

The Foes of Our Own Household

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By
Theodore Roosevelt

AUTHOR OF "FEAR GOD AND TAKE YOUR
OWN PART," ETC.



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CHAPTER XII

BIRTH REFORM, FROM THE POSITIVE, NOT THE NEGATIVE, SIDE

REFORMS are excellent, but if there is nobody to reform their value becomes somewhat problematical. In order to make a man into a better citizen we must first have the man. In order that there shall be a "fuller and better expressed life for the average woman," that average woman must be in actual existence. And the first necessity in "bringing up the child aright" is to produce the child.

Stated in the abstract, these propositions are of bromidic triteness. But an astonishingly large number of persons, including a lamentably large number who call themselves social reformers, either are, or act as if they were, utterly blind to them when they try to deal with life in the concrete. This is true of every group of persons who treat Bernard Shaw seriously as a social reformer. It is true of every group of reformers who discuss the home and the school, but regard it as indelicate to lay stress on the fact that

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neither is worth discussing unless there are children in sufficient numbers to make the home and the school worth perpetuating. It is true of all blatant sham reformers who, in the name of a new morality, preach the old, old vice and self-indulgence which rotted out first the moral fiber and then even the external greatness of Greece and Rome. It is true of the possibly well-meaning but certainly silly persons who fail to see that we merely enunciate a perfectly plain mathematical truth when we say that the race will die out unless the average family contains at least three children, and therefore that less than this number always means that, whether because of their fault or their misfortune, the parents are bearing less than their share of the common burdens, and are rendering less than their due proportion of patriotic service to the nation.

There has recently been published a "Study of the Birth Rate in Harvard and Yale Graduates," by John C. Phillips, of Boston. It should be circulated as a tract among all those most foolish of all foolish people, the half-baked educated people who advocate a profoundly immoral attitude toward life in the name of "reform" through "birth control." These people see that in the "submerged tenth" of society, and even among all the very poor, excessive child-bearing is a grave evil which crushes the woman, turning her

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into a broken-spirited, overworked, slatternly drudge; and which therefore crushes the family also, making it difficult for the children, on the average, to rise above a very low level. They do not see that it is the directly reverse danger against which we have to guard as soon as we rise above the class of the very poor, of those whose livelihood is so precarious that they are always on the brink of the gulf of disaster. As soon as we get above this lowest class the real danger in American families, whether of mechanics, farmers, railroad workers, railroad presidents, deep-sea fishermen, bankers, teachers or lawyers, is not lest they have too many children, but lest they have too few. Yet it is precisely these people who are really influenced by the "birth control" propaganda. What this nation vitally needs is not the negative preaching of birth control to the submerged tenth, and the tenth immediately adjoining, but the positive preaching of birth encouragement to the eight-tenths who make up the capable, self-respecting American stock which we wish to see perpetuate itself.

Mr. Phillips studies the birth rate for the two colleges in question by decades from 1850 to 1890. The figures for both colleges are substantially similar, Yale making a trifle better showing. They prove conclusively that for over fifty years

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the men who have been graduated from Harvard and Yale have left behind them a number of sons inferior to their own number—that is, to the number of fathers—and that, therefore, this college stock, which in point of worthy achievement is certainly among the thoroughly good stocks of the country, is tending to die out; and they show that this tendency has hitherto been slightly accentuated with each decade.

For the decade ending in 1870, for example, the showing was a trifle better than in 1880; and in 1890 there was a further, although a slighter, drop. 1890 was taken as the last year, because the number of children born to graduates after they have been graduated for a quarter of a century is too few materially to affect the averages.

On the average, during the thirty years, the graduate who married did so after he had left college eight years. About 78 per cent. married, roughly four-fifths. But over 20 per cent. of the marriages were childless. This leaves only three-fifths of the men of the class who contracted fertile marriages, and who, therefore, if their stock were to progress, had to make good the shortcomings of their fellows. The average number of children per capita per married graduate was about 2.3, and shrank decade by decade. Taking the entire number of graduates the average number of children surviving was 1.55 per capita (of

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whom, of course, on the average half are daughters). This means roughly, that in these thirty classes of Harvard and Yale graduates, representing, of course, a high average of the energy, ambition and cultivation, and a reasonably high average of the wealth, of the land, every four fathers left behind them three sons. If this ratio continues it will mean that 140 years hence—a period as long as that which divides us from the Declaration of Independence—the average college graduates of to-day will be represented in their descendents by only three-tenths of their present number.

