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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK LOVE—MARRIAGE—BIRTH CONTROL ***

LOVE—MARRIAGE— BIRTH CONTROL

Being a Speech delivered at the Church
Congress at Birmingham, October, 1921:

WITH A FOREWORD

BY
LORD DAWSON OF PENN



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FOREWORD

AT the Church Congress held this autumn at Birmingham I was honoured by an invitation to speak on "Sexual Relationships."

The subject-matter of that speech has aroused widespread interest and some controversy. It is

being published in response to numerous requests and because most of the reports, being of necessity condensed, inadequately and even in some instances incorrectly set forth the views I endeavoured to champion; for any speech on a subject so difficult to handle needs to be read in its entirety if misapprehensions are to be avoided.

And first, may I thank numerous correspondents; and those in disagreement equally with those in agreement with me. One and all they bear testimony, if indeed such were needed, to how widespread and responsible is the interest on this question, and therefore to the wisdom of its full consideration. Amongst the letters are intimate human documents which pathetically disclose, as does professional experience, how frequently happiness is marred by ignorance of either the principles or the methods which should condition the true conception of sexual relationships. [6]

I elected to deal with these relationships in their healthy rather than their morbid aspects, because the study of health is a sure way to lessen disease. Mere denunciations of evil serve but small purpose. The aim of statesmanship is rather to seek out causes and ponder over remedies, and prominent among remedies is surely the study of the significance and purport of sex love in a well-ordered and Christian community and provision for its healthy outlet. To this the first part of my speech was devoted. The view there upheld has brought forth a large measure of agreement and no reasoned disagreement.

The second part of my speech dealing with birth control (or what in strict accuracy should be called conception control) has aroused more controversy, but I venture to think that some, at least, of the criticism directed against my argument will disappear with a perusal of this full text of my speech. Therein will be found condemnation of infertile marriages and a strong plea that children are essential to the health and happiness of man and woman, are necessary to each other and of vital importance to the nation.

The difference between my critics and myself is not as to the vital necessity of the family following marriage, but rather this—they would like to see the large families prevalent fifty years ago restored (and where means and circumstances are favourable, such large families may be the source of much happiness); whereas under present-day conditions I should regard them as seldom attainable and desirable, and would favour smaller families of children born at predetermined intervals. [7]

A married couple who have produced four children in twenty years cannot be said to have ignored the precept “be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth” because they have so selected the times for the conceptions of their children as to enable them to give those children a better upbringing rather than have selfishly left the sequence of their offspring to blind chance.

The argument that the nation should foster large families in order more quickly to people the untenanted portions of the Empire, and so add to the strength and wealth of the British Dominions, requires serious attention, not in isolation, but in conjunction with other considerations, and calls forth varying opinions from economists.

On the other hand, emigration into *foreign* lands would seem to be a source of weakness to a nation. The feeding, clothing and educating of a young Briton cost the nation a definite sum of money, say, £400; if at the age of twenty, when he is ready to produce, that young Briton emigrates to a foreign state, he is a definite loss to the country of his birth and the country of his adoption is the gainer. [8]

From another standpoint the criticism is made that I have not urged the paramount necessity of diminishing the population of these islands. With the economic soundness of this view others are better fitted to deal, but no economic considerations would outweigh the importance of child life inspiring the homes of the land, and if the number and sequence of children can be regulated by the parents’ circumstances, these homes will increase in number, will start when parents are younger and confer greater benefits alike on the family and the State. If need be, the State could grant a progressive rebate of taxation, and educational facilities for each of three children born after the second and where the father is twenty-five years of age or upwards.

It is held by some that artificial birth control is contrary to Christian morals. This is the view firmly held by the Roman Catholic Church, and since the governance of the Roman communion is based on “authority,” its decisions are binding on its members and command our respect. But pronouncements of Protestant communions do not owe their force to “authority,” but to the conviction they carry in the minds and consciences of their people, and no clear scriptural sanction for the condemnation of birth control has been given, nor does the report of the Lambeth Conference vouchsafe any reasons why it is physically and morally harmful. [9]

A distinguished prelate of our Church has characterised the views herein set forth as “very unguarded.”^[1] If by that expression he means “careless,” he cannot have done me the honour of reading my speech, which, whatever its demerits, bears ample evidence of carefully considered thought and expression. If by “unguarded” he means “outspoken,” I will plead justification. For is it not time that a question which deeply concerns not only the thought, but the practice of the thinking portions of communities should be fully considered and its strength and its weakness disclosed by full discussion? The world looks to its leaders for reasoned guidance, not for assertion which may be but the husk of a thought that has gone. What is wanted is reasoned consideration, not unreasoned condemnation. For churchmen and statesmen alike, opportunism helps in situations which are small, but never in those which are large; there clarity of principle

alone stands forth as a beacon to light the path.

