Fabian Tract No. 131.

THE DECLINE in the BIRTH-RATE

By SIDNEY WEBB.

PUBLISHED AND SOLD BY

THE FABIAN SOCIETY.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

LONDON:

THE FABIAN SOCIETY, 3 CLEMENT'S INN, STRAND, W C.

MARCH 1907.

THE DECLINE IN THE BIRTH-RATE.

ON the 26th of May, 1905, a sub-committee of the Fabian Society was appointed with a curt reference—"to consider birth-rate and infantile mortality statistics"—with a view to investigate certain social phenomena of importance. The investigations of the sub-committee were directed first to the decline in the birth-rate; and as they led to conclusions of interest and importance, an informal interim report was, by direction of the Executive Committee, drawn up by one of its members—the facts and suggestions being put by the author in his own way, upon his sole responsibility—and communicated by him to the *Times*,* whence it was reprinted by the [American] *Popular Science Monthly*. The sub-committee is continuing its labors, but, for the convenience of members and others, the substance of the informal interim report is now reproduced in more accessible form, without the Fabian Society as a whole being committed to its suggestions.

The phenomenon to be investigated was the decline in the number and proportion to population of the children born in Great Britain. Such a decline had long been an object of desire in certain quarters. "If only the devastating torrent of children could be arrested for a few years," wrote one of the most sympathetic friends of progress, not so very long ago, voicing the opinion of the economists from Malthus to Fawcett, "it would bring untold relief."† Not many years have passed, and his aspiration is fulfilled. One of His Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, lately revisiting, after some interval, a public elementary school in the centre of London, remarked that, since he was there before, without any alteration in the school regulations, the "babies' class" had ceased to exist. Between 1896 and 1905 the total population of the County of London is estimated to have increased by 300,000 persons. But the total number of children between three and five years of age who were scheduled by the vigilant school-attendance officers positively fell from 179,426 to 174,359. That this scheduling was fairly exhaustive is shown by the fact that

* The report appeared in the *Times* of the 11th and 18th October, 1906; and in the *Popular Science Monthly* for December, 1906. Besides many articles and notices in the principal newspapers during October, 1906, it elicited articles, in confirmation or controversy, in the *Fortnightly Review* (by Montague Crackenthorpe, K.C.) and *Nineteenth Century* (by J. W. Barclay) for December, 1906.

† *The Service of Man*; by J. Cotter Morison, preface, p. xx.

there were almost exactly 5,000 fewer children of that age recorded in the London census of 1901 compared with that of 1891. Nor is this either an isolated or a temporary phenomenon. All over England and Wales the birth-rate is falling steadily, in a decline which has already lasted thirty years, and which shows no sign of slackening. In 1876, to every 100,000 of the population there were born 3,630 babies. In 1904, to every 100,000 of the population there were born only 2,790—absolutely the lowest number on record since birth registration began.*

1. *This decline in the birth-rate is not merely the result of an alteration in the ages of the population, or in the number or proportion of married women, or in the ages of these.*

It is necessary at the outset to remove one possible explanation. What the Registrar-General gives us is the crude birth-rate—that is to say, the exact proportion of births during the year to the total population, whether old or young, married or single. But in comparing these birth-rates for different years, we have to remember that important changes may take place, even in a single decade, in (*a*) the proportion between children and adults ; (*b*) the proportion between married and unmarried ; and (*c*) the proportion between married women of the reproductive age and those above that age. These changes—due, it may be, to emigration or immigration, to economic or social developments, or to mere prolongation of the average life—are sufficient, in themselves, to produce a rise or a fall in the crude birth-rate, without there having been any increase or decrease in human fertility. To give one striking instance, the crude birth-rate of Ireland per 100,000 population fell from 2,384 in 1881 to 2,348 in 1901. But we happen to know that in the course of these twenty years the proportion of married women of reproductive age to the total population so far diminished that the slight fall in the crude birth-rate really represented, not a decline, but a positive increase in fertility. If the Ireland of 1901 had contained a population made up by ages, sexes and marital conditions, in the same proportion as that of 1881, the recorded births in 1901 would have appeared as a birth-rate actually higher by three per cent. than that of 1881. We have, therefore, first to ask what are the corresponding figures for England and Wales, eliminating all the elements of variations of age, of postponement of marriage, and of positive refusal to marry.†

Now, it so happens that this problem has lately been worked out by the statisticians in a way to remove all uncertainty. Dr. Arthur Newsholme and Dr. T. H. C. Stevenson on the one hand, and Mr. G. Udny Yule on the other, have performed the laborious task of "correcting" the crude birth-rates for differences of age, sex and

* Sixty-seventh Annual Report of the Registrar-General, 1906, p. xix.

† I have restricted myself throughout to legitimate births. The number of illegitimate births in England and Wales is now only 112 per 10,000 of the population, and their omission does not affect the result. Their inclusion would merely have intensified the force of the argument at all points. The corrected illegitimate birth-rate fell between 1861 and 1881 by 21 per cent., and between 1881 and 1901 by 41 per cent.—more than twice as fast as the correct legitimate birth-rate.

marital conditions, as regards the census years from 1861 to 1901.* The results show a definite progressive fall since the 1871 census in the proportion of births, after allowing for all differences in the way the populations are made up. If the people of England and Wales had continued during those fifty years to be exactly of the same ages, and to be exactly in the same proportion married and single, the births per 100,000 of the population would have changed to the following extent: 1861, 3,236; 1871, 3,312; 1881, 3,273; 1891, 3,125; 1901, 2,729. That is to say, if the fertility of the married women of equivalent ages had remained the same in 1901 as it had been in 1871, there would have been born 3,312 babies per 100,000 population, instead of 2,729, or just upon 21 per cent. more, equal in the whole of England and Wales to something like 200,000 more than actually saw the light. Why were those 200,000 babies not born?