This would be bad enough if the disease were confined to college graduates. But, as Mr. Phillips shows in the brief summaries at the end of his article, it is merely representative of what is taking place among native-born Americans generally.

The most pitiable showing is made by the graduates of the women's colleges. So far, among the older classes of the older among these colleges, the average girl is represented in the next generation by only 0.86 of a child. This means, that for every five possible mothers there were two daughters. Do these colleges teach "domestic science," and if so, *what* is it that they teach? There is something radically wrong with the home training and the school training that pro-

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duce such results. To say this, is not in the least to join with the ignorant and foolish man who denounces higher education for woman; he is usually himself a striking illustration of the need of wiser education for men. But it most certainly is a recognition of the fact, not that there should be any abandonment of, nor indeed any failure to enlarge, the scheme of higher education for women, but that for women as for men this higher education should keep a firm grip on the true perspective of life, and should refuse to sacrifice the great essentials of existence to even the easiest and pleasantest non-essentials.

The trouble in our national life, however, is far more deep-seated than anything affecting only the most highly educated classes. The same drift is visible among our people generally; most so in the East, and in the cities and big towns of the West. In Massachusetts, for the twenty-five years ending in 1911, the deaths among the native-born population exceeded the births by 270,000, whereas during the same period the births in families with foreign-born parents exceeded the deaths by nearly 530,000. If this process continues the work of perfecting the boasted common school and college system for Massachusetts native Americans will prove about as useful as the labor of those worthy missionaries who on different occasions have translated the Bible

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into the tongues of savage races who thereupon died out.

In the West the native stock—and I use the term with elasticity to include all children of mothers and fathers who were born on this side of the water—is only just about holding its own. It is a little less than holding its own in the cities, a little more than doing so in the country districts. In the cities of Minneapolis and Cleveland, for example, such families average less than three children. In the country districts of Minnesota and Ohio they average about one child more a family, which in this case marks just the difference between increase and decrease. In the South the native white stock is still increasing, although with diminishing rapidity.

The figures given for the Harvard and Yale graduates show that, taking into account the number of children that die before growing up, the number of adults that do not marry and the number of marriages where for physical and natural reasons—that is, reasons presumably implying no moral blame in the parents—there are no children or only one or two children, it is necessary that the family physically able to produce children shall average over three or the race will slowly decrease in numbers. When the health conditions become such that child mortality is reduced still lower than at present, and when mar-

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riages become more universal and the having and rearing of a sufficient number of children is recognized for both man and woman as the highest duty and the greatest and most extraordinary pleasure of life, then an average family of three children may mean a slow increase. Under any circumstances an average of one or two children means rapid race suicide, and therefore profound moral delinquency in those wilfully responsible for it. But this is not all! At present whoever has only three children must be understood to represent a slight drag on the forward movement of the nation, a slight falling below the average necessary standard in the performance of the indispensable duty without which there will in the end be no nation; the duty, failure to perform which means that all talk of eugenics and social reform and moral uplift and self-development represents mere empty threshing of the air, as pointless as similar talk by a suicide.

What I have said does not represent preaching. It merely represents the application of certain mathematical truths to life. It is no more debatable than the statement that less than two and two cannot make four. Apparently some persons regard it as a satisfactory answer to point out that some worthless or hopelessly poverty-stricken family would benefit themselves and the country by having fewer children. I heartily

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agree to this, and will support any measures to make this agreement effective by limiting the production of the unfit, after we have first taken effective measures to promote the production of the fit. Doubtless there are communities which it would be to the interest of the world to have die out. But these are not the communities reached by the "birth-control" propagandists—even by that rather small proportion of these propagandists who are neither decadent nor immoral. I hold that the average American is a decent, self-respecting man, with large capacities for good service to himself, his country and the world if a right appeal can be made to him and the right response evoked. Therefore, I hold that it is not best that he and his kind should perish from the earth. The great problem of civilization is to secure a relative increase of the valuable as compared with the less valuable or noxious elements in the population. This problem cannot be met unless we give full consideration to the immense influence of heredity. There is far less danger of our forgetting the also very great influence of environment, which includes education. Except in a small number of cases, the state can exercise little active control against the perpetuation of the unfit. Therefore, the real and great service must be rendered by those who help put an aroused and effective public opinion on the side

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of the perpetuation of the stocks from which it is particularly important that the future citizenship of the nation should be drawn.

