

# The War and Illegitimacy

By J. W. MACMILLAN.

It will be remembered that, immediately after the war began, a general tremor of fear ran through the world that there would be an era of loose sexual relations, and that an inordinate number of children were about to be born outside the shelter of wedlock. This theme provoked many newspaper articles, a number of heated addresses from platforms and pulpits, and was supported by various alarming rumors. Happily, a few months sufficed to show that there was no great reason for fearing such disastrous consequences. The panic was allayed, and preparations which had been started by certain excitable and timorous enthusiasts for receiving a multitude of "war-babies" were stopped.

After more than three years since the armies were massed it is possible to estimate some of the effects of war upon illegitimacy. Unfortunately, the very conditions which set the new forces into play hinder a cool and comprehensive survey of the action of these forces. The statistics which are available are relatively few, especially from the lands of our enemies. Nevertheless, enough is procurable to display the tendencies set in motion, and to suggest the probable trend of after-the-war changes in the number, support and status of illegitimate children.

The evidence from all the countries engaged in the war indicates that the number of illegitimate births has declined from the beginning of the war. However, they have not declined so much as have the legitimate births. There is a slight proportionate gain of children born out of wedlock upon those born in wedlock. The general birth-rate has everywhere declined within the area directly affected by the conflict, while the illegitimate births are relatively more persistent than the legitimate. Thus, in England and Wales the illegitimate births fell off one-fifth per cent, and the legitimate births fell off eleven per cent. The only figures obtainable from France seem to be those of the city of Paris, which is perhaps not typical of the whole country. They are, however, of the same character as those from all the countries concerned. In one typical week the illegitimate births fell thirty-three per cent below the average of pre-war days, while legitimate births fell forty-nine per cent below. From Germany we learn that the illegitimate births in Berlin have decreased twenty-nine per cent. It is to be remembered that illegitimacy is normally twice as great in Germany as in Britain. In Italy, we have from Milan, which may be safely taken as typical of the larger cities of the country, a similar result of the war; the percentage of illegitimate births to total births increased from 8.3 to 9.4, between 1914 and 1916.

One of the inevitable effects of war is an increased appreciation of the value of human life. Food for powder must be supplied, and a man comes to be rated at his fighting power, which is not dependent on the legality of his origin or many other adventitious circumstances which seem much more important in days of peace. Hence there has been a general disposition to provide for a better support of bastards. No doubt, this new generosity was the easier to inaugurate because of the recent propaganda of child welfare workers on behalf of this disinherited class. The pleas of those who urged that illegitimate children should not be penalized for an offence which they did not commit, and that society should substitute its shelter for the home which they failed to inherit had made little impression upon the laws or customs of Europe. Yet, a large amount of sympathy had been aroused, and in several countries, as Norway and Austria, enlightened laws regarding them had been enacted. In Britain, on the other hand, no important legislation on their behalf had been passed for forty years previous to the outbreak of the war.

The war has moved the British Government from its apathy. Court orders respecting the maintenance of this class of legal wards have been enforced more strictly. Before the war no soldier was permitted to assign any portion of his pay to a woman with whom he was living unless he was married to her. This is now permitted, and in such cases the separation allowance goes with the assignment. Illegitimate children are also to be eligible for pensions, on satisfactory proof of paternity.

In Germany, where, on account of the larger number of such children, the problem is more insistent, there has been a more generous recognition of their rights. Not only are they eligible for the same pensions as legitimate children, but maternity benefits are provided for the mothers at the time of their

birth. Children brought by a woman with her at the time of her marriage are also eligible for pensions in case of the injury or death of the husband. In Leipzig the municipality has adopted as its wards all the illegitimate and pauper babies within its bounds; this is looked upon as an experiment in child welfare work.

In Austria and Russia the laws had already been moderately advanced. It does not appear that any change has been made in Russia, where such children are not eligible for pensions. In Austria, on the other hand, an Imperial order issued early in the war increased the legal rights of this class of children. The registration authorities are now required to report each illegitimate birth to the district court, which assumes a wardship over the child, and forces the father to support it. In the matter of pensions the two classes of children are placed on the same footing.

The deepest question which society has to face in this problem is that of the status of the illegitimate child. The number of such children, and the support accorded them, are indeed powerful factors in determining their status. Besides these influences however, the law may directly elevate the social standing and recognition of these children in other ways. In France, for instance, since the war began, it has become possible to legitimize such children by means of the marriage of their parents. Marriage by proxy has also been authorized for soldiers and sailors in cases either of expected or of actual births of children. Italy has followed the example of France in these particulars.

In Austria, and it gives us a kindlier feeling for the "ramshackle" Empire to learn of such action, the husband of the mother of an illegitimate child is now permitted to give the child his name. And not only

are these hapless ones eligible for pensions, but an illegitimate orphan's pensions is greater than that of a legitimate orphan.

The annual report of the Local Government Board of Britain for 1915-16 discussed the needs of this class of children at length. It was pointed out that there was great need of supervision of their welfare, and recommended keeping the mother with the child, if possible, for the first year of its life. It also recommended a system of home visiting of mothers and foster mothers. In keeping with this report is that of the Committee on Health of Munition Workers which asserts the need of maternity care for both married and unmarried mothers.