2. *The decline in the birth-rate is not confined to the towns, nor (so far as England and Wales is concerned, at least) is it appreciably, if any, greater in the towns than it is in the rural districts.*

Human fertility may possibly be normally slightly lower in the towns than in the rural districts, and it is sometimes suggested, especially by German authorities, that the fall in the birth-rate is to be accounted for by progressive "urbanization." But English statistics afford no support to this hypothesis. It is true that the corrected birth-rates of the towns of Northampton, Halifax, Burnley and Blackburn fell off between 1881 and 1901 by no less than 32 per cent., and that of London by 16 per cent. But the corrected birth-rate of Cornwall fell off by 29 per cent., that of Rutland by 28 per cent., those of Sussex and Devonshire by 26 per cent., and that of Westmoreland by 23 per cent. It is no less significant that, whilst the corrected birth-rate of all Ireland actually rose during these twenty years by three per cent., that of Dublin rose by nine per cent. If it was the unhealthy environment of our great towns that was causing a reduction in the number of births, we might expect to find Liverpool, Salford, Manchester and Glasgow—cities of extensive overcrowding, fearful slums and high mortality—heading the list. As a matter of fact, the corrected birth-rate between 1881 and 1901 fell off proportionately less in these cities than in any other town, and actually less in proportion than in all but six of the counties. A decline in the birth-rate, which does not appear at all in Dublin, appears much less in Liverpool and Manchester, Salford and Glasgow than in Brighton, and appears far more in Westmoreland, Rutland, Devonshire and Cornwall than in any of those towns, can hardly be due to "urbanization."

* "The decline of human fertility in the United Kingdom and other countries as shown by corrected birth-rates," by Arthur Newsholme, M.D., Medical Officer of Health, Brighton, and T. H. C. Stevenson, M.D., Assistant Medical Officer to the Education Committee of the London County Council; "On the changes in the marriage and birth-rates in England and Wales during the past half century; with an inquiry as to their probable causes," by G. Udny Yule, Newmarch Lecturer in Statistics, University College, London. Both these papers will be found in the *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society*, March, 1906.

3. *The decline in the birth-rate is exceptionally marked where the inconvenience of having children is specially felt.*

There is not much evidence to be adduced under this head, but what there is is of some significance. It is an error to suppose that the decline is entirely, or even principally, among the wealthy or the middle class. Where married women habitually go to work in factories, and where their earnings form an important element in the weekly income of the family, the interruption caused by maternity is probably most acutely felt. The enforcement by the Factory and Workshops Acts of 1891 and 1901 of four weeks' absence from employment after child-birth comes as an additional objection. Moreover, in the factory districts the later age at which children can now become productive wage-earners has certainly rendered large families less economically desirable than of yore. It is, therefore, of some significance that the ten towns in all England in which the relative fall in the birth-rate between 1881 and 1901 is most startlingly great are Northampton, Halifax, Burnley, Blackburn, Derby, Leicester, Bradford, Oldham, Huddersfield and Bolton—all towns in which an exceptionally large proportion of married women are engaged in factory work, in textiles, hosiery or boots. I can adduce no statistics of the decline in the birth-rate among the married women teaching in schools; but it is known to be great.

4. *The decline in the birth-rate appears to be marked also in places inhabited by the servant-keeping class.*

It is significant that Brighton shows a relatively heavy falling off from a birth-rate which was already a low one. But a comparison between various districts of London gives us further indications. Let us take, as a convenient index of relative wealth, the percentage of domestic servants to population. The corrected birth-rate of Bethnal Green—the district of London in which there are fewest non-Londoners and in which fewest of the inhabitants keep domestic servants—fell off, between 1881 and 1901, by 12 per cent. (or exactly as much as that of the North Riding of Yorkshire). But that of Hampstead—where most domestic servants are kept—fell off by no less than 36 per cent., and attained the distinction of reaching the lowest of all the corrected birth-rates that Dr. Newsholme has computed. Second only to Hampstead in this respect come Kensington and Paddington, which have statistically to be taken together, and which, keeping nearly as high a proportion of domestic servants as Hampstead, saw their corrected birth-rates, already lower than that of Hampstead, fall off by 19 per cent., and sink to less than two-thirds of that of the Bethnal Green of 1881. It would be interesting to extend this comparison, taking all the districts of London in the order of their average poverty, as shown by such indices as the proportion of the inhabitants who live in one or two-room tenements, by the rateable value per head, and by the percentage keeping domestic servants. But the variations in the registration areas in nearly all these cases prevent accurate comparison of birth-rates between 1881 and 1901. Dr. Newsholme and Dr. Stevenson, on the

one hand, and Mr. Udny Yule, on the other, do, indeed, compare the corrected birth-rates for 1901 of five separate groups of metropolitan boroughs, arranged in grades of average poverty. This comparison gives us the interesting result that the small group of three "rich" boroughs has, per 100,000 population (corrected) 2,004 legitimate births; the four groups comprising nineteen intermediate boroughs have almost identical legitimate birth-rates of between 2,362 to 2,490 per 100,000; whilst the poorest group of seven boroughs has a legitimate birth-rate of no less than 3,078, or 50 per cent. more than that in the "rich" quarters. From these figures it has been inferred that we are, in London at any rate, multiplying most prolifically from our least wealthy stocks. It should, however, be noticed that the group of seven "poor" boroughs happens to include, not only those containing the greatest numbers of Irish Roman Catholics, but also those in which the great bulk of the Jews are to be found. Practically half the marriages that take place in the registration districts of Whitechapel and Mile End Old Town are solemnized according to the Jewish rite. It is against all the influences of the Jewish religion, tradition and custom to limit the family, and the birth-rate among Jews of all classes and all nationalities is known to be large. We cannot, therefore, infer from these statistics either that the birth-rate of the poorest stratum of the English race in London is greater than that of the artizan or lower middle class. The remarkable evenness of the corrected birth-rate throughout the nineteen "intermediate" metropolitan boroughs, though they vary from having about 15 up to about 45 per cent. of servant-keeping households, is rather an indication to the contrary. This is in accordance with the fact that the decline in the corrected birth-rate appears to be as great in the counties made up preponderatingly of the poorly paid agricultural laborers, as in those districts in which the average level of wages is much higher.*