Really intelligent eugenists understand and insist on these facts. The *Journal of Heredity* for July, 1917, contains one article showing the evil which has come from permitting the unrestricted breeding of a feeble-minded, utterly shiftless and worthless family in Ohio; and another, and even more important article showing that the idea that, in a normal and healthy community, large families are an evil is false and dangerous in the highest degree. The writer says: "Large families in the slums may be considered undesirable; unregulated [excessive] child-bearing for any woman may be considered undesirable; but this [is untrue as to] large families separated from the influence of poverty. It is doubtless true that in the Hull House district, where many children have feeble and unintelligent parents and lack the necessities of life, a large family means weakness. But the reverse is true in normally sound stocks, in sections of population which have average intelligence, physique and prosperity." The writer shows that in such normal stocks the health of the mother is best, and the infant mortality lowest, in families with at least six children. The writer shows that in superior parts of the population large families are desirable from

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the point of view of the parents, the children and the world, alike; but that "in eugenically inferior parts of the population the smaller the family the better for all concerned." He shows that the birth-control extremists are dealing with pathological conditions—and indeed themselves represent a pathological condition.

At different times in different nations the needs and the duties differ widely. Professor Ross has shown that China has suffered immeasurably because of the reckless overbreeding of its people. France is now in hazard of her national existence because of exactly the opposite cause. A century ago France was as populous as Germany. Her soil is fertile, her natural advantages great. But France's population remained nearly stationary while Germany's population increased, until the two countries stand nearly as five to three. The increase in Germany's population was accompanied by such industrial and social development (having no relation whatever to such mere swarming of poverty-stricken incompetents as China and, formerly, Southern Italy have seen) as also to mean a marked increase in social and national efficiency. In consequence, all of France's heroic gallantry and self-devotion and her utmost self-sacrifice have been needed in order to enable her, with the help of potent allies, even to hold back a foe whom once she was able

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to meet single-handed. The United States need not follow the example of China in order to avoid the French shortcomings, and it can still avoid these shortcomings while profiting by the magnificent French example in other ways.

In instancing France I merely take what the best and most patriotic Frenchmen say. The French Academy in its Proceedings has throughout this war been carrying a series of studies on the dwindling birth-rate in France, and has shown that on the average the mother capable of having children must have over three or the race will slowly diminish; of course only one or two children means closely impending race suicide. As M. Hervé has recently said, the man who leaves behind him no children, or the father of only one son, must hereafter realize that he is not a patriot; that he is not doing his duty by his country. (I speak, of course, of the average, not the exception.) A French newspaper before me says: "In 1850 the population of France surpassed that of Germany. When this war broke out it had become inferior by 27 millions. It was this fact to which the war was really due. If the Germans had had before them 60 millions of French instead of 39 they would have hesitated long. The cause of the war was that we had not furnished to France enough children. . . . If the French birth-rate continues to diminish we

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shall some day face a new war of conquest waged against us. It is a question of life or death which confronts France. She must live! But in order to live she must face the implacable realities of existence. The national conscience should insist that our legislators put the matter of the repopulation of France in the first place." The lesson applies as much to the United States. If our birth-rate continues to diminish we shall by the end of this century be impotent in the face of powers like Germany, Russia or Japan; we shall have been passed by the great states of South America.

We are dealing with rules, not with exceptions. We are discussing the birth-rate in any given community, just as we discuss the ability of a community in time of war to provide soldiers for the nation's safety. In any small group of men it may happen that, for good and sufficient reasons, it is impossible for any of the members to go to war: two or three may be physically unfit, two or three may be too old or too young, and the remaining two or three may be performing civil duties of such vital consequence to the commonwealth that it would be wrong to send them to the Front. In such case no blame attaches to any individual, and high praise may attach to all. But if in a group of a thousand men more than a small minority are unwilling and unfit to

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go to war in the hour of the nation's need, then there is something radically wrong with them, spiritually or physically, and they stand in need of drastic treatment. So it is as regards marriage and children. In a small group there may be good and sufficient explanations why the individual men and women have remained unmarried; and the fact that those that marry have no children, or only one or two children, may be cause only for sincere and respectful sympathy. But if, in a community of a thousand men and a thousand women, a large proportion of them remain unmarried, and if of the marriages so many are sterile, or with only one or two children, that the population is decreasing, then there is something radically wrong with the people of that community as a whole. The trouble may be partly physical, partly due to the strange troubles which accompany an over-strained intensity of life. But even in this case the root trouble is probably moral; and in all probability the whole trouble is moral, and is due to a complex tissue of causation in which coldness, love of ease, striving after social position, fear of pain, dislike of hard work and sheer inability to get life values in their proper perspective all play a part.

