

BIRTH CONTROL*

**BY EDWARD C. PODVIN, M. D.,
New York**

**Adjunct Professor of Hygiene and Preventive Medicine, Fordham
University Medical School**

The present agitation of the subject of birth control, which is engaging the attention of the laity and to a certain extent the medical profession, although brought forth at this time by a group of notoriety seekers who would surround it with the glamour of the so called advanced ideas of a most progressive age, is in reality an old and often discredited practice which has appeared again and again.

The story of the decline and decay of any great nation has always interwoven with it this strong damning of national vices. A nation may wax strong on the industry of its

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people, its sons clean of mind and sturdy of body, its daughters fruitful in their progeny and devoted to domesticity. Then comes the period of great wealth, luxury and so called refinement. In this age the vices subordinated in the previous one by stern necessity arise and prosper, most prominent and damaging being the pandering to the passions with a distaste for the responsibility of a family. To indulge the sexual appetite and avoid its consequences birth control is suggested. This marks the era of decay. Once given over to this practice, no nation has ever been known to follow other than the road to ruin. It was so with ancient Greece and Rome, where this vice prevailed until the strength of these great nations was destroyed.

In modern times this practice has prevailed to such an alarming extent in France that for years its death rate has exceeded the number of births. During the first six months of the year 1914 before the European War the number of births in France was 4,000 less than for the same period of the preceding year. At the same time the deaths increased 20,845. Thus the population of France during the first six months of 1914 decreased 24,816. For the past thirty years the French birth rate has steadily decreased, while the death rate has increased.

Our committee on birth control would like to turn this nation into another France. As intelligent students of history, realizing its devastating influence, it is our patriotic duty to oppose it. They wish to have repealed Section 1142 of the New York Penal Code, which makes the giving information leading to race suicide, a misdemeanor. If they succeed in having this law removed from the statute books, it is then their purpose to go about the dissemination of the so called formula for the prevention of conception. The methods which they suggest consist of douches, antiseptics, etc., and contain nothing new or novel.

Let us for a moment consider what this practice would mean to the individual, aside from its affect on the nation. Man is so constituted that there are two sides to his nature; an animal or physical side and an intellectual or spiritual part. His physical being must ever be subordinate to and dominated by the intellectual. His tendency is ever toward selfperfection, the development and refinement of his entirety being under the guidance of his intellect.

Among the natural appetites given to man are those of hunger, thirst, and the sexual instinct. Each has a definite and necessary purpose and each must be under the control of the intellect. The sexual instinct necessary for procreation differs in no way from the others in that its indulgence increases and intensifies it, while repression diminishes it. Therefore any practice which would tend toward the exercise of this function otherwise than in the way and for the purpose intended by nature, namely, procreation, would stimulate and strengthen passion and thus lower the moral calibre of the individual. On the other hand, all authorities agree that the control and subjection of the sexual function is not only desirable but beneficial, and that man can reach the highest state of development, both physical and mental, without their exercise.

Since the indulgence of the sexual instinct means the strengthening of this appetite, anything that would tend to make easy and encourage this indulgence would also tend to the lowering of man to the most degrading depths. The over-exercise of this function would bring about the development of all kinds of abnormalities and degeneracy in sex matters, as it is a well established fact that those who overindulge the sexual instinct eventually become perverts of one form or another.

Again, we are all aware that one of the greatest protecting agencies of female virtue is the fear of conception. Remove this fear and you have taken away from those of not overstrong mental faculties one of the most important natural safeguards of chastity. Also, any physician is aware that the methods advocated by the disciples of birth control are far from perfect, that in order to be even tolerably efficacious they must be intelligently carried out. Now, the very class of women for whom they are intended are the ones least likely by nature and environment to observe the prescribed technic. Thus we would have the terrible results of the false security promised by those prescriptions, and the inevitable accompaniment—the abortionist or suicide.

No more unpatriotic principle could be advocated than that which it is entitled and which it may sorely need for its development or defense.

It would directly violate and frustrate the primary ob-

ject of matrimony, which is the begetting of children, and what more natural, if we do away with the purpose of matrimony, than that we do away with matrimony itself? Free love is the natural sequence of this plan. It means the lowering of man below the level of the beast, who is guided only by instinct. Man is guided by reason, yet in the practice of birth control he would overthrow reason and give himself up entirely to the gratification of his passions.

That it is a violation of God's law as expressed in Genesis, "Increase and multiply," does not seriously concern the advocates of this practice.

The first and most appealing argument advanced in behalf of birth control is poverty; that children are brought into the world by people who are unable to give them the means of livelihood, and that their presence here is undesirable.