[1] Diocesan Conference at York.

The fear that discussion of this vital problem will endanger morality surely loses sight of the fact of knowledge being so fundamental to our well-being, that incidental dangers encountered along its path must not deter us from its continued pursuit. [10]

Moreover, it will be noticed that I have discriminated between the principle of birth control and the methods of its application, the latter being preferably determined by the advice of the family doctor rather than by the perusal of books in general circulation.

The attitude of mind of the Church towards the problems of sexual relationships is part of a larger question, viz., the ever-widening gap between the formal teaching of the Church and the actual belief of the present generation, including many who by baptism and early training belong to her fold.

This gap between authority and actuality of belief imposes a strain on intellectual integrity and weakens the foundations of a real allegiance. For those of us who are of mature years the gap is bridged by the tender associations of our childhood and the memory of parents, for whom no such gap existed, and whose faith and character have left indelible impressions on our lives. But for the youth of to-day no such bridge exists. The War has caused a hiatus and thought has broken with tradition. Thus, youth is no longer willing to accept forms and formulæ only on account of their age. So it has set out on a voyage of inquiry, and finding some things which are doubtful and others which are insufficient, is searching for forms of expression more in harmony with the realities of life and knowledge. Although becoming estranged in thought from the Church, it is possessed of deep religious feeling and, firm on the rock foundation of faith, is trying to build a superstructure more in accord with the progress of revelation, not only in religion, but in science, and the needs of the world in which it moves and has its being. [11]

Far be it, that I should write thee sin or blame,
Or think thee unbefitting holiest place,
Perpetual fountain of domestic sweets,
Whose bed is undefiled and chaste pronounced,
Present, or past, as saints and patriarchs used.
Here Love his golden shafts employs, here lights
His constant lamp, and waves his purple wings,
Reigns here and revels; not in the bought smile
Of harlots, loveless, joyless, unendeared,
Casual fruition; nor in court-amours,
Mixed dance, or wanton mask, or midnight ball,
Or serenate, which the starved lover sings
To his proud fair, best quitted with disdain.
These, lulled by nightingales, embracing slept,
And on their naked limbs the flowery roof
Showered roses, which the morn repaired.

[12]

Paradise Lost,
Book IV.

LOVE—MARRIAGE—BIRTH CONTROL

[13]

MAY I make certain preliminary observations? Painters and poets depict Love to us in golden hues and arouse in us happy and sympathetic, and, I trust, reminiscent response, helping us to realise that life without the love of man and woman would be like the world without sunshine.

Though, therefore, the social student in his approach to the subject is not helped by the beauties of colour and song, it behoves him to avoid undue solemnity, and still more an air of portentous foreboding.

In each age customs have been deplored as heralds of evil, but the evils have seldom materialised.

One of the difficulties of this subject is that those who are called upon to give counsel are apt to forget the strength of the forces to be dealt with, for it is during youth especially that sex attractions are so powerful, and, may I add, so delightful. Middle-aged people may be divided into three classes.

Those who are still young.

Those who have forgotten they were young.

Those who were never young.

And it is with the first class before my eyes that I am privileged to address this audience.

I will confine my attention to the sexual relationships between unrelated adult people in youth and prime.

It is common ground that sex love between such people should be the physical expression of a lasting affection, and be so intimately blended with the feelings of helpfulness, sympathy, and intimate friendship as to form a union of body, mind and spirit. It further should be associated with the love of and desire for children.

This complex is best secured by the institution of marriage.

All its constituent features, except two, are vividly realised in intimate friendship, and above all, in that unique bond between mother and son which with some of us is the most wonderful thing in our lives.

Its two exclusively distinctive features are: *sex love* and *child love*.

These are the real problems before us to-day, particularly the former, and if in these remarks I seem to concentrate on the problems of sex love, be it understood I do so from a desire to save the time of the meeting and not because I think sex love should reign alone in unbalanced supremacy.

And by sex love I mean that love which involves intercourse or the desire for such.