The fundamental instincts are not only the basic but also the loftiest instincts in human na-

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ture. The qualities that make men and women eager lovers, faithful, duty-performing, hard-working husbands and wives, and wise and devoted fathers and mothers stand at the foundations of all possible social welfare, and also represent the loftiest heights of human happiness and usefulness. No other form of personal success and happiness or of individual service to the state compares with that which is represented by the love of the one man for the one woman, of their joint work as home-maker and home-keeper, and of their ability to bring up the children that are theirs.

Among human beings, as among all other living creatures, if the best specimens do not, and the poorer specimens do, propagate, the type will go down. If Americans of the old stock lead lives of celibate selfishness (whether profligate or merely frivolous or objectless, matters little), or if the married are afflicted by that base fear of living which, whether for the sake of themselves or of their children, forbids them to have more than one or two children, disaster awaits the nation. It is not well for a nation to import its art and its literature; but it is fatal for a nation to import its babies. And it is utterly futile to make believe that fussy activity for somebody else's babies atones for failure of personal parenthood. I shall never forget witnessing a reception

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given by the governor of a big state to a "Mothers' Meeting." The governor enthusiastically advised his audience to remember that it was their duty to have a sufficient number of healthy children so that the race should go forward and not backward; and then discovered that the "mothers" were such only in a highly figurative sense, the large majority being spinster school-teachers and many of the remainder zealous maiden ladies at the head of philanthropic associations. They were there to tell some one else how to do the vital work! Now, it was quite proper for them to be there, but they should have been there as distinctly subordinate to the mothers themselves.

The remedy? There are many remedies, all of them partial. The state can do something, as the state is now doing in France. Legislation must be for the average, for the common good. Therefore legislation should at once abandon the noxious sentimentality of thinking that in America at this time the "only son" is entitled to preferential consideration, either for the sake of himself or of his mother. The preference, as regards all obligations to the state, should be given to the family having the third and fourth children. In all public offices-in every grade the lowest salaries should be paid the man or woman with no children, or only one or two children, and a marked

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discrimination made in favor of the man or woman with a family of *over* three children. In taxation, the rate should be immensely heavier on the childless and on the families with one or two children, while an equally heavy discrimination should lie in favor of the family with *over* three children. This should apply to the income tax and inheritance tax, and as far as possible to other taxes. I speak, as usual, of the average, not the exception. Only the father and mother of over three children have done their full duty by the state; and the state should emphasize this fact. No reduction should be made in a man's taxes merely because he is married. But he should be exempted on an additional \$500 of income for each of his first two children, and on an additional \$1,000 of income for every subsequent child—for we wish to put especial emphasis on the vital need of having the third, and the fourth and the fifth children. The men and women with small or reasonable incomes are the ones who should be encouraged to have children; they do not represent a class which will be tempted by such exemption to thriftlessness or extravagances. I do not believe that there should be any income exemption whatever for the unmarried man or the childless married couple; let all the exemptions be for the married couples of moderate means who have children.

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An aroused and enlightened public opinion can do infinitely more. There must be a sterner sense of duty and a clearer vision of the perspectives among which duty must work. That standard of living is poor, whether for mechanic or bank president, which is based on ease, comfort, luxury and social ambition rather than on education, culture and wide ability to shift for oneself. The oldest duty of all is that owed by the fathers and mothers of Americans to care for the future of their country and the ideals of their race. The man and the woman must be partners in love, in mutual forbearance, in gallant facing of the future, in wise choice of duty among conflicting considerations. I would be the first to admit that no universal rule can be laid down, applicable to all people under all conditions. But let our people study, not only books on sociology, but also stories like Kathleen Norris's "Mother," Cornelia Comer's "Preliminaries," and Dorothy Canfield's "Hillsboro People." These books are wholesome reading for man and for woman—and they have the additional merit of being interesting.