5. *The decline in the birth-rate appears to be much greater in those sections of the population which give proofs of thrift and foresight than among the population at large.*

Here we have to leave the carefully corrected birth-rates supplied by Dr. Newsholme, and fall back upon evidence which is statistically less perfect. What would be desirable would be to have precise and "corrected" birth-rates for different years of two sections of the population, the one comprising those who took thought for the morrow and the other comprising those who did not. Such an exact contrast is, of course, unattainable. But it so happens that we do possess, over a term of nearly forty years, the number of children born in one large sample of the population, selected, it might almost be said, solely by the characteristic of thrift. The Hearts of Oak

* The failure to take into account the special aggregation of the Jewish and the Irish population in the districts of greatest poverty, and the limitation of the investigation to London, appear to me to diminish the validity of some of Mr. David Heron's implications in the recent publication, *On the Relation of Fertility in Man to Social Status, and on the changes in this relation that have taken place during the last fifty years.* 1906. But his calculations point in the same direction as those cited.

Friendly Society, the largest centralized benefit society in the kingdom, has now over 272,000 adult male members. This membership belongs to all parts of the United Kingdom, of which it may be said to represent about three per cent., or no inconsiderable sample. No one is admitted who is not of good character and in receipt of wages at least 24s. per week, a figure which excludes the agricultural laborer, the unskilled worker in town or country, and even (outside London) the lowest grades of skilled artizans. The society consists, in fact, of the artizan and skilled mechanic class, with some intermixture of the small shopkeeper and others who have risen into the lower middle class. Among its provisions is the "lying-in benefit," a payment of 30s. for each confinement of a member's wife. Unfortunately, we do not know either the relative proportions of the members who are married or the average age of the wives. There is, however, no reason to think that the proportion of married members has appreciably changed, whilst it is believed that the average age of the members as a whole has risen from about 33 to 37·52 ; and it may possibly be inferred that there is a corresponding increase in the average age of the wives. Judging from the evidence of the Scottish census of 1855,* we might in such an event have expected a falling off in the births, due to this assumed difference of age, of at most 15 per cent. Now, what are the facts ? From 1866 to 1880 the proportion of lying-in claims to membership rose slowly from 2,176 to 2,472 per 10,000. From 1881 to 1904 it continuously declined, until in the latter year it reached only 1,165 per 10,000 members. The birth-rate among the population of a million and a quarter persons, distinguished from the rest, so far as is known, only by one common characteristic, that of thrift, has fallen off between 1881 and 1901 by no less than 46 per cent., or a decline nearly three times as great as that during the same period in England and Wales. Taking the whole period of decline, from 1880 down to the latest year for which I have the statistics, 1904, the falling off is over 52 per cent. A smaller society, the Royal Standard Benefit Society, having 8,225 members and giving a similar benefit, shows similar results. Between 1881 and 1901 the proportion of members claiming the lying-in benefit fell off by more than 56 per cent. If the members of the Hearts of Oak Friendly Society and the Royal Standard Benefit Society had had proportionately as many births in 1904 as the members of 1880 had in that year, there would have been born to them nearly 70,000 babies, instead of 32,000. If the birth-rate in these 280,000 families of comparatively prosperous artisans had only fallen in the same degree as that of England and Wales generally, there would have been born to them 58,000 babies instead of 32,000. What was the special influence in these exceptionally thrifty families that prevented the other babies being born? It looks as if the birth-rate was falling most conspicuously, if not exclusively, not among the wealthy or the middle class, as such, but among those sections of

* See the figures given in *Fertility, Fecundity and Sterility*, by J. Matthews Duncan, 1871 ; and those in *Natality and Fecundity*, by C. J. and J. N. Lewis, 1906, pp. 18, 26 and 33.

every class in which there is most prudence, foresight and self-control.

6. *The decline in the birth-rate is due to some new cause which was not appreciably operative fifty years ago.*

We may, indeed, infer, from the relatively stationary birth-rate, alike of the whole population and of selected classes down to some date between 1871 and 1881, and the steady persistence of the subsequent decline, that the decline is due to some new cause. The same conclusion is reached by the elaborate calculations just published by Mr. Heron.* In 1851, as in 1901, it could have been inferred from a comparison of different districts in the metropolis that "the more cultured, the more prosperous, healthy and thrifty classes of the community" were producing fewer children per marriage than the classes of lower social status. But, as regards London in 1851, Mr. Heron is "driven to almost certain conclusion that differences in the mean age of wives were amply sufficient . . . to account for the differential birth-rates of districts with divergent social status." The operating cause of a low birth-rate was, in fact, at that date, postponement of marriage, operating chiefly among the rich, professional or "middle" classes. We know, however, from Dr. Newsholme's corrected birth-rates that no such cause as a greater postponement of marriage, with the corresponding rise in the age of the average wife, has anything to do with the decline in the birth-rate now recorded. This decline is due to something affecting all classes other than causes that were appreciably in operation in 1851.