Now aside from the religious aspect, that we as believers in a Creator hold that He alone is responsible for each individual and that we are not to decide so important a question for Him, in the physical sense alone, can this statement be proved? No class of men are more conversant with the intimate affairs of the family than physicians; now let me ask how many instances can we recall in all our experience of actual suffering being due alone to the size of the family? That we have seen suffering and want is undeniable, but in how many instances was that due alone and entirely to the excessive number of children? Was there no intemperance, was there no lack of industry on the part of the parents, or were there not industrial or financial accidents due to man's carelessness or cupidity that contributed to or caused the suffering?

What do we mean by happiness and suffering, especially in this regard? I ask anyone who has an only child, or who has ever had to deal either professionally or otherwise with an only child, what is their idea of the relative happiness of that child reared with every want anticipated, and the child of the tenement who subsists on the plainest fare, but who is able to divide not only his crusts but his joys and sorrows with brothers and sisters. Happiness, as we all know, is not a matter of environment, but is a mental state, dependent entirely on the individual, and influenced least of all by surroundings. Again, if we were to review the history of

those who have been of greatest service to humanity, or have really contributed toward the world's progress, I am sure we would find that from the ranks of those born to poverty and hardships have come a vast majority of our great men and women of all ages. How are we to decide in advance which child in years to come will be the better cared for? We are none of us gifted with the powers of foresight—not even the apostles of this wonderful creed—and the parents who decide that because today they are in a comfortable position financially and otherwise, they will proceed to have a child, may be the very ones who in a short time, by some unexpected change in fortune, are reduced to penury, while their neighbors, whose large and poorly clad progeny, at the time of their decision the familiar gossip of the neighborhood, have by a similar change been swept on the crest of a wave of prosperity to affluence or high state.

The other argument advanced is that due to the severity of labor woman is reduced to a state of invalidism, that she often gives up her health, happiness, and even life itself, through parturition. That an occasional death occurs during childbirth is patent. I am not familiar with the actual mortality statistics of pregnancy, if there are such figures. Someone with a genius for statistics has recently compiled the death rate from German measles and chickenpox, and I am sure they are on a par with pregnancy. To say that a woman should avoid pregnancy because of the rare fatalities would be equivalent to stating that no one should travel on railroads because an occasional passenger is killed. And as regards the injurious effects on the health and wellbeing, just exactly opposite is the case, as every physician knows.

We need but to review our practical experiences to realize that the class of patients that are always in our waiting rooms, with every variety of complaint, real or imaginary, are the unmarried women of advancing years or the married ones with one or no children. What more constant and sorrowful picture is there than this class of women—prematurely gray and enfeebled, soured in disposition, disappointed in ambition, disillusioned, confirmed pessimists, gossips and busybodies, their life a burden to themselves and an annoyance to everyone with whom they come in contact? They furnish the vast majority of the subjects operated on for floating kidney, chronic appendicitis, and any other chronic

and obscure conditions which can be credited with their complaints and will justify an exploratory operation. They fill and make possible the rest cures and sanitariums and are almost the sole support of the charlatan.

On the other hand, consider what is our usual experience with the mothers of large families. In the early years of their married life we see them about once every eighteen months for confinement. We see them again quite frequently when we go to the home to visit the children while they are small. If we think that the mothers should come to our office for some special purpose or examination, we usually are obliged to appeal to the husband and make him stay home from work to bring them. Then they drop out of our sight until we may meet them again at the climacteric period when they come to us accompanied by daughters that look like their sisters or sons that seem like brothers. The finest physical specimens of womanhood that I have in my acquaintance at the age of forty to fifty or over are the mothers of large families. No Jackson's membrane operation in this class of patients, no tampon or no electrical treatments. Health and happiness shine in their countenance—happiness engendered by the hopes and plans and endeavors in behalf of others—their children. Sacrifice, the great force, has refined their character, and surrounded by their progeny they are truly the queens of the earth, before whom every true and honorable man has ever bowed in allegiance and respect—noble motherhood.

That there is a justification for the control of offspring in certain rare instances nobody will dispute. The husband of a tuberculous or otherwise enfeebled wife is not alone justified but is in duty bound to exercise this control. There is no objection to control for economic reasons if husband and wife are agreed in the matter and are able to safeguard the passions. To accomplish this it is not necessary to stoop to a practice that is degrading and dangerous, it is not necessary to pander to the passions or disobey Nature's laws. There is a birth control that is absolutely reliable, no whispered formula is necessary for its execution, it does not weaken man physically or morally, it violates neither the law of God or man—selfcontrol.

301 East Fordham Road