UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY
OU_162516
UNIVERSAL
LIBRARY

OSMANIA UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Call No. 312.1942 / L84B Accession No. 2523

Author London Advertising Service Guild

Title Britain and her Birth Rate

This book should be returned on or before the date last marked below.

BRITAIN AND HER BIRTH-RATE

BRITAIN AND HER BIRTH-RATE

A Report prepared
by
MASS-OBSERVATION
for the
ADVERTISING SERVICE GUILD

The sixth of the 'CHANGE'
Wartime Surveys

LONDON
Published for the Advertising Service Guild by
JOHN MURRAY, 50 ALBEMARLE STREET, W.1

Questions relating to the report contained in this volume or any of the other reports issued under the generic title of 'Change' may be addressed to:

Advertising Service Guild,
10 *Hertford Street,*
*London, W.*1 *Grosvenor* 3477

CHECKED 1955.

or to any of its members:

Basil Butler Co., Ltd.,
12 Hertford Street,
London, W.1.

C. R. Casson, Ltd.,
29 Hertford Street,
London, W.1.

Cecil D. Notley Advertising, Ltd.,
43 Hertford Street,
London, W.1.

Everetts Advertising, Ltd.,
10 Hertford Street,
London, W.1.

Stuart Advertising Agency, Ltd.,
Kingsway House, Kingsway,
London, W.C.2.

FOREWORD

HITHERTO these published surveys of the Advertising Service Guild have concentrated on the social, economic and industrial problems created by the war. If this work has been of any value we must modestly disclaim any credit for commercial disinterestedness. We have a vested interest in public opinion and attitudes. The man in the Forces, the mother in the home, the girl in the factory, are all interesting characters in the sociologist's history of the war. Today, part of the work of propaganda is to project them to themselves heroically. Tomorrow the same methods of propaganda will revert to its more prosaic task of regarding them as consumers again.

They will, of course, be different consumers from the civilian army which went into war in September 1939—different in habit and desire, different physically and mentally, different in age, alas different in numbers.

We have already in previous surveys to this tried to calculate the extent of these differences, and now we come to face the fact of declining numbers. It is the problem of the thinning and ageing population, and it is not a war problem, however lethal bombs or bullets may be; it is not a health problem, however deadly epidemics or plagues may be. Why are the quivers empty? Why is the stork reluctant? Why are (or were) babies unfashionable? Why are large families 'uneconomic'?

Practically every adult person in this country is more or less competent to discuss the population question as parents or potential parents. The freedom of the individual to have children or not is, in the vast majority of cases, an essential citizen liberty with which even tyrants or the totalitarian State can scarcely interfere.

Therefore when we commissioned our colleagues of Mass-Observation to collect and collate the facts of opinion and to place this material on to a background of history of social, industrial, medical and religious causes, we felt that the result would be a unique contribution to a subject of vital interest. Let the reader—specialist or general—now judge.

A. E. J.

SOME FACTS ON MASS-OBSERVATION

Mass-Observation is an independent, scientific, fact-finding body, organized by Tom Harrisson and H. D. Willcock from 21 Bloomsbury Street, London, W.C.1 (MUSeum 6811). It has a team of trained whole-time objective investigators and a nation-wide panel of voluntary informants.

For seven years it has documented the processes of social change, of political trend, of public and private opinion, in a series of books, bulletins, broadcasts and articles. It is concerned only:

(1) with ascertaining the facts as accurately as possible;

(2) with developing and improving the methods for ascertaining those facts;

(3) with disseminating the ascertained facts as widely as possible;

Mass-Observation does not believe that social science can effectively operate only at the academic level. Its job is to study real life; and the people it studies are people who can be interested immediately in the results, which often directly concern their everyday lives.

Since it began with a handful of people and without any money, Mass-Observation has become internationally known and recognized. Many political, social, commercial and official bodies have used it, in peace and war. The present report is the sixth in a series made on behalf of the Advertising Service Guild.

PREVIOUS CHANGE REPORTS

No. 1. *Interim Report on Reactions to Clothes Rationing.

No. 2. *An Enquiry into the Results of Home propaganda.

No. 3. People in Production—A Report on British War Production (John Murray, 10s. net).

No. 4. *People's Homes—A Report on Post-War Housing (John Murray, 10s. net).

No. 5. The Journey Home—A Report on Demobilisation. (John Murray, 6s. net).

