

INTERNATIONAL AWAKENING, 1922

MY STAY in the Orient had been strenuous. It was likewise unique and interesting. From the time of my arrival at Yokohama to the date of leaving the police headquarters in May, I had given over five hundred interviews in Japan alone, at most of which there were present several reporters representing different newspapers or magazines from all over the country. Very early in my career I had realized the importance of giving clear, concise and true concepts of birth control to those interviewers or reporters who wished to write about it. This simple policy served my purpose well in the Orient, where labored English with technical phrases was completely lost. However, the strain of so many interviews began to tell on my health. In Yokohama I had been ordered to bed for ten days, and I was forced to cut short my stay in Japan and to cancel many lectures which I had planned in China and India.

Accordingly, we set out for London where I hoped I might recuperate. The long trip through the Red Sea at that late

season was torture and we were thankful to reach Port Said alive. My son Grant, who had traveled with me for the whole eight months, was very ill in Cairo, but recovered sufficiently for me to take him on to London. Upon our arrival in still another new and strange country, he became homesick for the first time since we left New York eight months before. He was fed up with strange sights, strange people, new customs, temples, churches, shops, art galleries and historic sights. He was no longer interested in anything but a tennis match. His mind refused to register the historic significance of other things. I knew he longed to be among the boys of his own age, so I cabled to a friend conducting a camp in Maine, and upon his reply I shipped my young son across the Atlantic on the S S *Majestic* to his native land. He had had all his mind could absorb. But that voyage around the world made all the difference in the world in his future outlook and studies. I have never regretted taking him along, though his headmaster protested vigorously against it.

The English Malthusian League, still headed by Dr. Charles and Mrs. Bessie Drysdale, had called the Fifth International Neo-Malthusian and Birth Control Conference in London for the four days beginning July 11, 1922.

On that date we gathered at Kingsway Hall, delegates from Europe, from Asia, from America. With the exception of Russia, all of the countries manifested their interest. Frau Rosika Schwimmer of Hungary and Herr Johann Ferch of Austria evoked tragic notes from those two depleted countries. Coincident with the opening of this conference, there had been the public statement concerning love and marriage by Lord Dawson of Penn, the king's physician, to the bishops at Lambeth—a sort of Magna Carta of married love, which had created a great sensation in the press and which acted as an auspicious prologue to the opinions then expressed. In addition to Lord Dawson of Penn, our movement seemed to be supported by the most distinguished minds of Great Britain. Unequivocally they expressed their convictions concerning population and contraception—men like the Very Reverend

William Ralph Inge, dean of St Paul's, the Bishop of Birmingham, H G Wells, Havelock Ellis, Professor MacBride, an eminent biologist, Harold Cox, editor of the *Edinburgh Review* and John Maynard Keynes, the economist. All of these distinguished men gave strength and dignity to the cause.

Two birth control clinics had already been established in England the preceding year. Dr Marie Stopes and her husband had opened the first one, and the Malthusian League had organized the second. Today, in 1931, there are nearly twenty five, all under private auspices, although contraceptive advice is given from government welfare centers as well.

The Fifth International Conference was well attended. It united advocates of the population movement from Germany, Austria, France, Italy, and the Scandinavian countries into one strong international body. Considering the unsettled conditions of Europe and the still seething hatred of Germans everywhere, the attendance of continental delegates was surprisingly large.

To England's credit may it be said that the German and Austrian delegates were treated with every courtesy and consideration. Any feeling hanging over from the war time propaganda was thrust aside, not only out of an innate courtesy on the part of both Dr and Mrs Drysdale, but because the English sense of respect for intelligence is dominant.

It was a deep satisfaction to me to see that in England birth control was being supported by scientists of unquestioned and distinguished authority. England, particularly in these scientists—as in her greatest literary men, her editors and her publicists—exhibited a moral courage and stamina that were too often lacking in the United States. And tolerance, in addition! They could listen to the Germans as attentively as to their own countrymen. Then too, it was a delight to work in an atmosphere unblighted by legal restrictions. This scientific candor resulted in a directness and a delicacy that banished any semblance of indecency or prurience. The newspapers carried the accounts of the conference with sincerity and sobriety. There was no effort to be sensational or facetious.

The Conference was opened by a reception given on the evening of the first day by Mr and Mrs H G Wells in their London home. Nothing more gracious than this act of opening his house to the members of the Conference could emphasize the support of this brilliant and influential leader of modern thought, one of the bravest, most courageous of men, brave in audacity, courageous in integrity of the mind and spirit. He has numerous good and loyal friends, many jealous friends, a few enemies, and millions of admirers.

H G Wells has liberated thought in America. He has influenced personal lives in great undertakings. He is one of the most truly masculine men I have ever known. He has not only brains, but a capacity for loving both individuals and humanity at the same time. He can be amusing, witty, sarcastic, brilliant, flirtatious, and yet profound at once. He is quick, sensitive, alert to the slightest meaning, or intonation, or feeling. To be with him means you must pull yourself up, keep alive every second, or you miss the Wells as he reveals himself to you in his writings.