It is necessary to my argument to emphasise that sex love is one of the clamant dominating forces of the world. Not only does history show the destinies of nations and dynasties determined by its sway—but here in our every-day life we see its influence, direct or indirect, forceful and ubiquitous beyond aught else.

AN IMPERIOUS INSTINCT.

Any statesmanlike review, therefore, will recognise that here we have an instinct—so fundamental, so imperious—that its influence is a fact which has to be accepted: suppress it you cannot. You may guide it into healthy channels—but an outlet it will have, and if that outlet is inadequate or unduly obstructed, irregular channels will be forced.

We uphold the control of sex love outside marriage by the individual—and that we are right in so doing is incontestable. But let us realise that in practice self-control has a breaking point, and that if in any community marriage is difficult or late of attainment, an increase of irregular unions will inevitably result.

That the Church recognises this is shown by the statement that marriage was instituted to prevent sin. In considering the problem of illicit intercourse and its attendant evils the social conditions that make for a wholesome life are of more efficiency than Acts of Parliament to suppress vice.

My desire, however, on this occasion is rather to consider sex love in relation to marriage. The first point I wish to make is that people need more knowledge of the scientific bearings of sex relations and more clearly defined guidance of their rightful purport and practice. They are imperfectly provided with both. We talk about instructing the young when we are neither clear nor agreed amongst ourselves, and the young are endangered as much by crudity as by absence of instruction.

All are agreed that union of body should be in association with union of mind and soul; all are agreed that the rearing of children is a pre-eminent purpose. But what purport is there beyond these? Here there is a lack of precision.

THE CHURCH AND MARRIAGE.

What does the Church service say? It says "Marriage was ordained for a remedy against sin, and to avoid fornication; that such persons as have not the gift of continency might marry and keep themselves undefiled members of Christ's body."

Now this is a very negative blessing. It implies that where unfortunately people cannot be continent that marriage gives the best way out—enables them to get relief within the pale of virtue. This attitude affords to sex love no positive purport or merit of its own, and is in striking conflict with the facts of life through the ages—facts which carry social approval.

The recent pronouncement of the Church as set forth in Resolution 68 of the Lambeth Conference seems to imply condemnation of sex love as such, and to imply sanction of sex love *only* as a means to an end—namely, procreation, though it must be admitted it lacks that clearness of direction which in so vital a matter one would have expected. It almost reminds me of one of those diplomatic formulæ which is not intended to be too clear. Allow me to quote from it:—

"In opposition to the teaching which under the name of science and religion encourages married people in the deliberate cultivation of sexual union as an end in itself, we steadfastly uphold what must always be regarded as the governing consideration of Christian marriage. One is the primary purpose for which marriage exists—namely, the continuation of the race through the gift and heritage of children; the other is the paramount importance in married life of

deliberate and thoughtful self-control.”

THE FACTS OF LIFE.

Now the plain meaning of this statement is that sexual union should take place for the sole purpose of procreation, that sexual union as *an* end in itself—not, mind you, *the* only end—(there we should all agree), but sexual union as *an* end in itself is to be condemned.

That means that sexual intercourse should rightly take place *only* for the purpose of procreation.

Now the large majority of conceptions take place immediately after and before the monthly period.

Quite a large family could easily result from quite a few sexual unions. For the rest the couple should be celibate. Any intercourse not having procreation as its intention is “sexual union as an end in itself,” and therefore by inference condemned by the Lambeth Conference.

Think of the facts of life. Let us recall our own love—our marriage, our honeymoon. Has not sexual union over and over again been the physical expression of our love without thought or intention of procreation? Have we all been wrong? Or is it that the Church lacks that vital contact with the realities of life which accounts for the gulf between her and the people? [18]

The love envisaged by the Lambeth Conference is an invertebrate joyless thing—not worth the having. Fortunately it is in contrast to the real thing as practised by clergy and laity.

Fancy an ardent lover (and what respect have you for a lover who is not ardent)—the type you would like your daughter to marry—virile, ambitious, chivalrous—a man who means to work hard and love hard. Fancy putting before these lovers—eager and expectant of the joys before them—the Lambeth picture of marriage. Do you expect to gain their confidence?

They ask for bread; you give them a stone.

ALLEGIANCE OF THE YOUNG.

Authority, and I include under authority the Churches, will never gain the allegiance of the young unless their attitude is more frank, more courageous, and more in accordance with realities.