7. *The decline in the birth-rate is principally, if not entirely, the result of deliberate volition in the regulation of the marriage state.*

The reader can scarcely have read the foregoing statements without coming to the conclusion that the falling off in the birth-rate, which has during the last twenty years deprived England and Wales of some 200,000 babies a year, is the result of deliberate intention on the part of the parents. The persistence and universality of the fall in town and country alike; the total absence of any discoverable relation to unhealthy conditions, mental development, the strain of education, town life or physical deterioration of any kind; the remarkable fact that it has been greatest where it is known to be widely desired; the evidence that it accompanies not extreme poverty but a variety of conditions (among which social well-being is only one) leading to a positive wish not to have a large family; and that it is exceptionally marked where there is foresight and thrift—all this points in one and the same direction.†

* *On the Relation of Fertility in Man to Social Status, and on the changes in this relation that have taken place during the last fifty years*, by David Heron, 1906, p. 20.

† It is, at any rate, consistent with the hypothesis of volitional interference, in view of the fact that illegitimate children are, on an average, certainly less desired than legitimate, that, as already stated, the corrected illegitimate birth-rate should have fallen off in England and Wales more than twice as much as the legitimate, and twice as much between 1881 and 1901 as between 1861 and 1881. The figures for Scotland correspond to these. (*Natality and Fecundity*, by C. J. and J. N. Lewis, 1906, p. 54.)

We may add other evidence. Among the Roman Catholics in the United Kingdom any regulation of the marriage state is strongly forbidden, and has, during recent years, been made the subject of frequent, special animadversion, both privately and from the pulpit. It is significant that Ireland is the only part of the United Kingdom in which the birth-rate has not declined; that in Ireland itself it has declined a little in semi-Protestant Belfast, and not at all in Roman Catholic Dublin; and that in the towns of Great Britain the decline is least in Liverpool, Salford, Manchester and Glasgow—towns in which the proportion of Roman Catholics is considerable. Among the principal textile factory towns the decline is least at Preston, which is the one having the largest proportion of Roman Catholics. Among the different metropolitan boroughs—though we can not measure with accuracy the fall in the birth-rate—the present rate is highest, and, therefore, in all probability, the fall has been least, in those boroughs in which the Irish Roman Catholics (and the Jews who, in this respect, are in the same position) are most numerous. All this is inconsistent with the hypothesis that the decline is due to physical degeneracy, and consistent with that of its being due to deliberate volition. Common report that such deliberate regulation of the marriage state, either with the object of limitation of the family, or (which has the same result) with that of regulating the interval between births, has become widely prevalent during the past quarter of a century—exactly the period of the decline—reaches us from all sides—from doctors and chemists, from the officers of friendly societies and philanthropists working among the poor, and, most significant of all, from those who are engaged in the very extensive business of which this new social practice has given rise. What is needed to complete the demonstration is direct individual evidence that volitional regulation exists. This the sub-committee of the Fabian Society set itself to obtain.

The procedure adopted was to obtain a voluntary census from a sufficiently large number of married people who could be relied upon to give frank and truthful answers to a detailed interrogatory. For this information resort was had to between 600 and 700 persons, from whom the committee had grounds of hope that answers would be received. About half of these persons resided in the metropolitan area, the remainder being scattered sparsely over the rest of Great Britain. In social grade, they included a most varied selection of occupations, extending from the skilled artizan to the professional man and the small property owner; omitting, on the one hand, the great army of laborers, and, on the other (with few exceptions), the tiny fraction of the population who have incomes from investments exceeding £1,000 a year. They were, of course, selected without the slightest reference to the subject of the inquiry; so little, indeed, was known about them from this standpoint that more than 20 per cent. of them proved to be unmarried, and thus unable to bear testimony. They were invited to give the information desired without revealing their identity, the form being so arranged as to enable it to be filled up by nothing more easily recognizable than crosses and

figures.* Altogether 634 forms were sent out. From these there have to be deducted, for one reason or another, 158—viz., 114 bachelors, 30 duplicates (wives of husbands making returns), five which failed to get delivered by post office, two refusals, five returned blank or incomprehensible, and two relating to marriages abroad. Of the 476 remaining, 174 did not reply. Whether these should be added to the number of those who candidly confessed to having taken steps to regulate the births in their families, or to those who had taken no such steps, or in what proportion they should be distributed between the two, the reader must judge for himself. Significant replies were received from 302 persons. But as 14 of the returns included particulars of two marriages, the total number of marriages of which particulars are recorded is 316. In six cases the papers contain references to second marriages of which insufficient particulars are given. These will not, however, materially affect the results. What is recorded here is the result of 316 marriages, and concerns 618 parents—not, of course, an adequate sample of the people of Great Britain, but, being drawn from all parts of the

* The questions asked are appended :

	Yes.	*No.*
1. Are you Married?		
Those who have been married should return themselves as married. In cases of second marriages each should be dealt with separately. A second paper will be sent if desired.		
2. Is your Sex Male?		
3. Age last birthday?		
4. Date of Marriage?		
Further returns from persons married before 1870 are not necessary, as the period to be investigated goes back only 30 years.		
5. Age of Husband at Marriage?		
6. Age of Wife at Marriage?		
7. Particulars of Children born (including still-born children) :		

	DATE OF BIRTH.	SEX.		DATE OF DEATH.*
		M.	F.	
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				

* *This is only asked for as relevant to the inquiry in cases of deaths unaer five years of age.*

8. Do you expect to have any more (or any) children?		
9. In your marriage have any steps been taken to render it childless or to limit the number of children born?		
10. If yes, during what years have such steps been taken?		
11. Has there been any exceptional cause (such as the death or serious illness of husband or wife) tending to the limitation of the number of your children? (If possible, state the cause) ...		

