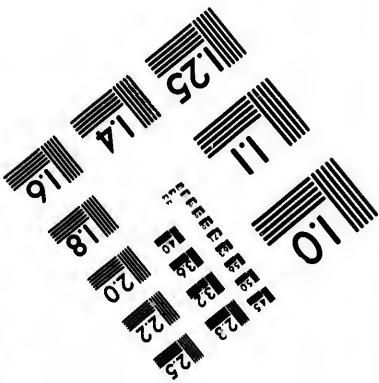
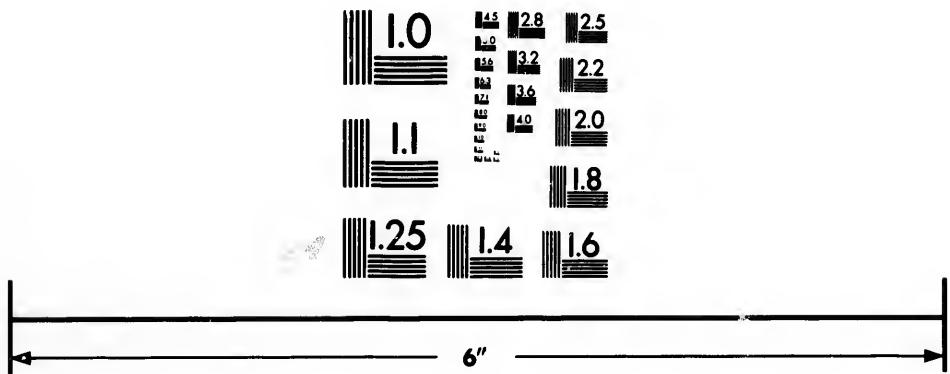


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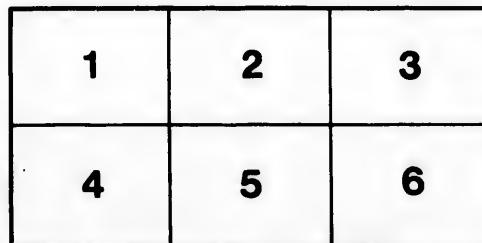
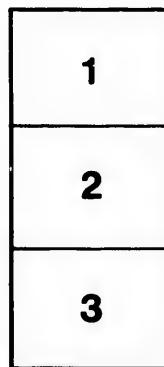
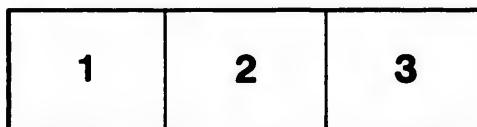
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The Low Birthrate.

ITS CAUSES AND RESULTS.

A SERMON BY THE REV. JAMES SIMPSON, M. A.
IN ST. PETER'S CATHEDRAL, CHARLOTTETOWN, NOV. 13, 1898.

At the recent session of our Provincial Synod, a resolution was passed expressing deep anxiety at the abnormally low birth-rate in the Province of Ontario; and a committee was appointed to consider the whole subject of vital statistics for the Ecclesiastical Province.

This matter has produced a good deal of comment in the secular press, and of necessity must, in the near future, demand the very serious attention of the community at large. For not only is Ontario suffering in this respect, but many other parts of Canada as well; and I am certain that if we had any means of obtaining statistics for this Province, we should make almost as poor a showing as the more western ones. Nor does it apply to our Dominion alone.

At the Church Congress held at Bradford England, last month, the Dean of Ripon raised the note of alarm, and said: "If this state of things went on, it was a case in which the nation must go down. It would be a case of national suicide, which was all the more terrible to them as Christians, because it meant the forsaking of the natural law of God. For the sake of what? For the sake of a wretched calculation and childless homes where luxury and ease should dwell."

The question is, also, becoming a very live one in the United States, and not before its time, while France is actually at a standstill with regard to its population, the annual excess of births over deaths being only one per thousand inhabitants throughout the whole country; and deaths are in excess of the births in nearly half of the eighty-seven departments, or counties.