And to tell you the truth, I am not sure that too much prudent self-restraint suits love and its purport. Romance and deliberate self-control do not, to my mind, rhyme very well together. A touch of madness to begin with does no harm. Heaven knows life sobers it soon enough. If you don't start life with a head of steam you won't get far. [19]

Sex love has, apart from parenthood, a purport of its own. It is something to prize and to cherish for its own sake. It is an essential part of health and happiness in marriage. And now, if you will allow me, I will carry this argument a step further.

If sexual union is a gift of God it is worth learning how to use it. Within its own sphere it should be cultivated so as to bring physical satisfaction to both, not merely to one. The attainment of mutual and reciprocal joy in their relations constitutes a firm bond between two people and makes for durability of their marriage tie.

Reciprocity in sex love is the physical counterpart of sympathy. More marriages fail from inadequate and clumsy sex love than from too much sex love.

PASSION A WORTHY POSSESSION.

The lack of proper understanding is in no small measure responsible for the unfulfilment of (connubial) happiness, and every degree of discontent and unhappiness may from this cause occur, leading to rupture of the marriage bond itself. How often do medical men have to deal with these difficulties, and how fortunate if such difficulties are disclosed early enough in married life to be rectified. Otherwise how tragic may be their consequences, and many a case in the Divorce Court has thus had its origin. [20]

To the foregoing contentions it might be objected you are encouraging passion. My reply would be, passion is a worthy possession; most men, who are any good, are capable of passion.

You all enjoy ardent and passionate love in art and literature. Why not give it a place in real life?

Why some people look askance at passion is because they are confusing it with sensuality. Sex love without passion is a poor, lifeless thing. Sensuality, on the other hand, is on a level with gluttony—a physical excess—detached from sentiment, chivalry, or tenderness.

It is just as important to give sex love its place as to avoid its over emphasis. Its real and effective restraints are those imposed by a loving and sympathetic companionship, by the privileges of parenthood, the exacting claims of career and that civic sense which prompts men to do social service.

Now that the revision of the Prayer Book is receiving consideration, I should like to suggest, with great respect, that an addition be made to the objects of marriage in the Marriage Service, in these terms: "The complete realisation of the love of this man and this woman, the one for the other."

BIRTH CONTROL.

And now, if you will permit me, I will pass on to consider the all-important question of Birth Control.

First, I will put forward with confidence the view that birth control is here to stay. It is an established fact, and for good or evil has to be accepted. Although the extent of its application can be and is being modified, no denunciations will abolish it. [21]

Despite the influence and condemnations of the Church, it has been practised in France for well over half a century, and in Belgium and other Catholic countries is extending. And if the Roman Catholic Church, with its compact organisation, its power of authority, and its discipline, cannot check this procedure, is it likely that Protestant Churches will be able to do so?—for Protestant religions depend for their strength on the conviction and esteem they establish in the heads and hearts of their people.

The reasons which lead parents to limit their offspring are sometimes selfish, but more often honourable and cogent. The desire to marry and to rear children well equipped for life's struggle, limited incomes, the cost of living, burdensome taxation, are forcible motives; and, further, amongst the educated classes there is the desire of women to take a part in life and their husband's careers, which is incompatible with oft-recurring pregnancies. Absence of birth control means late marriages, and these carry with them irregular unions and all the baneful consequences.

It is idle to decry illicit intercourse and interpose obstacles to marriage at one and the same time.

But, say many whose opinions are entitled to our respect: "Yes—birth control may be necessary, but the only birth control which is justifiable is voluntary abstention from connubial relations." Such abstention would be either ineffective or, if effective, impracticable and harmful to health and happiness. [22]

To limit the size of a family to, say, four children during a child-bearing period of 20-25 years, would be to impose on a married couple an amount of abstention which for long periods would almost be equivalent to celibacy, and when one remembers that owing to economic reasons the abstention would have to be most strict during the earlier years of married life when desires are strongest, I maintain a demand is being made which for the mass of people it is impossible to meet; that the endeavours to meet it would impose a strain hostile to health and happiness and carry with them grave dangers to morals.

Imagine a young married couple in love with each other—the parents, say, of one child, who feel they cannot afford another child for, say, three years—being expected to occupy the same room and to abstain for two years. The thing is preposterous. You might as well put water by the side of a man suffering from thirst and tell him not to drink it.

