

**MEDICAL
ASPECTS OF CONTRACEPTION**

REPORT AND EVIDENCE

MEDICAL ASPECTS OF CONTRACEPTION

*Being the Report of the Medical Committee appointed
by the National Council of Public Morals in
connection with the investigations of
the National Birth-rate
Commission*

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PREFATORY NOTE

THE National Council of Public Morals, which has for its objects the promotion of the moral and physical regeneration of the race, established in 1913, with official recognition, an enquiry which became known as the National Birth-rate Commission. The Commission was composed of sixty recognised authorities in religion, science, statistics, economics, and education; it took evidence from a large number of experts, and in 1916 presented its first Report to the late Lord Long, then President of the Local Government Board, who said on receiving the Commission :

“ My first duty, and a very great privilege it is, is, on behalf of the Government and on behalf—may I for a moment voice something much wider and much larger than the Government?—on behalf of society and the country, to thank your Commission for the splendid work which you have done. . . . I am confident that if you have done nothing else, and I think you have done a great deal more, you have stirred the minds and hearts of men and women in so profound a way that even the most careless, the most indifferent, cannot be deaf to your entreaties or regardless of your suggestions. . . . If the need for work of this kind were great before, it is ten times

greater now that this war has come. I hope that the important remark made to us a moment ago may be appreciated by the people of this nation throughout its length and breadth—namely, that true patriotism and true devotion to public service are not to be found merely in the performance of those splendid feats of arms which have won the gratitude of our hearts and which have won our undying admiration, but they are also to be found in those quieter, less glorious, but none the less valuable services which we can, if we will, in our time and generation render to the State.”

Now, in that Report ¹ the question of family restriction was put before the Commission at considerable length by expert witnesses, and their evidence and examination were published in full. The Report was extensively reviewed in the Press of Great and Greater Britain, America, and in most Continental countries, and aroused great interest in the Churches. It went out practically to the ends of the earth. One typical review may be quoted: *The New Statesman* (Dr. Sidney Webb) said that “The National Council of Public Morals has done a great public service. The Commission has produced the most candid, the most outspoken, and the most impartial statement that this country has yet had as to the extent, the nature, and the ethical character of the voluntary regulation of the marriage state which now prevails over the greater part of the civilised world.” In that Report there was a special section dealing with the moral and religious aspects of Birth Control, and the views of representative

¹ Published under the title of “The Declining Birth Rate, its Causes and Effects.”

members of the Established Church, the Catholic Church, the Free Churches and the Jewish community were published. In an "addendum" to the Report, drawn up by the Rev. Principal A. E. Garvie, D.D., and signed by twenty-four of the members of the Commission, it was urged that—

"The following are some of the questions which deserve more thorough and general consideration than we have been able to give to them :

(1) Is parenthood the only valid reason for marital relations ?

(2) What motives justify the restriction of the family ?

(3) Is any mode of restriction except voluntary abstinence from marital relations moral and religious ?

(4) How would such voluntary abstinence affect the health, comfort, and happiness of the relations of husband and wife ? "

From the issue of that Report, the National Council has been more or less the centre of organised investigation into the various aspects of the complex problem of Birth Control. And various members of the Commission—amongst whom were Sir Arthur Newsholme (then the Principal Medical Officer of the Local Government Board, who with Dr. T. C. Stevenson, the Superintendent of Statistics, were appointed by their respective Government departments to serve on the Commission), Dr. Mary Scharlieb, Lady Barrett, and others—armed with

the expert information gained at its board, have written books on the subject which have still further aroused public opinion upon this urgent and almost world-wide problem.

The Commission was reconstituted in 1917, and devoted three more years to further investigation into problems of population and parenthood, and in 1920 presented its second Report to the Rt. Hon. C. Addison, M.P., then Minister of Health. This further Report occupied a volume of 450 pages, and had a very large circulation, and also dealt with the problem of Birth Control. Again in 1921 the National Council appointed, as the Ministry of Health decided it would be better to have an independent inquiry, a special Committee on "The Prevention of Venereal Disease" with a view to bringing together the divided forces attacking these dire evils. The subject of Birth Control came again into the discussion of these vital matters. And later in 1921 the National Council reconstituted the Commission a third time to deal with a further problem of the "Development and Education of Young Citizens for Worthy Parenthood," and its third Report, under the title of "Youth and the Race," a volume of 378 pages, was presented to the Ministry of Health and the Board of Education jointly. During the third investigation we were, as before, brought up against the recurring question of Birth Control, and in particular we were urged on all sides to follow up the work of our first Commission and to give some guidance to Christian people who were sorely perplexed about their duty and responsibility in this regard. The National Council accordingly

appointed, in continuation of its previous investigation, a special Committee "to consider the Ethical Aspects of Birth Control from the point of view of Christian people." The President of the National Council, the Lord Bishop of Winchester, who, as Bishop of Peterborough, had served on the previous Commission, became the President of this Birth Control Committee. The Report was published in May 1925 and was extensively reviewed in the Press at home and abroad.

Soon after a Medical Committee was appointed to consider the medical aspects of contraception. The terms of reference and the members are given on pp. xv-xvi. We regret to state that Dr. Letitia D. Fairfield had to resign after six meetings owing to pressure of professional work.

The Committee has held eighteen meetings and has had the benefit of statements and evidence from F. H. A. Marshall, Sc.D., F.R.S.; Robert L. Dickinson, M.D.; Miss Gertrude Sturges, M.D.; Mrs. G. M. Cox, M.B., B.S.; Mrs. Alice L. L. Robson, M.B., C.M.; Mrs. C. S. S. Winter, M.B., Ch.B.; T. A. Webster, M.A.; C. Killick Millard, D.Sc.; Binnie Dunlop, M.B., Ch.B.; Norman Haire, Ch.M., M.B.; R. A. Gibbons, M.D., F.R.C.S.E.; Lord Dawson, M.D., G.C.V.O., and H. Crichton Miller, M.D. The evidence of these various witnesses, to whom the Committee has been greatly indebted, follows the Report and the Memoranda, which are here published.

In our previous Reports we have stated the limits of the responsibility of the members and ourselves in making these investigations and in publishing the various

Reports, and we cannot do better than quote our own words again :

“ The members of the Committee who have signed this Report are to be considered to have expressed their general agreement with its conclusions, without necessarily asserting their unanimity in every detail.

“ The Council left the members free in every way to pursue their inquiries, and the Report is now presented to the public without alteration by the Council. The Committee is alone responsible for its Report.”

It will be clear, therefore, that, in accordance with its settled policy here stated, the National Council is in no way responsible for this report, either in its recommendations or in the evidence which was placed before the Committee. None the less it is exceedingly grateful to the members of the Committee, and in particular to the Chairman, Mr. Gibbs, and also to Sir Arthur Newsholme and to Dr. Giles, for the time and trouble which, though themselves busy men, they have given to this investigation. It remains to say that the report is not suited, nor is it intended, for general reading, but for those medical men and women upon whom responsibility lies for giving advice on this most difficult subject.

The National Council would like, should financial help be found for this particular purpose, to proceed next year with the third part of its investigation—namely, the Economic Aspects of Birth Control.

It may here be stated that in 1925, at the time the

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Ethical Report was issued, the National Council also issued the Report of three years' scientific psychological investigation into the educational value of the Cinematograph, following its earlier inquiry into the physical and moral effects of the Cinematograph upon young people.

In this, as in other ways, the National Council of Public Morals, which is a voluntary body dependent upon charitable contributions, hopes to continue its efforts to serve the Nation, the Empire, and the Race.

60, Gower St., W.C. 1.

October, 1927.

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