

SCIENTISTS INTERESTS

I LEFT New York in November, 1926, going straight to London, with the idea of organizing a world population conference. I had long felt the necessity of having a scientific foundation for all future work. The propaganda aspect of the problem was in all countries far more advanced than the scientific or the medical development. Without the latter, no long range program was possible. My aim was to establish an international movement which, through its findings, its precise researches, thoroughly correlated and coordinated, would help in the solution of political, industrial, and racial problems which everywhere in the world today are causing such grave concern.

An arduous, complex task indeed I discovered that I had set for myself. My first object was to get sufficient financial support pledged for the undertaking, and my second to find a distinguished man of recognized scientific standing who would act as chairman and whose name would carry dignity and bring prestige. The committee was first formed around

Professor A M Carr Saunders, but this authority on population problems decided that he could not carry on so stupendous a task. Six weeks of work had gone into forming this committee when he informed me that his own obligations were too heavy for him to assume so great a responsibility, that he was willing to remain on the council in an advisory capacity, however, and would do everything in his power to work for the success of the conference.

Then the task had to be done over again, in the search of the field for a successor. After weeks of uncertainty, Sir Bernard Mallet consented to act as chairman. At one time Registrar General of Great Britain, he has been in charge of the vital statistics of the Empire.

The Council of the conference included, I think, men of the greatest distinction in both England and America. Professors E M East, Raymond Pearl, H P Fairchild, Drs C C Little, Wesley C Mitchell, and Whitridge Williams represented the United States on this Council. England was represented by Havelock Ellis, John Maynard Keynes, Julian S Huxley, Dr A F Crew, Professor Carr Saunders, Sir Humphrey Rolleston, Australia by Sir George Knibbs, France by Professor Leon Bernard, Lucien March, Andre Siegfried, Germany by Drs E Fischer and Grotjahn, Holland by Dr H W Methorst and M A Van Herwerden, Italy by Professors Corrado Gini and A Niceforo, Switzerland by Professor W Rappard.

After overcoming many obstacles, it was finally arranged to hold the first world population conference at the Salle Centrale in Geneva on the three days beginning August 31, 1927. My aim was to assemble a conclave of biological, sociological and statistical authorities from all the civilized countries of the world, aiming toward the organization of an international body, where new researches might be coordinated and studied. Our announcements proclaimed. It is known that the question of population growth holds possibilities of menace to the future of civilization, and yet the world population problem

is one of the great issues of today which has not been subject to concerted international action

Geneva was chosen because it is there that the League of Nations meets. It is still my conviction that eventually the League of Nations, to be alive, must interest itself in the population problems of the world and help to solve them through scientific knowledge.

All the members of the Committee in England worked for several months to attain the cooperation of other scientists on the continent. Julian Huxley was especially active and helpful, and it was due to these efforts that we were finally enabled to secure so impressive a list of names for our Council.

From the inception it was my firm resolution not to confuse the issue with birth control or propaganda of any sort. Consequently I kept my name out of all the preparatory activity. The secretary, Mrs. Edith How Martyn, who helped with the planning and organization, and I both remained in the background, carrying on the executive daily routine.

In April I established the headquarters in Geneva, and then began the arduous task of preparing for the translations of the papers to be read, and the setting up of the machinery which could function in four languages—German, Italian, French and English. Interpreters, translators, secretaries, and editors were to be secured, not to speak of printers and expert proof readers with knowledge of the subjects. Hotel arrangements and accommodations had to be arranged for our expected three hundred delegates, no small task in Geneva at that time of the year.

No official president had yet been chosen for the sessions of the conference. Dr. William H. Welch, the dean of public health and American medicine, was arriving, and it was suggested that he be made president. Numerous other names were suggested. But I insisted that Sir Bernard Mallet, who had given so generously of his time to the British committee, was morally entitled to this honor. He came to me one day and said, "Who is president of this conference?"

"Why you are, of course!" I replied, and that settled it. He

was made president of the conference, and conducted the sessions each day

To remain in the background during the preliminaries until the success of the conference was assured was one thing, but to have the names of all the workers who had made this success possible arbitrarily removed from the final program was to gain a strange view behind the scenes of international intrigue, a comedy often played on the Geneva stage. Sir Bernard himself ordered all the co-workers' names removed from the pages of the official program, including my own, as the final proofs were being sent to the press. Why was this done? Was it an anti-feminist group? Or was it the influence of something more subtle, something more pernicious, the order of some stage director behind the scenes who had given a peremptory order to the actors? These questions flashed through my mind. The latter proved to be the case, as I soon learned. Sir Bernard Mallet had pledged his word to the representatives of the Catholic countries—Italy, Belgium, Spain, and Catholic Germany—that birth control, contraception, and the conscious control of population would not even be mentioned. And this in the free atmosphere of a scientific population conference!