And further than that, if the efforts to abstain are seriously made the strain involved is harmful to the health and temper—if the efforts do not succeed the minds of husband and wife are troubled by doubts and anxieties which are damaging to their intimate relationships. And, moreover, if this harmful restraint succeeds in preventing conception there eventuates the inevitable prevalence of sex excitement followed by abortive and half-realised satisfaction, and the enhanced risk of the man or woman yielding to outside sex temptations. [23]

No—birth control by abstention is either ineffective, or, if effective, is pernicious.

THE HOME'S TRUE INTERESTS.

I will next consider Artificial Control. The forces in modern life which make for birth control are so strong that only convincing reasons will make people desist from it. It is said to be unnatural and intrinsically immoral. This word unnatural perplexes me. Civilisation involves the chaining of natural forces and their conversion to man's will and uses. Much of medicine and surgery consists of means to overcome nature.

When anæsthetics were first used at childbirth there was an outcry on the part of many worthy and religious people that their use under such circumstances was unnatural and wicked, because God meant woman to suffer the struggles and pains of childbirth. Now we all admit it is right to control the process of childbirth, and to save the mother as much pain as possible. It is no more unnatural to control conception by artificial means than to control childbirth by artificial means. Surely the whole question turns on whether these artificial means are for the good or harm of the individual and the community! Do all contraceptive measures damage the individual? The answer to that depends on the purpose for which they are used. If they are used to render unions childless or inadequately fruitful they are harmful. There are grounds for thinking that unrealisation of maternity favours sterility. [24]

Generally speaking, birth control before the first child is inadvisable. On the other hand, the justifiable use of birth control is to limit the number of children, and to spread out their arrival in such a way as to serve their true interests and those of their home.

That such applications of birth control produce no harm receives support from the study of the numbers and distribution of the children of the professional classes.

The advantage and disadvantage of this or that contraceptive is a technical matter for the doctors to determine.

Again, it has been stated that artificial control is harmful because it leads to excessive indulgence. Experience and evidence are against this being a fact.

Contraceptives by the time and circumstance of their application involve prudence and control. The proper and efficient restraints on undue sexual indulgence are to be found in mutual consideration, sympathy, and tenderness and the pressing claims of life's duties.

The sensualist who is not deterred from excess by these considerations will be completely careless whether his indulgence results in children or not—he is moved by his selfish impulses alone.

[25]

CAREFUL DISTINCTION.

Once more, careful distinction needs to be made between the use and the bad effects of the abuse of birth control. That its abuse produces harm I fully agree—harm to parents, to families, and to the nation. But abuse is not a just condemnation of legitimate use. Over-eating, over-drinking, over-smoking, over-sleeping, over-work do not carry condemnation of eating, drinking, smoking, sleeping, work.

But the evils of excessive birth control are very real. There is first the individual—every woman is better in body and mind for child bearing—the periodic completion of the maternal cycle brings out the best, preserves youth and maintains vital contact with life. Maternity gives to woman her most beautiful attributes. Fancy being mad enough to suppress it! If one watches the woman with one child and all maternity finished before thirty, and compare her at forty with the woman of the same age who has had, say, four children at proper intervals, who usually has the advantage in preservation of youth and beauty? Not the former.

On the other hand, it must be admitted that baby after baby every year or eighteen months wears and often exhausts a woman's strength. The inference is that the use of birth control is good, its abuse bad.

Next, the children. Is it even necessary to refer to the failure of the single-child household? Poor little thing! Surrounded by over-anxious parents, spoilt, no children to play with, bored stiff by adults. And then, perhaps, illness, and it may be death—and when it is too late to produce another.

[26]

Of the many tragedies I met in the war none exceeded that attaching to the loss of only children. It often means the end of all things; nothing to live for—just blank despair.

THE WAY OF HAPPINESS.

The parents and the home both need children of varying ages. That is the way of happiness and enduring youth.

And lastly, the national aspect may be stated very briefly. If England is not to lose her place in the world her population must be maintained. Unless fathers and mothers produce an average of over three children that population will not be maintained.

If you say to a young husband and wife with their one or two children, "Do you like to contemplate that when you both leave life your country will, through your action, be worse off than when you entered life?" that is an appeal to patriotism, and likely to be a successful appeal.

There are signs of a public opinion forming which will condemn the selfishness of marriages without their proper heritage of children, but such public opinion will not be strengthened by an indiscriminate condemnation of birth control.

[27]

May I end my speech with an appeal that the Church approaches this question, in common with certain others, in the light of modern knowledge and the needs of a new world, and unhampered by traditions which have outworn their usefulness?

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