You will gain a better idea of the variation of the birth-rate in different places if I give you a few statistics. In the year 1895 the birth-rate in the Province of Quebec was about 38 for every 1000 inhabitants; in England it was 30 $\frac{1}{2}$ per 1000; in France, nearly 22; in Ontario, only 18. Thus, you see, the rate in Ontario was lower than that of France, and only half of that of Quebec. In 1896 there was a slight improvement in Ontario, the rate being 20 $\frac{1}{2}$ per 1000, but this was probably the result of a new and more stringent registration act which came into force at that time. But the chief cause of alarm is not so much that any one year shows a low birth-rate in any one country; but that for the last quarter of a century there has been an almost steady decrease. In 1874 France's rate was 26 $\frac{1}{2}$, now it is only 22; England's was 36, now it is 30 $\frac{1}{2}$; Germany's was 40, now it is 35 $\frac{1}{2}$; and so on.

What is the cause of this? It has been claimed that the poor showing in the Province of Ontario is due to a certain extent to defective registration, and this may be partly true. It is quite possible that a number of births, especially in the country districts, are not registered, although one would imagine that this would apply equally well to the country districts of the

sister province of Quebec. But this does not account for the annual decrease in the rate, which undoubtedly arises principally from two causes: 1st, the low marriage rate; and 2nd, the unwillingness of women to become mothers, and the consequent extensive use of artificial checks to prevent conception taking place; or worse still, the wilful murder of unborn children by the practice of abortion.

These are not pleasant subjects to deal with. A congregation is apt to be shocked at any reference to such matters from the pulpit, while it listens without a blush to St Paul's very plain language about the sins of impurity, in his various epistles. There is a peculiar kind of morality abroad which allows the perusal of the most prurient sort of literature, so long as a person is married; the witnessing of most lewd play at the theatre, and the performance of most questionable acts between husband and wife, — but is too modest to listen to any condemnation of such things from those whose duty it is to speak about them.

The clergy may preach about intemperance as much as they like; they may denounce gambling and its hundred evils; they may refer to any other sin in the desecration in the plainest terms; but any mention of the sin of lust or impurity (especially in a mixed congregation) must be veiled, or merely hinted at, so that no one can be quite certain what is meant and those who are guilty flatter themselves that it cannot be very wrong or it would be dealt with more vigorously and definitely. Such mock modesty is surely born of Satan for the furtherance of his own vile ends. Are we to see the morals of the community depraved, the holy estate of matrimony degraded to a state of monogamous prostitution, and the slaughter of the innocents a thousand times more awful than that of Herod indulged in, without raising a warning voice—without denouncing the iniquity in the name of God? If those whose office and duty it is to teach the people the law of God hold their peace and keep silence, how shall the world be convinced of sin?

It is constantly said by medical and other writers upon this subject, "This is a master for the Church to deal with," and thank God, the Church is, at last, awakening to her sense of duty, and intends to deal with it. Synods and Conferences are taking it up; some vigorous leading articles have lately appeared in the Church papers on both sides of the Atlantic, and the clergy must face the situation, lay aside their ecorumes and speak out with no uncertain sound.

We are in a little corner of the world here. We may be—I trust, we are, freer from these evils, than they in the larger cities of the main-land; but I know we are not altogether free from them, and therefore I must do my part, at the risk of giving offence, and of shocking the susceptibilities

of those who prefer that the wounds of sin should purify in their concealment rather than they should be uncovered, that they may be healed.

