

The Waste of Life

And What Must Be Done to Prevent It

By DR. C. W. SALEEBY

No modern scientist has done so much to call attention to the waste of human endeavour and human life as this famous English writer. This article is typical of the man and his gospel.

SOME optic atrophy assails us, so that, while life is spilled and wasted on every side, we merely deplore the fall of the birth-rate. This is not reasonable, nor even human, for as I showed at the Royal Institution five years ago, the birth-rate has been falling since the dawn of life, and in the main line of life's ascent. The highest birth-rate is among the microbes; the highest in vertebrates is among the fishes, who are the humblest vertebrates; the highest in mammals is among the rats and the rabbits; the lowest in mammals (with the exception of the huge elephant) is among ourselves; and as for birds, Darwin pointed out long ago that the fulmar petrel lays only one egg, but it is the most numerous bird in the world. As for man, whose birth-rate is so small, and in whom the birth-rate steadily falls as he advances, he is the only living creature who steadily increases in numbers.

The obvious explanation of this paradox of the petrel and of man, is that, though the young of these most numerous creatures be so few, they are the best cared for. So many of them are saved that the effective birth-rate, as I wish to call it, is indeed highest among ourselves. The fish may produce a million eggs in a season, but, on the average, all but two will die, and the numbers of the race will merely be maintained.

Infant Mortality.

ALL this clearly means, in a word, that, as life ascends, its wastage diminishes. To produce three offspring, and save them all, is more economical, more human, more humane, more vital in the long run, than to produce a million and lose all but two. It follows that the wastage of life among ourselves is essentially inhuman, belonging to stages of life's ascent which we have really outgrown; and it follows, further, that the movement of our age against the waste of life is in every sense, biological and moral, too, in harmony with the genius of our species. In short, our first duty, as human and moral beings, is not to deplore the falling birth-rate, after the fashion of too many truculent moralists, who draw their confident indictments against a nation, but to save the birth-rate we have—and then, perchance, humbly to "ask for more," if we honestly believe ourselves capable of taking care of it.

Of course there is waste of life at all ages, among the mature and the prosperous, the men who have "retired," and who spoil and abbreviate the holidays of their lives because they have no resort but eating and drinking, as also among the enthusiasts and the conscientious, who work themselves into their graves. All this is theme enough for long and useful discussion, but I must attend to first things first. Among all forms of life, death and destruction bear most heavily upon the immature. What Darwin taught us to call "natural selection" is chiefly a "slaughter of the innocents." The death-rate, which is the waste-rate, is highest at the beginning of life, falls gradually away, and is never so high again until we observe it among the very old, where it can no longer be called waste of life at all.

This is strictly and abundantly true of ourselves. It is infancy and childhood that contribute so hugely to our death-rate, as ever since life began; and the further and complementary statement to that already made about the fall of the birth-rate as life ascends is that it has been accompanied by a fall in the death-rate. We, therefore, who work towards that end, towards preventing the waste of life in our day and generation, are working exactly in line with the main upward trend of organic progress.

The Care of Motherhood.

THE primary appointed means for the prevention of waste, in all the higher forms of life, are mothers and fathers—mothers earliest and most, but fathers also. This we see alike in the oak's care of the developing acorn, the whale's care of her calf, swimming beside her, or that association of mother and child among ourselves which so many religions, surely not quite in error, have regarded as divine. First, then, if we are to prevent the waste of human life, we must take care of the

mothers who primarily produce and take care of it. The existing infant mortality is approximately the measure of the need; and nothing can be more significant than the lessons we have learnt in the campaign of the last decade for the prevention of waste in infant life. The French, who have a tiny birth-rate, and who fear the Germans, with their huge (though rapidly falling) birth-rate, were naturally the pioneers. Where babies are scarce, they are precious. The pioneers invented the creche, and the sterilized milk depot. They thought to short-circuit the mother, and improve upon Nature's most ancient invention for the prevention of waste in infant life. Then they learnt to do better. They began to take care of the nursing mother; then to take care of the expectant mother, and now they have their reward. The Germans came very late into the field and made their experiments quickly, with the French examples before them. Already they have abandoned everything else and are beginning with the care of motherhood. That is the principle of what is, by universal consent, much the best thing in the Insurance Act, the "maternity benefit," which I heard impartially applauded from both sides of the House on the introduction of the Bill in May, 1911. I repeat the suggestion that our national memorial to Lord Lister should take the form of a Listerian Order of skilled men and women, appointed by the nation to save and rescue its motherhood, in its creative hour, by the application of the great principles of Listerism. A nation that can afford public-houses and race-courses can afford to build a memorial to Lister.

Educating Young Parents.

THAT would—nay, it will—be the first step; and then we must prepare to teach our adolescents and instruct our young parents, so that their love of their children may be fortified by knowledge. So long as individuals are mortal, the destiny of any people must hang upon its parenthood; or, as King George has said, "The foundations of national glory are set in the homes of the people." Is it not time that we taught our girls to be good wives, even if we have to teach them less about the wives of Henry the Eighth?