It was always a source of great amusement to me to hear Londoners remarks about Wells. People who had never met him thought they knew most about him. I was living in the suburbs of London in the spring of 1920 in a very nice, homey place where three elderly spinster women lived also. Owing to the closeness and intimacy of our living it was known in the household that I had been invited for a week end to Easton Glebe by Mrs Wells. Great excitement prevailed. What train was I to take, what dress was I to wear, what other garments I was to include in my wardrobe—these were the important questions! They were rather horrified when I departed with a small week-end case, leaving behind me fluffy, feminine evening gowns of their choice. I returned Monday about midnight having spent the day in London seeing various people. As soon as I got to my room and closed the door, I heard steps in the hallway. A soft tap on the door, and in came the three ladies in night clothes, they had waited up to hear all about my visit. I told them as much

as I could about the other visitors, and when I had finished one of the ladies leaned forward and said in a loud suppressed hesitant whisper, Did he try to kiss you?

Who? I asked, thinking she referred to one of the guests I had been praising

Why—why—don't you know? she stuttered

Know what? I insisted She looked a little abashed at this, so her sister took up the answer

Well, Sister means that Wells gets every woman he wants He has a magnetic influence over them They adore him

Was he fascinating? the youngest sister asked

And for two solid hours (until 2 a m) I was bombarded with such questions The fact that there was a Mrs Wells, whom Mr Wells dearly loved, did not matter in the least He was the villain lover, the Beau Brummel of spinsterhood in England

I wish I could do justice in expressing my admiration for Mrs Wells— Jane as she was affectionately called To know her as the charming hostess, devoted mother, loyal wife, one must read the introduction by Mr Wells to her own book, published after her death in 1928

Perhaps the most brilliant as well as entertaining event of the Conference was a formal dinner given to the delegates at the Holborn Restaurant, a place famous for generations for its public dinners To Americans especially was it a unique experience to hear the sonorous voice of the professional Master of Ceremonies, who stood behind the chair of the chairman, Mr Drysdale The first toast was to the King, and as the Master of Ceremonies in his full uniform called out, Pray silence for the King! everyone rose, clinked glasses with each other while His Majesty's health was drunk by the international body This dinner was attended by Mr and Mrs Wells, Sir Arbuthnot Lane, Professor Westermarck, Prof W W MacBride of England, and an array of other brilliant personages of national and international fame

One typical event of our conference was an excursion by motor to Dorking, the birthplace of Thomas Robert Malthus

There we all sat around John Maynard Keynes while he made a splendid address on the philosophy of Malthus

Mr Harold Cox entertained us all at tea in his home at Gray's Inn, and the conference closed with a large public meeting at Kingsway Hall with H G Wells in the chair Mr Wells summed up the situation by saying that a subject like birth control becomes decent and clean when it is proclaimed from the housetops in the open, but salacious and obscene when whispered in secret and surreptitious tones I remember his voice as he announced to us The choice before us is not a choice between innocence and knowledge It is a choice between whispering, leering, red-eared and furtive-eyed knowledge on the one hand, and candid straightforward knowledge on the other We stand in this movement for the open ways, for the scientific method and for light

The resolutions and manifestos of the Conference are worth recording in substance as expressing views on various issues then pending and embodying the thought and vision of far reaching consequences Especially was there great vigor and encouragement expressed as to the extension of birth control education to the Orient and calling upon those governments to help their teeming population adopt the practice

It condemned as short sighted and reactionary the policy of repression still existing in certain countries, and expressed the hope that at least those unfit by heredity may be enabled to decrease their number for the welfare of the race

Attention was called to the benefits which the practice of birth control can confer on young people by enabling them to marry early and regulate the number of children in accordance with health, resources and possible future advancement

We called upon the public health authorities and all Christian churches and welfare agencies to join us in providing parents with proper instruction and to supplement our teachings with such moral sexual instruction as would conform to their own standards of science or ethics, as would help to guard against abuse

We urged upon the League of Nations to proclaim as a

great principle of international peace that the increase of numbers is not to be regarded as a justifiable reason for national expansion, but that each nation should limit its number to its resources

The substance of these resolutions was dear to the heart of all members of the conference. It was like the creed of a new religion. The very air was electric with our faith and confidence in the possibility of a new order in human affairs.

The medical session was no less impressive and encouraging. First, the medical group called upon the medical profession to provide for instruction as part of the recognized duty of the profession in all hospitals and public health centers to which the poorest classes and those suffering from hereditary defects apply for relief. The conference also called attention to the fact that hygienic contraceptive devices are distinct from abortion in its physiological, legal or moral aspects, and further recorded its opinion that there is no evidence that the best contraceptive methods are injurious to health, or conducive to sterility.

