

will not here be discussed, it being sufficient to remark that the balance of medical opinion seems to be in favour of the view that some of them are harmless. In any case, we may well hope that better means of preventing parenthood will be discovered before long.

The objections which can be raised against each of these two methods of keeping down the numbers of a nation will next be considered. Continence may mean either the renunciation of marriage or abstinence from sexual relations after marriage. The objections to these two forms of continence are sufficiently similar to allow them to be considered together. They are as follows. In the first place, these practices are so much against human nature that it would be out of the question to expect that under any circumstances they would be largely adopted by the bulk of the population. No doubt continence has been deliberately practised after marriage to a greater extent than is generally admitted in order to prevent the appearance of too big a family. But continence alone could never ward off the evils of over-population. Moreover, continence would be more likely to be practised by persons guided by moral motives than by the thoughtless and the weak-willed; for the better the couple, the more consideration, at all events, would they give to any advocacy of continence on moral grounds. The result of trusting to continence alone would, therefore, be that the imprudent and those whose passions are controlled with difficulty would have a proportionately large number of descendants. The harmful qualities which distinguished them—namely, carelessness, selfishness, and sexual passions—would consequently thus be made to increase in future generations. Another objection to continence in married life is that it may cause such a strain as to stand in the way of affection between husband and wife; a tie which is essential to the well-being of the family. Lastly, when only one of a couple demands continence, the other may make this an excuse, however inadequate, for adultery.

Turning to the objections to birth control, it is urged

that a widespread knowledge of the methods of contraception would encourage promiscuous intercourse. This is no doubt true in a measure. Here again we must, however, weigh the good results against the bad. Much might be done in any case to mitigate such harmful results as would result from a widespread knowledge of birth-control methods. Public advertisements of contraceptive appliances should be prohibited. The most important reform which could now be made would be, however, to ascertain the best methods of instructing young people as to sexual matters—a difficult problem—and to see that such improved methods were generally adopted. But whatever steps might be taken in order to safeguard the situation, married women should always be able to get the necessary information without difficulty, which is not the case at present.

Certain moral advantages would, moreover, result from a general admission that birth control is justifiable in certain circumstances. Early marriages would thus be facilitated, and promiscuous intercourse diminished in consequence. The feeling of individual responsibility in regard to their children amongst parents would be increased; because the appearance of each child would be felt to be the result of deliberate choice. The strongest argument in favour of birth control is, however, that the present increase in the population of the world cannot go on indefinitely, and that the only alternatives in the future will be either birth control or the birth of millions of children destined to die a preventable death after a short and useless life. This is what is now taking place in countries where birth control is not practised.

To sum up, when the choice lies between doing an injury to posterity and refraining from parenthood, it appears that either continence or birth control must be practised. Those who admit that continence cannot be relied on as a sufficiently efficient check on population, but who nevertheless hope to see the practice of birth control entirely abandoned, should consider what would be the result of the fulfilment of their hopes. It would certainly be a steady increase in

unemployment, poverty, misery, disease, and the death of little children. On the other hand, those who are striving to promote birth control without reference to its effects on the inborn qualities of future generations should consider what would be the result of their endeavours if successful. It certainly would be that birth control would be most practised by the more thoughtful and superior individuals. They would have fewer children in consequence; whilst the inferior stocks, taking less thought for the morrow, would continue to have more children, thus making their bad qualities tend relatively to increase in the future. As we shall see in Chapters XIII and XV, the wrongful use of birth control is now doing an injury to the race which may have disastrous consequences. This is, however, no argument against its rightful use.

Our aim must, therefore, be to facilitate the practice of birth control when it is desirable on all grounds, whilst unsparingly condemning its use for merely selfish motives. A dual campaign, both for and against birth control—or, in other words, for its use only on suitable occasions—is needed in order to maintain the quality of our nation in the future.

There are many human beings, however, who could under no circumstances be trusted to practise the self-restraint needed for the voluntary abandonment of parenthood, whether by continence or birth control. Persuasion will not do all that is needed to preserve the nation from deterioration, and in future chapters it will be necessary to consider the cases in which pressure ought to be applied.

CHAPTER IX

Sterilization

STERILIZATION is another means of preventing parenthood which must be considered. It may, in fact, be regarded as a proper method of birth control in certain circumstances.

In the discussions on sterilization, prejudices have often resulted from a misunderstanding as to the nature of the operation which, it is proposed, should be performed. We shall here only be considering certain surgical methods which have been introduced comparatively recently; for the ordinary stockyard way of sterilizing the male is never advocated for eugenic purposes. Moreover, there are some reasonable grounds for hoping that still better means of preventing parenthood will be available before long; these being perhaps dependent on the use either of X-rays or of injections into the blood.

The operation now generally adopted in the case of males, known as vasectomy, is a trifling affair, which can be performed under local anaesthetics. The operation on females, salpingectomy, is a more serious matter, being perhaps comparable in risk to that for appendicitis when there are no complications. The difficulty of operating on females affords no excuse, however, for not operating on males. In regard to both operations, the character and the life of the patient are in no way affected, except that parenthood does not result from the union of the sexes.

Sterilization has been advocated both as a punishment and as a safeguard to the public in regard to sexual offences. The above-mentioned operation on the male would, however, be no safeguard against assault. Moreover, the threat of performing these operations would have little deterrent

effect on sexual offenders of either sex. As to the stockyard method of sterilization, it would be unsuitable for the purposes of punishment, and its use would increase the unreasonable prejudices now often aroused against the methods employed for eugenic purposes. In any case, we are not here concerned with punishment.