There are no figures which I know of which help to set Canada in comparison with the countries of Europe. As it is found, however, as soon as we develop any inquiries into any realm of social facts, that Canada is much like the rest of the world, it is probable that our national experiences parallel theirs. We certainly have illegitimate births among us, and it is likely that they are both less in number and greater in proportion since the war began, even as they are on both sides of the trenches in Europe. What has not been done, and should be immediately done, is to give recognition in our separation allowances and pensions to the needs and rights of illegitimate children.

Moreover, we may expect that one of the consequences of the war will be an enhanced estimate of the value of human beings simply as such. We shall, I venture to hope, be less ready with our branding irons wherever we find a trace of shame. Wealth, position, race, deportment, dress, accent and all the picaresque breed of adventitious qualities and possessions which have served in the past to mark superiority will surely mean less to a generation which has been scorched by such fires as are now raging. And the poor, the immigrant, the delinquent, the member of a despised race, the fallen woman and her sorry but precious living gift to society will surely be appraised at a higher rate. It is humanity which is sacred, and not its trappings.

## WAR TIME SCARCITY OF LABOR WIPES OUT THE AGE DEADLINE.

During the last twenty-five years or so many large industrial concerns, railroads and business houses have had an unwritten law that no man over 45 years of age should be hired. Much has been said and written about the economic waste that has resulted from this policy, which has unnecessarily shortened by many years the productive life of countless thousands of men, and forced women and immature boys to assume the burden of family support, simply because they could get jobs, while the head of the family, though at the zenith of his mental and physical capacity, found his way absolutely barred. The illogical character of the restriction is evident when one stops to consider that the general application of the deadline at 45 would at once eliminate at least 75 per cent of the principals and active executives of the great business enterprises of the country, leave our universities and colleges with depleted faculties, decimate Congress, cabinet and courts, and incidentally, would have relegated President Wilson, Roosevelt and Lloyd-George to the scrap heap at least fifteen years ago. Since passing the "deadline" Teddy has hunted lions in Africa, discovered a "River of Doubt" in South America, run for President, helped edit a great national weekly, gone down in a submarine and up in an airship, tried his best to take on the job of walloping the kaiser, and is to-day going up and down the country preaching patriotism and unity and thereby helping win the war. Yet if fifteen years ago he had, incognito, applied for a job in factory, workshop or office, and stated his age, the chances are ten to one he would even then have been told that he was "too old!"

Confronted by a shrinking labor supply the age deadline is vanishing into the limbo of forgotten things. In Chicago numerous concerns have during the last few months employed hundreds of men past 45 for all kinds of work—clerical, mechanical and manual—with the most satisfactory results. As a matter of fact, employers have reported that in efficiency and reliability these men have excelled their juniors. One of the great railroad systems of the country, which for many years has refused to hire, in any capacity, men who had passed 45, now announces its readiness to employ men up to 70 who possess the necessary qualifications. In other words, the age limit is abolished. Of course, this does not mean that men of 60 or 70 will be employed for work that requires younger men, but it does mean that to a greater degree than at any time in the last twenty-

## BRITAIN'S HEALTH REORGANIZATION.

On a moderate estimate 1,000 babies' lives could be saved every week in England if the health authorities could co-operate in more thorough educational and supervisory work.

Upwards of 100,000 children under five years of age die each year, according to the most recent estimate of the best informed medical administrators. For the four years, 1911-1914, the exact figure was 575,078, a figure which represents more than a quarter of all the deaths at all ages.

This is an appalling state of affairs, for by far the greater part of the loss is avoidable. Since the war began England has suffered fearful depletion of her numbers on the battle field, and in her homes the loss has also been terrible. There she has lost, using the above reckoning, 360,000 children under the age of five years. The men who died in France died gloriously spending their lives for their country in a supreme cause, but the children who died, died in the sacrifice. No military failure, however, disastrous, ever wasted life more wantonly. Like a gambler, reckless in misfortune, England throws away these pledges of her strength and greatness, pledges of her strength and greatness.

Of course, this burning of the candle at both ends cannot go on indefinitely. In peace-time the vast annual sacrifice to Moloch was dreadful enough, but in war time in means ruin. The birth rate falls and falls, the best and bravest of the race are cut off and the children who might have perpetuated their splendid qualities are allowed to die by the hundred thousand. The Government now realizes that there is only one end to this progress. Saving infant life is no longer a question of charity; it is no longer a question of social reform; it is no longer a question of economic reorganization or a question of man power, it is a question of national existence. Therefore, all Britain and the world in general is concerned in the proposal which Lord Rhondda has made that a Ministry of Health should be established. Without a tremendous effort the annual 100,000 child deaths cannot be prevented, and as certain physicians point out that effort cannot be made by forces frittered away upon half a dozen different departments, and that unless the ordinary practicing doctors of the country are enrolled in the great child-health army, British arms cannot escape complete crushing disaster. — Chicago Tribune.

five years fitness and capability are to be the governing factors, rather than an arbitrary and senseless age limit.—American Lumberman.