First, let us deal with the low marriage rate. And immediately the question suggests itself to you, doubtless. What has the Church to say against a low marriage rate? There is surely no sin in abstaining from matrimony if one desires so to do. That is perfectly true. But what are the causes of the decrease in the number of marriages of late years? Is it because men are getting more continent, that sensual desires are not as strong now as formerly? Alas! the enormous number of prostitutes gives the lie to such a suggestion. The calculations of the most competent investigator gave the estimated number of public prostitutes in England, in 1891 (the last census year) as 315,000, in France as 467,000. And neither Canada nor the United States can cast stones at Europe in this matter. (Usher.) Is the decrease because the poorer people, the laboring classes are becoming more provident and unwilling to enter upon the Holy Estate of Matrimony until they are better provided with this world's goods? No. I believe I am right in saying that there is little perceptible decrease in marriage among this portion of the community. It is the middle and upper classes who offend in this, and the reason is the growing self-indulgence of the age. Young men and women are not willing to make that self-sacrifice required to start married life in an humble way. They must begin their house-keeping with as much style as they have been used to in their own homes. Luxuries which their parents never dreamed of in the early days of their married life, they consider necessities. They must keep their place in society and entertain as well as their neighbors, and until all this can be done they will not undertake the responsibilities of matrimony. The consequence is "that the country is full of celibate women, to whom their condition is rightly and naturally a wrong and a grievance," while the men too often gratify their passions in unlawful ways; for those who know declare that as the marriage rate decreases prostitution proportionately increases. And it must be borne in mind that prostitution for the sake of livelihood is an outcome of so-called civilization. It is not a relic of primitive man. When wants were few and there were no complex social problems, men could marry as early as they liked, for there was always a living to be obtained. Later, over-population monopolies, competition and the demands of society have placed a succession of barriers around matrimony, and the professional harlot is the consequence.

Has not the Church a right to raise her voice against such a state of affairs as this? Dare she remain silent under such circumstances? We have no desire to advocate improvident marriages; there are two many of them already, and matrimony, as our exhortation hath it,—"It is not by any to be enterprises, nor taken in hand, unadvisedly, lightly, or wantonly, to satisfy men's carnal lusts and appetites, like brute beasts that have no understanding, but reverently, discreetly, advisedly, soberly, and in the fear of God, duly considering the causes for which matrimony was ordained."

But when two people have that God-given love, one for the other, it ought to inspire them both with a spirit of self-denial and a readiness to forego many things they have hitherto been used to, if that will enable them to become husband and wife. There is no disgrace in

beginning married life in a modest way and the sacrifices each has to make in turn for the other, should but cherish that love which (we are too apt to forget) is an image of the love that is betwixt Christ and His Church, and we ought surely to be ready to give up something for our wives." "Love if it is worthy of the name must be consecrated by the idea of duty, which frequently implies self-sacrifice; and, so consecrated, it is at once the source and stay of whatever is highest and noblest in life."

The second cause of the prevalent low birth rate is the increased use of artificial checks to fecundity. And here again the luxury and self-indulgence of the age are to blame. It is not among the poor that these practices obtain. It is not those who have the excuse of poverty,—but the mercantile, the professional and the leisureed classes who are the culprits, because, sooth, childbearing interferes with their personal comfort—with their position in society—their pleasures—their self-indulgence, and everything must be sacrificed to these. "Formerly it was considered the wholesome duty of the educated and well to do, to set an example of high morality and Christian practice to their poorer brethren; now-a-days the position is reversed. Those in high places have acquired the knowledge which enables them to gratify their passions without becoming parents, and they have not only unhesitatingly adopted the practice, but blame the poor for not following their example."

The Psalmist said, "Lo children and the fruit of the womb, are an heritage and gift that cometh of the Lord." The verdict of the nineteenth century Christianity proclaims them to be "encumbrances." How often do we see advertisements for married people with no "encumbrances." When Israel forsook God and became idolatrous, the prophet Hosea (9:14) in announcing the nation's downfall cried "Give them, O Lord, what will Thou give? Give them a miscarrying womb and dry breasts." A most signal punishment for those who, if faithful to Jehovah, were to be as the sands of the sea for multitude. Now such a condition is considered by many, no punishment at all, but is self-inflicted and rejoiced in. "The joyful mother of children" was, in Bible times, the highest type of blessedness; now she is spoken of by her superior and criminally childless sisters as a "propagating drudge," and despised accordingly.