The essential difference between sterilization and the ordinary methods of birth control is that there is no going back on sterilization. The surgeon cannot undo the work of the surgeon.

Sterilization has been altogether condemned as being an unjust interference with the liberty of the individual. Now, whatever force there may be in this objection, it can apply only to the operation if performed compulsorily. Whether compulsion in this matter should ever be legalised is a question which may perhaps be left to those who come after us to decide. At present certainly the public would not tolerate any such proposal, even if its justice could be fully proved; and no doubt it would be a dangerous innovation, unless very carefully safeguarded. We shall, in consequence, here only be considering sterilization in cases where a consent has been obtained. The question will arise later on, it is true, whether in certain circumstances some pressure might not be applied in order to prevent such consent from being unreasonably withheld.

The practice of sterilization has also been criticized on the ground that it would increase promiscuous intercourse. The reply to this objection is much the same as that already given in regard to birth control—namely, that sterilization should be adopted in spite of certain disadvantages if it can be shown that it would be on the whole beneficial. There is, indeed, less objection to sterilization than to birth control on this account; for few persons would, for the sake of immediate sexual gratification, voluntarily give up for ever the chance of becoming a parent. Moreover, as to such as would act thus, it would be an advantage if they were to be permanently sterilized, for we do not want persons of their kind to reappear in the coming generations.

When it can be finally decided that no more children ought to be born, the fact that sterilization is a step which cannot be retraced may make it especially suitable as a purely voluntary method of preventing parenthood, at all events in the case of men. Its adoption should, therefore, be carefully considered in certain circumstances. When a man has been insane it seems to be especially suitable; because, as has been seen, he had better then give up all idea of having any or more children. As to a woman in the same circumstances, it would be preferable if her husband, or the man she is going to marry, would consent to be sterilized, so that she might be saved from the more serious operation. With improved methods of sterilization no doubt in this case also it should be the woman who ought to be rendered incapable of parenthood; because it would certainly be undesirable to prevent the chance of a sound man becoming a parent if he should marry a second time. What has just been said about insanity is equally true in regard to a number of other rare hereditary diseases. Sterilization is also suitable when the consent to have no more children is given reluctantly; for then it would be desirable that the decision arrived at should not be revocable at will.

As to the feeble in mind, any consent which might be obtained from them would be meaningless. Parents and guardians should, therefore, be empowered to allow sterilization to take place when they see fit. As to criminals, paupers, and all living uncivilized lives in a civilized country, their sterilization would not only tend to purify the race, but might be beneficial by preventing the appearance of big families in bad homes. To these subjects we shall, however, return in later chapters.

As an objection to sterilization, and indeed to all other methods of preventing parenthood, it has been urged that the racial improvement thus brought about would be very slowly obtained. But even if it were so, to lessen the amount of insanity, mental defect, crime, and the many other failings found in association with them, would

certainly be worth a long-sustained effort. Statistical considerations, however, indicate that the effects on the race of preventing parenthood would at first be fairly rapid, and would become very slow only when the harmful natural qualities in question had been to a large extent successfully banished.

In reply to all that has been said in favour of sterilization, it may be urged that, in such a serious matter, mere theoretical considerations are an insufficient guide, and that reform can only be safely based on actual experiences gained in the past. But how are such experiences to be gained if no one will make a move? Luckily, there is one place in the world, though only one place, to which we can look when seeking for practical information in regard to sterilization; and that is the State of California in the United States.

Over 5000 operations for sterilization were performed in California in the eighteen years ending in 1926. To give an idea of what this means, if these operations had been carried on here on the same scale there would have been well over 3000 persons sterilized in England alone every year. About one insane person in twelve of those admitted to the Californian State Asylum was sterilized, these being those most likely to transmit this disease to posterity. It is true that in some cases the operation was performed in the belief that it would be beneficial to the health of the patient; this being very likely a mistaken belief. On the other hand, there is no reason to suppose that the operation was in any way injurious to health. Indeed, certain married women with a tendency to insanity, and with an excessive fear of pregnancy, were able to live comfortably at home after sterilization.

Turning to the treatment of the feeble in mind in California, all allowed to leave the State Asylum have been sterilized in recent years. A considerable number of girls have been sent by their parents to this institution in order to be sterilized, and have then been allowed to return home. Many patients are allowed out on parole, as it is there called,

when they live with their parents or appointed guardians. Girls who have already gone wrong need careful watching, whilst there has been surprisingly little trouble in regard to sexual matters with the men when on parole. A number of the sterilized persons are married, some having had children before sterilization. Marriage is indeed regarded as the most practical way of steady girls when at liberty. It is claimed that, on the whole, sterilization has not increased promiscuous intercourse, and may even have lessened it.

English experience indicates that, in spite of great care, feeble-minded girls when not in institutions sometimes give birth to illegitimate children. In these circumstances a feeble-minded mother should not be held to be responsible or blameworthy, for it was impossible for her to have fully realized the nature of her offence. Since such occurrences could certainly be avoided by sterilization, a parent or guardian who fails to take this precaution must be prepared to accept the whole blame. If mothers of feeble-minded girls would picture to themselves all the shame and suffering which would be felt if an illegitimate grandchild were to be born in their home, they might begin to look on sterilization in a new light.

We have here been dealing with a disagreeable subject; but, in view of the possibility of thus improving the lot of all future generations, eugenics demands that careful and unprejudiced consideration should be given to the uses to which sterilization might be put.