12. OBSERVATIONS.—Any person willing to add any remarks throwing light on the foregoing return is requested to do so.

country and from every section of the great "middle" class, sufficient, perhaps, until more adequate testimony can be obtained, to throw some light on all the previous statistics.

The first division of the marriages is into two classes; marriages with families intentionally limited, and marriages with families not so limited.

In order to avoid clumsy sentences, the term "limited marriage" will be used to signify a marriage in which the family is intentionally limited, and the term "unlimited marriage" one in which it has not been so limited. The following table gives all the marriages returned, arranged by the date and classified as limited (L) and unlimited (U), together with (1) the number of childless marriages, (2) the number of children born or intended to be born (less deaths up to the age of five years), and the number of marriages in which more children were anticipated. "One or two" is printed as one and a half.

	Total marriages			Childless			Definite expected fertility			More children expected		
Date	L	U	Total	L	U	Total	L	U	Total	L	U	Total
1851	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	6	6	—	—	—
7	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	9	9	—	—	—
8	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	6	6	—	—	—
62	—	2	2	—	—	—	—	11	11	—	—	—
5	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	7	7	—	—	—
7	1	1	2	—	—	—	1	5	6	—	—	—
8	1	1	2	—	—	—	6	4	10	—	—	—
9	1	1	2	—	—	—	7	1	8	—	—	—
70	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—	—
1	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	6	6	—	—	—
2	—	2	2	—	—	—	—	12	12	—	—	—
3	3	3	6	—	—	—	10	12	22	—	—	—
4	—	1	1	—	1	1	—	—	—	—	—	—
5	4	1	5	1	1	2	6	—	6	—	—	—
6	2	—	2	—	—	—	6	—	6	—	—	—
7	3	—	3	—	—	—	13	—	13	—	—	—
8	6	2	8	—	—	—	28	6	34	—	—	—
9	6	—	6	2	—	2	19	—	19	—	—	—
80	3	—	3	—	—	—	12	—	12	—	—	—
1	2	—	2	—	—	—	7	—	7	—	—	—
2	1	2	3	—	—	—	7	5	12	—	—	—
3	6	2	8	—	1	1	16	3	19	—	—	—
4	6	2	8	—	—	—	28	3	31	—	—	—
5	8	2	10	—	—	—	31	8	39	—	—	—
6	3	1	4	—	—	—	8	7	15	—	—	—
7	6	2	8	—	1	1	20	2	22	1	1	2
8	6	2	8	—	1	1	22	4	26	1	—	1
9	10	3	13	—	1	1	23	4	27	2	1	3
90	8	—	8	2	—	2	14	—	14	—	—	—
1	6	1	7	1	1	2	15	—	15	1	—	1
2	11	—	11	3	—	3	20½	—	20½	—	—	—
3	11	2	13	2	—	2	23	1	24	3	1	4
4	7	1	8	2	—	2	10	6	16	1	1	2
5	16	2	18	5	2	7	22½	—	22½	6	1	7
6	10	2	12	5	1	6	19	5	24	1	1	2
7	9	—	9	1	—	1	19	—	19	2	—	2
8	13	1	14	1	—	1	23	3	26	3	1	4
1899	16	4*	20	3	1	4	34	3	37	3	2	5

* *One of these gives no information as to children.*

Date	Total marriages L	U	Total	Childless L	U	Total	Definite expected fertility L	U	Total	More children expected L	U	Total
1900	11	1	12	4	—	4	12½	1	13½	5	—	5
1	9	2	11	2	1	3	12	2	14	3	1	4
2	9	6*	15	1	2	3	15	6	21	4	3	7
3	9	6	15	1	2	3	15½	5	20½	3	6	9
4	9	7	16	2	4	6	12½	3	15½	6	7	13
5	6	3	9	6	3	9	6	—	6	2	2	4
Undated	4	—	4	1	—	1	10	—	10	1	—	1
	242	74	316	45	23	68	553½	157	710½	48	28	76

* *One of these gives no information as to children.*

It will be seen of the 316 marriages, 74 are returned as unlimited and 242 as limited. But in order to ascertain the real prevalence of voluntary limitation as affecting population, certain deductions should be made. Marriages prior to 1875 may fairly be taken out, since the decline of the general birth-rate only began after that date. This eliminates six limited and 17 unlimited marriages, leaving 236 limited and 57 unlimited. Again a usual commencement of limitation appears to be after the birth of at least two children. Marriages contracted in 1903, 1904, and 1905 should therefore be deducted. This leaves 212 limited and 41 unlimited for the period 1875 to 1902, both years included, and including also four marriages the dates of which were not reported, but which almost certainly fall within the period named. But it must be further noted that no less than 13 of the 41 unlimited marriages were childless, and therefore no occasion for limitation arose, unless the parents had desired a childless marriage. This reduces the number of fertile and unlimited marriages during the period 1875 to 1902 to 28 out of 252, or, if the infertile unlimited marriages are deducted, 239.

If we take the decade 1890-1899, which may be regarded as the typical period, we find that out of 120 marriages 107 are limited and 13 unlimited, whilst of these 13 five and possibly six were childless at the date of the return. *In this decade, therefore, only seven or possibly eight unlimited fertile marriages are reported out of a total of 120.*

In order to ascertain the effect of limitation on the size of families let us next take the number of children born and living up to five years of age, of all limited marriages from the earliest recorded (1867) to and including 1903.

NUMBER OF CHILDREN OF LIMITED MARRIAGES.