Those who adopt some of the various unnatural methods in vogue to save themselves the unpleasantness of child-bearing, frequently claim that there is no harm in what they do, although they acknowledge that other methods are sinful. But I am not afraid to assert that every artificial check is immoral, and that one differs from the other only in degree, not in kind, and the desire of the will is the same in all cases.

To be quite plain, the check must either prevent conception, or it must kill the embryo after conception. If the latter it is absolute murder—infanticide. For if it is murder to kill a child a moment after it is born, it is murder to kill it a moment before it is born, or week, or a month, or nine months before it is born. The very instant conception takes place there is the God-given life, and the sin is the same whether that life is strangled at its very source, or a few weeks, or months, or years afterwards. Even the laws of the land treat this matter as criminal and punish it accordingly when found out.

On the other hand, while the prevention of conception does not indeed destroy life, it does destroy the potentiality of life, which is moral murder; for every fraud is a choked germ; rendered unproductive,—an indirect *fanticide*. In other words, although the exact occasions cannot be specified, for they are known only to God, there must be such occasions in the natural course of events, when the check prevents a life from coming into existence. God says “let there be life”; man says “there shall not be life for I will thwart the purpose of the Almighty”; and can this be done without grievous sin?

That you may not think that I exaggerate the prevalence of these practices, that I have set up a man of straw for the pleasure of knocking him down, I will here quote a statement recently made in an American Church Magazine. It says:

“That the destruction of child-life between conception and birth is a common malpractice among American women, especially of the middle and upper classes, is too notorious to admit of denial, but that this terrible abuse is far more general than most people suppose we have good reason to believe. Abortion is a crime so inhuman, unchristian and damnable that one would naturally suppose that every woman in Christendom would look upon such a criminal operation with the most utter loathing, detestation and horror.

With shame and humiliation we are compelled to confess that among the older women of the Christian congregation, who commune at the Lord's Table and shine as leaders in Church guilds and societies, there are those who actually advise and urge the younger women to resort to an expedient so unrighteous to escape the burdens of motherhood, pooh-poohing the idea of its being a sin, and with the shrug of the shoulder saying “Oh, our best people do it, and so it can't be wrong.” (*Pulpit of the Cross*)

Again Dr. F. Naphy, an American physician writes “The detectable crime of abortion is appallingly rife in our day; it is abroad in our land to an extent which would have shocked the absolute women of pagan Rome. The crime is common, it is fearfully prevalent. Hundreds of persons are devoted to it in perpetration; it is their trade. In nearly every village its ministers stretch out their bloody hands to lead the weak women to suffering, remorse and death. Those who submit to the treatment are not generally unmarried women who have lost their virtue, but the mothers of families, respectable Christian matrons, members of churches, and walking in the better classes of society. Testimony from all quarters, especially from New England, has accumulated within the last few years to sap our faith in the morality and religion of American women.” And one more piece of evidence, I could give dozens such, but these will suffice. Some years ago a paragraph went the rounds of the American papers, stating that a practitioner in Ohio acknowledged on his death bed that he had assisted at not less than 1500 abortions. Amid the wailing of mothers who refused to be comforted, King Herod murdered, a few dozen of children in the village of Bethlehem, and we proclaim him a most inhuman monster. Today, not in one village alone, but in scores and scores of places in America and elsewhere, numbers of men put Herod Herod in his vile deed, while the mothers shed never a tear, and we must not denounce them for fear of shocking the modesty of our hearers. If this absolute

murder is so common an occurrence among educated Christian people, how shall we estimate the frequency of that moral murder which is committed by thousands who would shrink with horror from doing anything wrong after conception has taken place.