The serious student can turn to one of the best books recently written by an American scientific man: "Heredity and Environment," by Prof. Edwin C. Conklin, of Princeton. Let him look at pages 434-435, 450-455, and 498-

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507. I wish these pages could be circulated as a teacher's leaflet in all our schools and universities, in all the editorial rooms of our magazines and newspapers—especially in those whose editors pose as reformers and advocate every form of quack remedy from pacifism to birth-control. Says Mr. Conklin (I condense): "The cause for alarm is the declining birth-rate in the best elements of a population, while it continues to increase among the poorer elements. The descendants of the Puritans and the Cavaliers, who have raised the cry for 'fewer and better children,' are already disappearing, and in a few centuries, at most, will have given place to more fertile races of mankind . . . if we had fewer luxuries we could have, and could afford to have, more children. . . . No eugenical reform can fail to take account of the fact that the decreasing birth-rate among intelligent people is a constant menace to the race. We need not 'fewer and better children,' but more children of the better sort and fewer of the worse variety. There is great enthusiasm to-day on the part of many childless reformers for negative eugenical measures. [They forget that] sterility is too easily acquired; what is not so easily brought about is the fertility of the better lines. . . . What Bernard Shaw regards as the greatest discovery of the nineteenth century, *viz.*, artificially limiting the size

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of families, may prove to be the greatest menace to the human race. . . . The chief motive for limiting the size of families is personal comfort and pleasure rather than the welfare of the race. It is more important for the welfare of the race that children with good inheritance [in mind, body and will] should be brought into the world than that parents should live easy lives and have no more children than they can conveniently rear amid all the comforts of a luxury-loving age. . . . Race preservation, not self-preservation, is the first law of nature. Among the higher organisms, the strongest of all the instincts are those connected with reproduction. The struggle to be free is part of a great evolutionary movement, but the freedom must be a sane one, which neither injures others nor eliminates posterity. [Any movement which] demands freedom from marriage and reproduction is suicidal. In every age and country where men, and especially women, have demanded freedom from the burdens of bearing and rearing children, as well as from other natural social obligations, the end has been degeneration and extinction . . . if we continue to put individual freedom and luxury and selfishness above social obligations, our race and civilization will also see the writing on the wall: Thou art weighed in the balance and art found wanting."

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In any discussion such as this, where it is necessary to deal in sweeping manner with great truths, the statements made must be accepted as referring to the general and the average conditions. It is not possible at every point to qualify them so as to allow for exceptions. In this case it is, in my judgment, vital to establish the principles above laid down as generally applicable, and to insist that no country is healthy, indeed that any country is sick nigh to death, where these principles are not in general lived up to. But, of course, there are exceptions. There are a few—a very few—good men and women who, when unmarried, can do such admirable work that the question of marriage is negligible so far as they are concerned. There are men and women who remain unmarried for good and sufficient reasons, even although they never do great work in the outside world. The imposition on any woman of excessive child-bearing is a brutal wrong; and of all human beings a husband should be most considerate of his wife. Then, among married couples who are childless or have only one or two children, there are plenty to whom this is a dreadful grief and who are morally in no way to blame. For these men and women I have the same respectful sympathy that I have for a gallant man, of soldier stock, who,

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because of physical trouble for which he is in no way responsible, is denied the chance to serve his country under arms when that country's need is sore. There is no more fearless and danger-defying heroism than that shown by some women of the true heroic type, in walking through the valley of the shadow to bring into life the babies they love; and there is no punishment too heavy for the man who does not revere and serve such a woman as he reveres and serves nothing else that is human. And it may be his highest duty if the danger is too great to see that she does not face it. I know one girl who has just for the second time eagerly faced motherhood; and to bring the second baby to join her first she had to show a splendid courage which (and I speak accurately) ranges her beside any of the men who in their ragged blue and buff and their gaping shoes followed Washington, or any gaunt Confederate who charged with Pickett, or any of the sailormen who held the sinking launch steady while Cushing torpedoed the *Albemarle*; which ranges her beside her husband and brothers who have crossed the sea to face the German and Turkish armies.

It would be wicked, without due thought, to expose woman or man, girl or young man, to

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the possible stroke of fate; but we revere them all alike, precisely because they face the stroke of fate, high-hearted, if the need warrants it. They only who are not afraid to die are fit to live!