Children in family	*0*	*1*	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*11*
Marriages ...	39	54	59	29	22	11	6	3	2	1	1
Total Children ...	0	54	118	87	88	55	36	21	16	9	11

That is a total of 227 marriages and 495 children. But owing to second marriages, which are not in all cases fully detailed, nine children must be added, together with an uncertain number (say six) for two other fruitful marriages mentioned but not reported. Altogether the parents of these (say) 510 children number 452. This, however, ignores expected children.

Taking all limited marriages we may next ascertain what is the probable total *intended* fertility. We can state the number of each limited family in this form :

Number living added to the number intended where stated ; and, secondly, number living *plus* an unspecified addition. Cases where the return says "two or three" more children expected are classified as $2\frac{1}{2}$, and "three or four" as $3\frac{1}{2}$. We then get the following results :—

TOTAL EXPECTED FERTILITY OF LIMITED MARRIAGES.

Intended size of family	*0*	*1*	*2*	$2\frac{1}{2}$	*3*	$3\frac{1}{2}$	*4*	*5*	*6*	*7*	*8*	*9*	*11*
Completed families ...	33	35	45	4	26	5	21	11	6	2	2	1	0
Families with indeterminate additions ...	9	17	12	–	6	–	4	1	–	1	0	0	1
	42	52	57	4	32	5	25	12	6	3	2	1	1

If we assume the unspecified addition to average one and a half children we find that the 242 marriages have yielded or are intended to yield a total of 619 children and an average of 2·56 children per marriage.

If we take the typical decade 1890-1899 we get the following results :

107 LIMITED MARRIAGES, 1890-1899.

Children living to the age of five ...	0	1	2	3	4	5
Marriages	25	23	34	15	6	4
Number of completed families ("no more expected")	22	17	19	9	4	4
Not recorded or doubtful	1	3	5	2	1	–
More expected	2	1	4	3	1	–
Number of Children expected where indicated	–	$2\frac{1}{2}$	9	1	–	–

This gives 118 living children (excluding deaths of any after five years) and 12 or 13 expected, whilst in 11 cases unspecified additions to the families are anticipated, and 12 cases are doubtful. If one additional child is allowed for each doubtful case and one and a half for each unspecified case, this would give 159 children as the fruit of 107 marriages and of 211 parents (allowing for second marriages in which cases only three persons are concerned in two marriages). This indicates that the offspring of each limited marriage (judging from the period named) is almost precisely one and a half children per marriage. The average number of children to be expected from each marriage, in England and Wales twenty-five years ago, was at least three times as great !

Information as to the causes which had led to limitation was not specifically asked for. But in many papers a large number of valuable details were supplied. Taking all the limited marriages (242) we find the causes indicated as follows :

CAUSES OF LIMITATION.

Economic	38
Sexual ill-health	13
Other ill-health or heredity	19
Disinclination of wife	9
Death of wife	6
Not stated	114
Several causes	43
	242

Analyzing these last again we find the following causes assigned :

Economic	35 out of 43
Sexual ill-health	11 „ 43
Other ill-health or heredity	19 „ 43
Disinclination of wife	15 „ 43
Death of parent	2 „ 43
Other causes	5 „ 43

The death of a parent, of course, is a cause of *limitation* in another sense from that elsewhere employed in this paper.

Adding the two together we find that, out of the 128 marriages in which the cause of limitation is stated, the poverty of the parents in relation to their standard of comfort is a factor in 73 cases, sexual ill-health (that is, generally, the disturbing effect of child-bearing) in 24 and the other ill-health of the parents in 38 cases. In 24 cases the disinclination of the wife is a factor, and the death of a parent has in eight cases terminated the marriage. It should be added that in one or two cases of marriages in the earlier years tabulated recent deaths of parents are mentioned which could not have affected the size of the families, and these are not included in the above.

It is important not to mistake the character of the evidence which this small voluntary and confidential census yields. It is not, of course, suggested that so tiny a sample of the kingdom affords any valid ground for inference as to the rest of the community. But it does prove, with logically complete demonstration, that the hypothesis suggested by the statistics of the births in the entire population, and of the births among so large a sample as a million and a quarter persons, is a *vera causa*. Volitional regulation of the marriage state is demonstrably at work in many different parts of Great Britain, among all social grades except probably the very poorest. It cannot rightly be inferred from the particulars of so small a number as 316 marriages that it is at work elsewhere *to the same extent* as among them. The statistics indicate, indeed, that (as might have been expected) the voluntary regulation of the marriage state among this tiny sample of (presumably) very deliberate and foreseeing citizens has resulted in a higher degree of restriction of births than among the population at large. This very fact emphasizes the character of the "selection" that is going on. And to the present writer, at any rate, it is the differential character of the

decline in the birth-rate, rather than the actual extent of the decline, which is of the gravest import.

We must, indeed, now take it as proved that the principal, if not the sole, cause of the present continuous decline in the birth-rate in Great Britain is the deliberate regulation of the marriage state. This practice prevails, it must be inferred, either with the object of family limitation, or merely with that of regulating the intervals between births, among at least one-half, and probably among three-fourths, of all the married people in Great Britain of reproductive age—not, as is often imagined, only among those above the ranks of labor, but practically among all classes, from the agricultural laborer in sparsely populated districts, and the artizan in the towns, up to the various grades of professional men and even to the wealthy property owners. The result is that after a quarter of a century of this practice, the total number of children born annually in Great Britain is less than four-fifths of what it would be if no such interference took place. Nor is the practice confined to this country. Dr. Newsholme's statistics of "corrected" birth-rates indicate that New South Wales and Victoria have already carried it much further, whilst New Zealand is not far behind.* Registration in the United States is very imperfect, but it is clear that the American-born inhabitants of New England, and perhaps throughout the whole of the northern states, are rapidly following suit. The same phenomenon is to be traced in the German Empire, especially in Saxony, Hamburg and Berlin, but the German rural districts are as yet unaffected. The Roman Catholic population of Ireland (and of the British cities), as well as those of Canada and Austria, appear to be still almost untouched, but those of Belgium, Bavaria and Italy are beginning to follow in the footsteps of France. The fact that almost every country which has accurate registration is showing a declining birth-rate indicates—though, of course, it does not prove—that the practice is becoming ubiquitous.