I said educated Christian people for so our shame be it said, that it is not only the sin of the better classes, but it is also the sin of the Christian Heathens and Mahometans, so far as I can learn, know it not; and a recent writer (Usher) says: “I have taken some trouble to ascertain, and I find that the artificial check system is looked upon with horror by every Jew, both by distinctly immoral, and also wholly ruinous to any nation that might be so foolish as to adopt it.” Does it not seem strange that the professed followers of Jesus Christ—of Him who “was conceived by the Holy Ghost and born of the Virgin Mary”—should be the very ones of all others to war so relentlessly against the child-life of today.

But, further, it is not only the sin of the Christian, but it is the sin of the Protestant Christian,—the Christian that does not believe in sacramental confession. Russia, which is under the sway of the Eastern Church has the highest birth-rate of any nation in Europe. The Roman Catholic Church absolutely denies all use of her Sacraments to those who frustrate the ends of matrimony; so that community amongst families faithful to their religious duties, such evils cannot exist. And if France with the lowest birth-rate in Europe be brought forward to refute this, we contend that France has fallen from the Faith, and to a great extent in consequence of this very sin, which leads to infidelity as it is encouraged by infidelity. The census of 1891 gave the population of France as thirty-eight and one-half millions, and out of that number seven and two-third million men were returned as of no religion. This would mean considerably more than half the total number of men, and doubtless many of the remainder were only nominal Christians. One is not surprised at atheists encouraging this sin. They believe that there is no God,—no future life, and they therefore feel at liberty, to refuse to call life into existence, or to end it by suicide when and how they please. But no Christian, nay! no one who believes in a God can possibly defend the practice; for it certainly presupposes that there is no such thing as any Divine interposition or guidance, either in the world or in the individual. This is clearly exemplified by the case of Mrs. Besant, whose writings perhaps more than those of any other author taught and encouraged this plan of controlling this birth-rate. About the year 1878, Chas. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant, two well known atheists, gave the first impetus to the movement in England by publishing the “Fruits of Philosophy,” an American book which dealt openly with that which hitherto had only been known to a few, and for which they were prosecuted as the vendors of obscene literature, but were eventually acquitted. The case, however, created a great deal of attention, and much unfortunate publicity was given to the book itself, which consequently had a very large sale; and from that time the birth-rate in England has steadily decreased. Shortly after this Mrs. Besant published her own book “The Law of Population” which also had an immense sale, as it was translated into every language and read by millions of persons. In 1891, Mrs. Besant renounced Atheism and became a Theo-

sophist, she therefore believed in a God and immortality. Immediately she withdrew her book from circulation, although she was offered a large sum for the copyright, and confessed her error in writing. She declared that when advocating the system she considered man to be but an organism which was produced on the earth and perished upon it, but that as soon as she realized that man was immortal she became convinced that the practice was not only immoral in itself, but also only put one evil in the place of another. How, then, can any one who names the Name of the Lord Jesus Christ—anyone who professes to believe in the Resurrection of the Dead, and the life of the world to come, for an instant advocate or defend this sin?

Time will not permit me to dwell at any length on the evil effects of these practices upon the individual, upon society and upon the nation. Medical opinion is overwhelmingly against them. French physicians who have large experience are especially vigorous in denouncing their dangers to both sexes. In women they produce hysteria, congestions, inflammations, morbidity and all sorts of nervous diseases, they shorten life and excite a craving for morphine, ether and other drugs.

In society these practices must tend to increase prenuptial unchastity; for can our women maintain their high standard of virtue—can the marked difference between the chastity of women and that of men continue, if there is no fear of exposure and disgrace by becoming mothers.

Then, too, they greatly encourage divorce. For, undoubtedly, the presence of children over and over again averts the separation of husband and wife. Quarrels are made up and differences are borne with for the sake of the children, and from the unwillingness of either parent to be parted from them. In the case of the childless marriages there is no such restraining influence, and divorce is consequently sought upon the slightest provocation.