The younger men from England—Julian Huxley, A. F. Crew and Professor Carr Saunders—protested against this usurpation of authority, but some of our representatives from the United States fell under the spell of the underhand manoeuvring.

This experience gave me an idea of the pitfalls and stumbling blocks that impede the way even of men of science, when once they are dealing with this vital subject. Like statesmen and legislators, they are subject to the machinations of these sinister forces.

A permanent union to study population problems was indeed the outgrowth of this conference. It was organized at the conclusion of the conference. Dr. Raymond Pearl of Johns Hopkins was made president. During the past four years it issued bulletins and formed the nucleus of population re-

search in various countries. The first international meeting of the assembly was held in London in June of 1931.

An idea is, after all, only a seed. The seed perhaps of a great tree, but that tree can never become real unless we plant in a proper soil, unless we nurse, support, and protect our plant from frost—the frost especially of political intrigue. It is a test of endurance, of patience—oh, of endless patience, of forbearance. How many young crusaders I have witnessed come galloping to show me the way, panting with enthusiasm for the cause of the movement, the reformation of the world! They were, forsooth, coming to teach me how to put the movement on a sound practical or economic basis. They were going to get vast contributions, so that money would not cease to roll into our coffers!

Now, I am not criticizing these men and women for their motives. They were merely specimens, most of them, of venerated interests, which rapidly become discouraged at the first show of real obstacles. When they are confronted by difficulties that are not illusions but of thorny disagreeable surface they are too willing to retreat instead of fighting through. And so in the birth control movement they have come and gone. When they remain, they have found work, work, work—and little recognition and reward or gratitude. Those who desire personal honor or power or who measure their interest by the yardstick have gone. It is no place for anything but the measureless love of giving.

Looking back at people and events in the birth control movement in the past twenty years is like gazing down upon a varied landscape from some promontory. The years run through this landscape like a winding road through a valley. There, I tell myself, is the little garden I tried to cultivate. There in that field, I took such care to plant the seeds of an idea. There they fell on barren ground. But over here, on the other side, in that little patch, they are growing, growing into fruitbearing trees.

At the conclusion of the Geneva conference, after preparing the Proceedings for the publisher, I hastened to Berlin with

the purpose of forming a birth control committee which would aim for the establishment of clinics in the German capital. The situation in post war Germany was, and still is, a peculiar one. For one year, the statistics of Old Berlin indicated that out of forty four thousand known pregnancies twenty three thousand were terminated by abortion. And this was despite the fact that contraceptive devices could be purchased in every apothecary shop. At the same time, abortion remained a statutory offense, and the Association of German Medical Women had conducted a campaign against this statute. The injustice in the law was that it was the woman who was punished with imprisonment for abortion. Thus it was essentially a woman's fight, opposed by the Roman Catholics, the Nationalists, the reactionaries, and those men, like Professor Grotjahn, who cover the bitter pill of imperialistic ambition with a sugarcoating of patriotism. These patriots look at the world in terms of numerical greatness, and look upon Germany's women as mere machines in the cradle competition of human production.

This situation was brought home to me with striking emphasis when I spoke before the meeting of the Women's Medical Association in one of the rooms of the Town Hall of Charlottenburg, Berlin. My arrival had been announced in an excellent interview published by the *Berliner Tageblatt* in an article entitled Fewer—but Healthier—Children, so that this meeting was attended not only by women physicians but by men as well—economists, lawyers, hygienists and professors. Dr. Durant Weber, a woman physician, interpreted for me. I sought to show the evolution of birth control from infanticide, through abortion, to modern methods of scientific and harmless prevention. It was Professor Grotjahn who sought to present the picture of Germany's future greatness in terms of numerical surplus population, and to reduce women to the function of mere breeders.

A number of women sought to get the floor to denounce this statistical pedant. An energetic woman physician, Dr. Ruben Wolf, answered him with devastating precision. She

gave figure for figure, fact for fact, each based upon her experience in Berlin. At that meeting but one man, and he a physician from India, dared to defend birth control. The meeting took a decidedly feminist character, in view of this traditional opposition on the part of these spokesmen of imperialistic ideals.

