



EDITORIAL



BIRTH CONTROL.

THE advocates of changes in the law to permit the free dissemination of information on birth control show a disposition that makes one wonder whether they have individually given to the subject the thought that it demands. A committee of ladies have approached Governor Whitman with the request for his immediate cooperation in their campaign and seem to expect that he will of his own initiative immediately bring about the reform they seek. One is reminded of the furore that attended the twilight sleep discussion a year ago; at that time the newspapers and magazines of the country bristled with the threats of certain militant ladies who were insistent that doctors should be compelled by law to give twilight sleep to every parturient woman. We notice that in a very brief space of time the agitation has died out. Some of the names connected with the birth control propaganda are curiously familiar and may be identified with a variety of other recent schemes that were all important at the time but have now lapsed into the limbo occupied by the hoop skirt, peg-top pants, burnside whiskers and other fashions that once were everywhere and are now well nigh forgot.

May we inquire what all this agitation about birth control really means? Is it true, as has been whispered, that somebody has a patented contraceptive article that he is anxious to make commercially profitable and that someone else has an infallible application that he would be glad to see put upon the open market? These whispers are but rumor, it is true, but it is quite pertinent to ask if there is a basis for the rumor. Have the ladies and gentlemen who have interested themselves in the subject ever considered that birth control for the individual may be properly achieved in precisely the same way that pregnancies may be lawfully terminated? Any physician in an individual case, and after proper consultation, could properly place in the hands of his woman patient information that will help to guard her against future pregnancies, provided her health is likely to suffer from them. Gynecologists are quite ready to sterilize patients who are likely to bear children which may prove a menace to the public or to themselves. No one has ever questioned the propriety of such steps, but even though such eminent names as Jacobi and Holt are published as advocating the repeal of laws that have long been on the statute books forbidding the dissemination of general information upon this subject, it will require most careful consideration before the bulk of the thoughtful people of the country can be persuaded to give their unqualified endorsement. This subject goes back to the fundamental principle of the propagation of the species and under no circumstances must be lightly undertaken, for while a considerable number of people could be trusted to use their knowledge intelligently, it is equally true that a great many would hail the discovery as permitting unchecked licentious indulgence. There is in this country

today a very large class of utterly selfish people whose only thought is how to shirk responsibility and whose apparent aim in life is the cultivation of an appetite for selfish indulgence. It is true that people of this class can always purchase what they want and most of them, if one judges by their lack of children, have already secured the information which is now demanded in behalf of the uninstructed remainder.

It has been pointed out before in these columns that child-bearing has a great spiritual power in building up the character of both parents, a point which seems to be entirely overlooked in such arguments as the advocates of birth control have so far advised. The bulk of their arguments have been purely utilitarian. Before the Legislature is stampeded by the insistent clamor of Mrs. Sanger and her supporters, it should be informed through an enlightened commission on all possible sides of this momentous question, and it is greatly to be hoped that Governor Whitman will not permit himself to be hurried into any action that he may later regret.

H. G. W.