We must lay the foundations aright, if we would successfully build the House of Life; I offer no apology for lingering there. But though our infant mortality (almost the whole of which is really national infanticide) still consumes, within the first year of life, more than one-tenth of all that are born, and though no subsequent wastage can equal this, Heaven knows there is enough. For soon we put the child upon cow's milk, and that is the beginning of tuberculosis, which we now perceive to be, in reality, a disease of early life, like most other infections. All who really care about the waste of life are therefore bound to support the Pure Milk Bill which the hygienists have been demanding of Parliament for so many years.

The revelations derived from recruits in the Boer War led to a Royal Commission and Committees which examined our school children, and thence to "medical inspection." Medical and dental treatment must follow. I say must, advisedly, for we are all agreed upon the principle of national insurance, and the burden thereof, steadily increasing year by year, would surely break the nation's back ere long, unless we saw to it, as we must, that the beginning of vital decay and waste, threatening in childhood, are arrested, so that the insurable population, at sixteen, starts healthy and can then with relative ease and economy be left so.

Tuberculosis Mortality.

THE only rival to the infant mortality, which more than decimates our national life, is the tuberculosis mortality, above all from consumption, which also more than decimates us; and here, be it noted, the waste is very largely among young people, and young parents of both sexes. This is ruinous to the essential process by which alone a nation renews its youth; its present monetary cost is enormous; and we are now all beginning to ask, in the name of the Prevention of Waste, the question which the late King Edward, then Prince of Wales, asked seventeen years ago, "If preventable, why not prevented?" It will shortly be prevented; the Committee of experts now sitting on the subject, and the magnificent monetary provision lately made by Parliament, will see to that.

What the nineteenth century did for conditions of life the twentieth will do for life itself, first by prevention of vital waste, as those pioneers taught us, and then by sheer creation; but that is divine Eugenics or Race-Culture, and my space is exhausted. It has all coming time, and can afford to wait.

Eliminating Politics

SOME prominent men in Winnipeg and Toronto have decided to make an active effort to get the naval policy taken out of contentious politics. They propose to send a memorial to Mr. Borden and Sir Wilfrid Laurier suggesting that these leaders try to decide upon a naval policy which the country can support as a whole.

There is, in each city, a large committee who have been working on this memorial for some weeks, exchanging views and endeavouring to frame it in such a way as to command the approval of men on both sides of politics. Finally, three points were decided upon as basic and the memorial built around them: (1) A Canadian navy as a permanent policy; (2) an emergency contribution if circumstances warrant; (3) speedy action by parliament with the support of both political parties.

The memorial as finally drafted by the Winnipeg committee and accepted by the Toronto committee reads as follows:

WE, the undersigned citizens of , members of both political parties, unite in urgently representing to the Premier and Cabinet of Canada and the Leader of the Opposition:

1. That in our judgment it is the desire of the majority of the people of Canada that the Dominion should forthwith take her part in the naval defence of the Empire.
2. That capacity for self-defence being a necessary incident of nationhood, that Canadian people look forward to equipping itself with all reasonable despatch with the necessary means of defence; and that the permanent policy of the Dominion should look to the establishment of a navy that will be worthy of our national aspirations.
3. That if international relations as disclosed by official information are such as to indicate the existence of an urgent situation, substantial evidence should be given forthwith of Canada's recognition of her responsibilities as part of the Empire; and that the action taken in accordance with this idea should be of such a notable character as to be adequate in the light of the responsibilities of Canada, and of the exigencies of the case, and worthy of Canada's material wealth and prosperity.
4. That the motive animating Canadians is not to promote the military spirit as such, and, in particular, is not to render more acute the tension between Great Britain and any other Power; but to show in a practical way their belief that the effective maintenance of the British navy makes for the preservation of the world's peace, and to demonstrate unmistakably the strength of the Overseas' resources which are available for the defence of the Empire.
5. That it is highly desirable that the policy of the Dominion of Canada, both for the moment and permanently, with regard to this matter should not be or become a party question.
6. That without delay an earnest effort should therefore be made by the Government, through friendly consultation with His Majesty's Opposition in Canada, to give to such immediate action and to the Dominion's permanent policy, a form which, securing the adhesion of both parties, may remove the whole question of Imperial Defence from the domain of contentious politics.

It is not the intention of the committees to make a general request for signatures, but rather to ask only those who directly or indirectly signify their approval. Copies for signature may be obtained from Mr. V. C. Brown, Bank of Commerce, Winnipeg; or from Mr. John A. Cooper, 12 Wellington St. East, Toronto.

Government is Doomed

WHEN a constituency sends a man to the British Parliament to vote "agin the government" what a cry is raised by the Opposition supporters to the effect that the said Government is doomed. Manchester, in England, has just sent a Unionist to Parliament, and even the sedately immobile *London Times* claims that it is deadly warning to the Asquith people to quit. Here in Canada should a whole province stay Liberal in a local election, the Borden people are fevered in no way, as was lately the case with the Provinces of Quebec and Saskatchewan, though their opponents have not yet got beyond talking about it as a sign of what is going to happen ten years hence to the Conservative Government in power at Ottawa.—*Quebec Chronicle*.