And if this system is morally and physically wrong in the individual; if it undermines the sanctity of family life, the very foundations of well ordered society, it is also disastrous to the nation. The decay of the Roman Empire is a striking instance of this. The poet Juvenal describing the many causes which were bringing about the downfall of that Empire, in his sixth satire freely mentions this one, "The wealthy dame is seldom brought to bed." St. Paul in the first chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, also refers to the awful lust of the age. When the Roman women anxious about their own self indulgence, only, refused to nurse their children and came to look upon infanticide without any shame or horror, the glory of the nation soon departed. And who can fail to see that France of today is rapidly losing her present place among the nations of Europe from the same cause, and a like fate must sooner or later await every nation that yields itself up to licentiousness. God grant that the British Empire may realize her danger in time and return to the paths of matrimonial virtue.

The defenders of these practices plead in excuse that there is danger of over-population; that too frequent child-bearing ruins a woman's health, that people cannot afford large families, that parents in temporary sickness or having chronic disease ought not to beget children, and so on. All which is perfectly true.

But human beings differ from the lower animals in that they are able to control their sensual desires, and in such cases

those desires must be controlled, except, at least, at those regular times, when God, who knoweth all our needs, has provided that conception will not take place. Temperance in conjugal matters is as imperative as temperance in eating and drinking; and excess in any of these brings its own punishment. Self control is the first condition of all morality. To command the passions, not to be a slave to them is man's proper state, and the man who does not command them is every whit as bad as the drunkard, although his excesses are hidden from the eyes of his fellows, as the drunkards are not. The present state of society, the difficulty in providing for large families, or the ill health of a husband or a wife, may demand a greater exercise of self-control, but it can never condone a sin, let alone such a sin as infanticide.

My dear brethren, I have felt constrained to speak to you thus plainly tonight, because of the pressing need of checking the i-sidious vice which is everywhere taking possession of our homes. A few years ago this subject had been better left to some special occasion; but so rapidly has the knowledge of the evil increased of late, that now there is little fear of traching that which is not already known, and even if this danger did exist, there is the still greater danger of allowing the practices to pass unchallenged for the sake of a warning word. I am sure that many offenders have no idea of the sinfulness of them. They may feel that they are not altogether right and honest; but they know so little of physiology that the enormity of the sin does not manifest itself to them, and how are they to learn it unless the clergy speak out.

I can assure you it has been no easy task for me thus to speak, and if it has given you pain in listening, I am certain my pain in speaking has been tenfold greater than yours. But if my speaking, through God's mercy, be the means of checking this sin in the least degree, if it be the means of wianding the light of day and the crown of life for one babe yet unborn, if it be the means of making husbands and wives realize that married life is for something more than the selfish gratifications of the lusts of the flesh, then I am willing to bear the pain, aye, and the censure that is likely to follow from some quarters, knowing that if I kept silence any longer I should be guilty before God of my brother's blood.

One word of warning in conclusion. This is far too solemn a subject to jest about. If you have to talk of it at all, do it with the full realization of its sinfulness. And judge no one. There are, thank God, many married people, who, although childless, or with one or two children, are living pure, chaste, continent lives. There are others who from some physical cause are temporarily or permanently unfruitful. That such lie under a certain suspicion, in some minds, is unfortunately unavoidable in the present state of society. But I beg of you, in God's name, to judge no one. Exercise your Christian charity;—never say even to yourself, that you suspect any person. Leave the matter in God's hands, where it belongs; and pray ever and earnestly that this stone of reproach may be rolled away, and that once more "marriage may be honorable to all, and the bed undefiled."

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N.B.—For an exhaustive treatise on this subject see "New Mathusianism," by R. Ussher. Published by Gibbons & Co., 18 Bury St., London, Eng. Price 6s.

