licentious craving as well as the desire to make parentage less burdensome. It is respectfully submitted that the sexual craving was placed in animate creation for the sole purpose of preventing that which the advocates of birth control seem to overlook. Such improvement in the moral development of the human race as has come has been achieved through tribulations and trial and sorrow. Responsibility breeds responsibility, ease and comfort and luxury breed selfishness and licentiousness.

Before Judge Wadhams and the other advocates of birth control take the final step to place in the hands of the masses an infallible recipe, let them consider whether the reverse side of the question is not more important than the obverse and whether in endeavoring to subvert natural processes we are not breeding future sorrow and future trouble; yes, and future degeneration out of all proportion to present benefit.

H. G. W.