These facts—which we are bound to face whether we like them or not—will appear in different lights to different people. In some quarters it seems to be considered sufficient to dismiss them with moral indignation, real or simulated. Such a judgment appears to the present writer both irrelevant and futile. It is impossible, as Burke has taught us, to draw an indictment against a whole nation. If a course of conduct is habitually and deliberately pursued by vast multitudes of otherwise well-conducted people, forming probably a majority of the whole educated class of the nation, we must assume that it does not conflict with their actual code of morality. They may be intellectually mistaken, but they are not doing what they feel to be wrong. Assuming, as I think we may, that, under the best conditions, injury to health, if any, is inappreciable and, in fact, hypothetical only—aware, on the contrary, that the result is to spare the wife from an onerous and even dangerous illness, for

* The inferences to be drawn from the Australasian statistics are disputed. But see the remarkable Report and Evidence of the Royal Commission on the Decline of the Birth-rate and on the Mortality of Infants in New South Wales, 1904.

which in the vast majority of homes no adequate provision in the way of medical attendance, nursing, privacy, rest and freedom from worry can possibly be made—it is, to say the least of it, difficult on any rationalist morality to formulate any blame of a married couple for the deliberate regulation of their family according to their means and opportunities. Apart from some mystic idea of marriage as a "sacrament," or, at any rate, as a divinely instituted relation with peculiar religious obligations for which utilitarian reasons cannot be given, it does not seem easy to argue that prudent regulation differs essentially from deliberate celibacy from prudential motives. If, as we have for generations been taught by the economists, it is one of the primary obligations of the individual to maintain himself and his family in accordance with his social position and, if possible, to improve that position, the deliberate restriction of his responsibilities within the means which he has of fulfilling them can hardly be counted otherwise than as for righteousness. And when we pass from obligations of the "self-regarding" class to the wider conception of duty to the community, the ground for blame is, to the ordinary citizen, no more clear. A generation ago, the economists, and, still more, the "enlightened public opinion" that caught up their words, would have seen in this progressive limitation of population, whether or not it had their approval, the compensating advantage of an uplifting of the economic conditions of the lowest grade of laborers. At any rate, it would have been said, the poorest will thereby be saved from starvation and famine. To those who still believe in the political economy of Ricardo, Nassau Senior, Cairnes and Fawcett—to those, in fact, who still adhere to an industrial system based exclusively on the pecuniary self-interest of the individual and on unshackled freedom of competition—this reasoning must appear as valid to-day as it did a generation ago.

To the present writer the situation appears in a graver light. More accurate knowledge of economic processes denies to this generation the consolation which the "Early Victorian" economists found in the limitation of population. No such limitation of numbers prevents the lowest grade of workers, if exposed to unfettered individual competition, from the horrors of "sweating" or the terrors of prolonged lack of employment. On the other hand, with Factory Acts and trade union "collective bargaining" maintaining a deliberately fixed national *minimum*, the limitation of numbers, however prudent it may be in individual instances, is, from the national standpoint, seen to be economically as unnecessary as it is proved to be futile even for the purposes for which McCulloch and Mill, Cairnes and Fawcett so ardently desired it.

Nor can we look forward, even if we wished to do so, to the vacuum remaining unfilled. It is, as all experience proves, impossible to exclude the alien immigrant. Moreover, there are in Great Britain, as in all other countries, a sufficient number of persons to whom the prudential considerations affecting the others do not appeal, or appeal less strongly. In Great Britain at this moment, when half, or perhaps two-thirds, of all the married people are regu-

lating their families, children are being freely born to the Irish Roman Catholics and the Polish, Russian and German Jews, on the one hand, and to the thriftless and irresponsible—largely the casual laborers and the other denizens of the one-roomed tenements of our great cities—on the other. Twenty-five per cent. of our parents, as Professor Karl Pearson keeps warning us, is producing 50 per cent. of the next generation. This can hardly result in anything but national deterioration ; or, as an alternative, in this country gradually falling to the Irish and the Jews. Finally, there are signs that even these races are becoming influenced. The ultimate future of these islands may be to the Chinese !

Thus, modern civilization is faced by two awkward facts ; the production of children is rapidly declining, and this decline is not uniform, but characteristic of the more prudent, foreseeing and self-restrained sections of the community. It is only in mitigation of the first of these facts that it can be urged that the death-rate is also declining, so that in most countries the net annual increase of population exhibits little sign of slackening. This, indeed, affords but slight ground of satisfaction. The probable diminution in the death-rate has very narrow limits ; whilst that in the birth-rate is cumulative and limitless. What is of far greater social importance is that a diminished death-rate among those who are born in no way mitigates the evil influence of an adverse selection—it even intensifies its effects.

The conclusion which the present writer draws from the investigation is, however, one of hope, not of despair. It is something to discover the cause of the phenomenon. Moreover, the cause is one that we can counteract. If the decline in the birth-rate had been due to physical degeneracy, whether brought about by "urbanization" or otherwise, we should not have known how to cope with it. But a deliberately volitional interference, due chiefly to economic motives, can at any moment be influenced, and its adverse selection stopped, partly by a mere alteration of the economic conditions, partly by the opportunity for the play of the other motives which will be thereby afforded.