Two evenings later a group of women physicians gathered at my hotel, and the initial steps were taken toward the information of the *Beratungstelle für Geburtenregelung* or Birth Control Clinic, which was opened the following May in Neukoeln, one of the most densely crowded working class districts of Berlin. For the first time the word *Geburtenregelung* (Birth Control) was applied to such a clinic in Germany. Frau Dr. Helene Stoecker, one of our pioneers, had indeed been instrumental in the establishment of Marriage Advice Bureaus founded and directed by the *Bund für Mutterschutz* but none had sought to maintain a research bureau enabling the direction to keep a scientific record of each patient and thus to share in the standardization of methods and practice. Frau Dr. Ruben Wolf has been most energetic and enthusiastic in carrying on the work among the working class, and Dr. Hodann includes birth control in all his lectures to workers.

Since that time, many other similar clinics have been established and they are directed under the supervision of the government.

My coming to Berlin had been prepared by my old friend, Agnes Smedley, thanks to whose energy I was brought into immediate contact with the outstanding women of Germany, pioneers like Dr. Hermione Edenhuiszen, Frau Adele Schreiber, former member of the Reichstag who had translated my book, Dr. Helene Lange, mother of the woman's movement, and that graphic artist of the lower depths of Berlin misery, Kathe Kollwitz, who generously consented to do a drawing for my book, *Motherhood in Bondage*, which was published a few years later. Frau Stutzin, whose husband is one of the leading medical men in Berlin, is now organizing the various

groups into a central united National Birth Control Research Association

I returned to Switzerland in an effort to regain my lost energies, my strength being so depleted that a nervous break down was imminent. My plans had been made to go to India after the close of the Geneva conference. The arrangements of the papers and discussions and the preparation of them for the publisher (Edwin Arnold & Company, London) was a colossal task. By the time they were finished, I was utterly unfit for a journey to India, and taking Dr Fritz Schweitzer's advice I went to St Moritz for a two months period of recuperation.

I shall always deeply regret that I was not able to make a visit to India. In that vast empire with its teeming millions there is a crying need for a strong birth control movement. It had indeed been inaugurated in Bombay, Calcutta, and other centers, and staunch adherents like Professor R. D. Karve, N. S. Phadke and others, were doing their utmost against tremendous odds. Several of my pamphlets and books had been translated into Hindustani, and birth control societies had been organized by young nationalists.

Curiously enough, opposition to birth control came from an unexpected source. About 1925 Mahatma Gandhi attacked modern contraceptives by proclaiming that the only method of birth control—apparently the Mahatma is not opposed to it *per se*—should be self control. There is an old Sanskrit proverb to the effect that even saints make mistakes. The most forward looking of Indian publications deplored the Mahatma's stand as one of his mistakes. One of them called Gandhi's attention to the fact that our country is teeming with mannikins having weak bodies and sunken eyes, born of mothers who are almost every year passing through the dangers of annual conceptions and confinements, and in the interest of the nation we must put a stop to this human waste of life.

Far more representative of a profounder insight is Rabin

dranath Tagore, who wrote to me at the very time Mr Gandhi uttered his unfavorable pronouncement

Santiniketan,
September 30, 1925

Dear Margaret Sanger

I am of opinion that the Birth Control movement is a great movement not only because it will save women from enforced and undesirable maternity, but because it will help the cause of peace by lessening the number of surplus population of a country, scrambling for food and space outside its own rightful limits. In a huger stricken country like India it is a cruel crime thoughtlessly to bring more children to existence than could properly be taken care of, causing endless suffering to them and imposing a degrading condition upon the whole family. It is evident that the utter helplessness of a growing poverty very rarely acts as a check controlling the burden of over population. It proves that in this case nature's urging gets the better of the severe warning that comes from the providence of civilized social life. Therefore, I believe, that to wait till the moral sense of man becomes a great deal more powerful than it is now and till then to allow countless generations of children to suffer privations and untimely death for no fault of their own is a great social injustice which should not be tolerated. I feel grateful for the cause you have made your own and for which you have suffered.

I am eagerly waiting for the literature that has been sent to me according to your letter, and I have asked our Secretary to send you our *Visabharati Journal* in exchange for your *Birth Control Review*.

Sincerely yours,

RABINDRANATH TAGORE

The younger representatives of India, keenly conscious that

the tide of time can never turn backward, will eventually turn sharply from this attitude of Gandhi's

India's real awakening, from the eutenic and eugenic point of view, awaits the awakening of India's women. An all women's congress was recently held there. I hope that by the time the next one is convened I may be able to deliver in person my message to the women of India.