Nothing could have been more timely than these resolutions (carried by 163 to 3) to offset the malicious, insinuating propaganda already begun in opposition circles.

At about this time in London there were two legal battles attracting public attention which kept the subject ever before the people. One of them was a libel suit brought by Dr Marie Stopes against Dr Haliday Sutherland for stating in a book that methods advised in the birth control clinic which she had founded and conducted were dangerous and harmful. The suit aroused tremendous interest, and gave Dr Stopes the opportunity of stating her case and of bringing to public attention both sides of this burning question.

In March, 1923, the jury's verdict awarded one hundred pounds to Dr Stopes, but the House of Lords, as was to be expected from a body of its character, reversed the decision on December 21st, 1924.

The other trial was the prosecution of Guy and Rose Aldred in January 1923, for publishing my pamphlet, *Family Lim*

station, the same which was then being distributed by the government of Yucatan to couples with marriage certificates

It was most amusing to those of us familiar with the scientific approach to this subject to find that the learned judges of England were not shocked so much by the reading matter contained in the pamphlet as by a drawing, copied from a medical text book, which illustrated the exact position of the womb. It illustrated the correct way for the woman to feel her cervix in order to adjust the necessary device. This drawing was ultimately removed from the pamphlet, and the publishers continued to circulate it throughout the British Empire.

During the same year, Dr and Mrs Drysdale withdrew from the movement as leaders of the Malthusian and New Generation Leagues, and passed over to another group the responsibility of a cause which had been held so dear, and carried on so nobly, by two generations of the Drysdales for over fifty years.

From the early fifties, when George Drysdale first published his epoch making gospel of birth control, *The Elements of Social Science*, throughout the Victorian era, through the tempestuous days of the Great War, down to these chaotic days when the whole world has been desperately driven to a realization of the fundamental need for the conscious control of population, it has been those brave self sacrificing Drysdales who have kept alive the idea. It has been a noble tradition of the Drysdale family—this quiet, unceasing service, this loyalty to an ideal.

The movement in England was making solid advances. Nothing could now stop its progress. It was significantly noticeable that the trend of the movement in England was economic, influenced, no doubt, by such scientists as Keynes, Cox, Drysdale, and based on the work done previously by Mills, Place, Carlyle and back to Malthus himself. While Marie Stopes had energetically translated the idea into her own theories of sex education, nevertheless the weight of all arguments was at this time based on scientific, economic and sociological principles.

John Maynard Keynes said It is not merely an economist's problem, but in the near future the greatest of all political questions It will be a question which will arouse some of the deepest instincts and emotions of men, and feeling may run as passionately as in some of the earlier struggles between religions

When the instability of modern society forces the issue, a great transition will have begun, with the endeavor by civilized man to assume conscious control in his own hands away from the blind instinct of mere predominant survival

European diplomacy was urging a high birth rate Italy's attention was called to her falling birth rate, especially in the northern countries, which brought forth denunciation from Mussolini

Report came from Milan that Premier Mussolini had declared the prolific birth rate of the Italian people to be one of the questions now crying for solution I will not, he was quoted in the New York *Herald* of October 19 as saying, conduct any Malthusian propaganda The fact that decadence worries other countries shows that we must be proud of our flourishing growth Our births exceed our deaths by 440,000 yearly In this small peninsula, numbering 40,000,000, these figures will show what a huge problem we are facing

Only three roads are open to us—to addict ourselves to voluntary sterility (the Italians are too intelligent to do that), to make war, or to seek outlets for the overpopulation

A star is again rising on the horizon—the German star Germany, which we believed crushed, is already standing She is preparing herself for an economic revenge, and next year she will start fighting to regain her world markets

The last sentence, coupled with a statement that the Fascist militia is not to be disbanded, looks as if the present government of Italy is itself considering war for a place under the sun as a possible outlet for its surplus numbers

On my return to America in October 1922, I felt the vibrations of the Town Hall outrage in every direction which I

turned We had to fight attempted persecutions and prosecutions vigorously at every stage

The American Birth Control League, which had been organized at the First National Birth Control Conference in November, 1921, and of which I was president, now began to take the form of a real organization

Immediately after the inception of the organization, we had set into motion through legal channels the request for incorporation under the membership laws of the state of New York All kinds of interference by our foes was put in the way to prevent this Finally, after much delay, Justice Bijur, of the New York Supreme Court, approved our motion, and a certificate of incorporation was granted to the League It was our first legal victory, and we were ready to make the aims of our group a reality

Our objectives and principles were printed and scattered widely They have been the means of clarifying the birth control issue, and of setting the movement on a footing with other social agencies and scientific bodies

The opposition to the work was no longer confined to New York, but permeated our activities in every part of the country It intimidated legislators It spread lies concerning our motives and character It used the press, the police, the courts to beat us back into subjection But the ocean could not be swept back with a broom The truth was out It illuminated the world Motherhood no longer cringed before the relentless laws of fecundity