What seems indispensable and urgent is to alter the economic incidence of child-bearing. Under the present social conditions the birth of children in households maintained on less than three pounds a week (and these form four-fifths of the nation) is attended by almost penal consequences. The wife is incapacitated for some months from earning money. For a few weeks she is subject to a painful illness, with some risk. The husband has to provide a lump sum for the necessary medical attendance and domestic service. But this is not all. The parents know that for the next fourteen years they will have to dock themselves and their other children of luxuries and even of some of the necessaries of life, just because there will be another mouth to feed. To four-fifths of all the households in the land each succeeding baby means the probability of there being less food, less clothing, less house room, less recreation and less opportunity for advancement for every member of the

family. Similar considerations appeal even more strongly to a majority of the remaining 20 per cent. of the population, who make up the "middle" and professional classes. Their higher standard of life, with its requirements in the way of culture and refinement, and with the long and expensive education which it demands for their children, makes the advent even of a third or fourth child—to say nothing of the possibility of a family of eight or twelve—a burden far more psychologically depressing than that of the wage-earner. In order that the population may be recruited from the self-controlled and foreseeing members of each class rather than of those who are reckless and improvident, we must alter the balance of considerations in favor of the child-producing family.

The question is whether we shall be able to turn round with sufficient sharpness and in time. For we have unconsciously based so much of our social policy—so many of our habits, traditions, prejudices and beliefs—on the assumption that the growth of population is always to be reckoned with, and even feared, that a genuine realization of the contrary position will involve great changes. There are thousands of men thinking themselves educated citizens to-day to whose whole system of social and economic beliefs the discovery will be as subversive as was that announced by Copernicus. We may at last understand what the modern economist means when he tells us that the most valuable of the year's crops, as it is the most costly, is not the wheat harvest or the lambing, but the year's quota of adolescent young men and women enlisted in the productive service of the community; and that the due production and best possible care of this particular product is of far greater consequence to the nation than any other of its occupations. Infant mortality, for instance—that terrible and quite needless slaughter within the first twelve months of one-seventh of all the babies that are born—is already appealing to us in a new way, though it is no greater than it was a generation ago. We shall suddenly remember, too, that one-third of all the paupers are young children; and we may then realize that it is, to the community, of far more consequence how it shall bring up this quarter of a million children over whom it has complete power than the exact degree of hardness with which it may choose to treat the adults. Instead of turning out the children to tramp with the father or beg with the mother, whenever these choose to take their discharge from the workhouse, which is the invariable practice to-day, we should rather jump at the chance of "adopting" these unfortunate beings in order to make worthy citizens of them. Half of the young paupers, moreover, are widows' children, bereft of the breadwinner. For them the community will have to arrange to continue in some form or another the maintenance which the father would have provided had he lived. Above all, in order to put a stop to the adverse selection that is at present going on, we must encourage the thrifty, foreseeing, prudent and self-controlled parents to remove the check which, often unwillingly enough, they at present put on their natural instincts and love of children. We must make it easier for them to undertake family

responsibilities. For instance, the arguments against the unlimited provision of medical attendance on the child-bearing mother and her children disappear. We may presently find the leader of the Opposition, if not the Prime Minister, advocating the municipal supply of milk to all infants, and a free meal on demand (as already provided by a far-seeing philanthropist at Paris) to mothers actually nursing their babies. We shall, indeed, have to face the problem of the systematic "endowment of motherhood," and place this most indispensable of all professions upon an honorable economic basis. The feeding of all the children at school appears in a new light, and we come, at a stride, appreciably nearer to that not very far distant article in the education code making obligatory in the time-table a new subject—namely, "12 to 1 p.m., table manners (materials provided)." One encouragement to parentage in the best members of the middle and upper artizan classes would be a great multiplication of maintenance scholarships for secondary, technical and university education, and the multiplication of tax-supported higher schools and colleges at nominal fees, or even free.

Such a revolution in the economic incidence of the burden of child-bearing will, of course, be deprecated by the ignorant and unthinking, as calculated to encourage the idle and the thriftless, the drunken and the profligate to increase and multiply. The grave fact that we have to face is that, under our existing social arrangements, it is exactly these people, and practically these only, who at present make full use of their reproductive powers. Such a revolution in the economic incidence of the burden of child-bearing as is here proposed would, as a matter of fact, have exactly the opposite result. It would in no way increase the number of children born to those parents whose marriages are at present unregulated. But in the other section of every class of society, where the birth-rate is now regulated from motives of foresight and prudence, it would leave the way open to the play of the best instincts of mankind. To the vast majority of women, and especially to those of fine type, the rearing of children would be the most attractive occupation, if it offered economic advantages equal to those, say, of school teaching or service in the post office. At present it is ignored as an occupation, unremunerated, and in no way honored by the State. Once the production of healthy, moral and intelligent citizens is revered as a social service and made the subject of deliberate praise and encouragement on the part of the government, it will, we may be sure, attract the best and most patriotic of the citizens. Once set free from the overwhelming economic penalties with which among four-fifths of the population it is at present visited, the rearing of a family may gradually be rendered part of the code of the ordinary citizen's morality. The natural repulsion to interference in marital relations will have free play. The mystic obligations of which the religious-minded feel the force will no longer be confronted by the dead wall of economic necessity. To the present writer it seems that only by some such "sharp turn" in our way of dealing with these problems can we avoid degeneration of type—that is, race deterioration, if not race suicide.