

for her children's well-being would be still all-absorbing, at least during the first four years of each one's growth. Students of child psychology are insistent that the pre-school period is the most important in the life of the individual and requires the most skilful attention. Natural affection is not enough; it must be wedded to care for the child's mind. Now, willy-nilly, modern life itself takes such toll of nervous energy that there are few educated women to-day who go through all the child-bearing period and have sufficient nerve force to welcome each child that may 'come along' and rear it happily. Yet without adequate nervous energy in the mother what family can develop into healthy and well-balanced useful citizens? It necessarily follows that the output of children will be limited if the parents are to do their part adequately. Quantity, the mass production of the past, must give way to quality. That involves birth-control. How is it to be achieved?"

Without necessarily assenting to the sentiments expressed in the above quotation, the Committee considers that such opinions cannot but demand thoughtful consideration. Dread of large families or of close-interval pregnancies under modern conditions is undoubtedly a common reason for attempting to limit the family.

But having made all allowances for the more difficult circumstances of modern times, the more thoughtful consideration of some husbands for their wives and of some parents for their children, and a legitimate intention to maintain a higher standard of living, it seems clear that amongst a considerable section of the community the demand for the limitation of families has passed beyond these motives into regions of thoughtlessness and selfishness.

Furthermore, an attitude of pitying superiority towards the woman with many children appears to be a current fashion. Many witnesses expressed the opinion that a young and sensitive mother was frequently deterred from a further pregnancy, for which she would in other circumstances be quite prepared, or tempted to seek abortion, because of the fear of ridicule by current public opinion.

Still other women, it has been explained, are influenced by comparisons. Seeing their neighbours leading less burdensome and more pleasure-full lives, they decide to follow suit.

The modern desire for pleasure and freedom from responsibility has led many to lose sight of the ideal of the family as a service to the State and the unit of social life.

Unwillingness on the part of the wife to give up remunerative work is a factor that operates in certain cases; this may be due to the position of the wife as the support of an invalid husband and family, but in other cases the reason is obviously selfish.

While dealing with this question of social outlook, it will not be out of place to refer to an aspect which, though mentioned by only a few witnesses, is known to all social workers as a factor of increasing importance. This is the fear of war. It may take the form of (a) conscious visualization of the horrors of war, or (b) subconscious fear evidenced by excessive anxiety regarding the future. In either case it acts as a powerful deterrent from child-bearing, although it is doubtful whether those who are influenced by this fear would resort to abortion where contraception had failed.

Speaking of social conditions, some witnesses, under the impression that the average age at marriage was rising, attribute the increasing abortion-rate among the unmarried partly to this cause.

The actual fact is that the age at marriage has decreased of late years, but is still probably higher than would be the case if economic conditions were more favourable.

It is clear that, whether the motives be worthy or selfish, women of all classes are demanding the right to decide how many children they will have. Methods which depend on self-control are ruled out as impracticable. Contraceptives are largely used, and, judging by the marked decline in the birth-rate in recent years, are in many cases successful. In other cases, however, they are not so, and there is then frequently a resort to abortion.

(5) IGNORANCE OF EFFECTIVE METHODS OF CONTRACEPTION AND OF THE DANGERS OF ABORTION.

The public as a whole is ignorant of the physiology of reproduction. This results in attempts being made to prevent conception by methods which are doomed to