* Out of print.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

		Page
	Preface	7
I.	What is Happening	16
II.	What May Happen	24
III.	Is it Important?	30
IV.	Contraception—Cause or Effect?	40
V.	Are Families Planned?	54
VI.	Marriage Bases	61
VII.	The Place of Children in Married Life	69
VIII.	Social Attitudes to Large Families	74
IX.	Unwanted Children	78
X.	The Size of the Family wanted	79
XI.	Spacing and Fecundity	86
XII.	Why So Few?	96
XIII.	The Unborn	105
XIV.	Ill-Health, Sub-health and Fear of Childbirth	110
XV.	Selfishness?	116
XVI.	Economic Paradox	119
XVII.	Housing	135
XVIII.	Household Helps	147
XIX.	Middle-class Routine—The Future Pattern?	153
XX.	Like My Mum	166
XXI.	Mothers' Faiths	180
XXII.	Eugenic Prospect	199
Summary		208
Appendix I.	The Questionnaire	232
„ II.	Factual Information	235
„ III.	The Check Investigations	242
Bibliography		245

NOTE

In this report the age and social class of women whose comments are quoted are given in brackets after the quotation. The three broad class groups used are:

B—Middle Class.

C—Artisan and skilled Working Class.

D—Unskilled Working Class.

Thus (42C) means a woman of the Artisan Class, 42 years old.

PREFACE

The birth-rate problem is the coming problem for Western Civilization. In England today we are on the edge of it. Unless the trends of half a century are not only arrested but reversed immediately, the population of this country will diminish. Unless people decide to have larger families it will go on diminishing until there is no one left. And unless people decide to have slightly larger families soon, those who are left later will have to change the size of their families considerably if the decline is to be arrested. The birth-rate problem cannot be shelved until the population has reached a convenient size—if anyone could decide on an optimum size—because if it were shelved till then, it might be quite impossible to prevent still further shrinkage. Like Alice, the parents of this country must bite the other side of the mushroom quickly or the mushroom will be too big to bite, and their chins will be bumping against their boots.

This survey is an attempt to find our why people are limiting their families so drastically, and to suggest means whereby they may be encouraged to have more children. The angle of approach is frankly partisan. Mass-Observation has lined up with those who do not want the English people to disappear. To those readers—and as an opinion research organization we know they will be many and intelligent—who welcome the decline in population, we would point out right here on page one, that this does not mean joining forces with those who want babies for cannon-fodder or for any specific purpose other than producing more babies. The plain and simple fact is that if eventually people do not decide to have more babies than they are having now, there will be no babies, no Englishmen or Englishwomen, for war or for peace.

The problem of a declining population is not confined to this country. It is with France already, and it will be with the countries of North-Western and Central Europe very soon. Even the Southern countries, which are still rapidly expanding, will eventually decline if present trends continue. It is a problem arising from a way of life, and most of the unsolved anxieties of our kind of civilization are involved in one way or another. When we set out to investigate the falling birth-rate we knew we could not provide the answer. You cannot investigate civilization in six months. We defined the field roughly as follows, and planned the work to provide as many pointers as possible rather than a few cut and dried and permanently established facts:

1. Contraception, the means whereby families may be limited simply according to the parents wishes, is here and is likely to stay. Birth-rates will increasingly be a direct reflexion of the number of children people want. The only point of determining the precise extent to which various methods of birth-control are used, and how

effective they are, would be in order to find out how much further the birth-rate would decline *if everything else remained the same.* Other factors will not remain the same, so all we need are some general indications.

2. The main object of the investigation is to find out why parents limit their families so strictly. The reasons of which they are conscious and are able to put into words may not be the most important ones. Factual checks and inter-relations of attitudes will be necessary.
3. Small families are today so much an accepted thing that we must be very wary of taking 'reasons' at their face value. The more remote a hypothetical course of action is from a person's day-to-day scheme of thought, the less likely are they to be able to give valid reasons for not pursuing it. Reasons need interpreting through behaviour and checking on it.
4. But the final problem is not the reasons for having small families, many of which are only too clear and few of which can be completely eliminated. *The final problem is why parents do not think it worth while overcoming the difficulties in order to have more children.*

In brief outline that is the layout of the main body of this report. We start with a short sketch of the history of the birth-rate. This is followed by a discussion of the possible consequences of a decline. The opinions of ordinary people about its importance are described in their relation to population policy. We then suggest, after an examination of the history of contraception, that birth-control cannot properly be held responsible for the declining birth-rate; the desire to limit families threw up a simple means, but we cannot assume that if this means were not available, other measures would not be adopted in its place. There follows a short discussion of the extent to which modern methods of contraception are known about and used today, and after that the rest of the report is devoted to a study of the number of children people want and have, why they want that number, and how they might be persuaded to want more. The progress of each section, and of the report in general, is from the superficial to the underlying motive. Generally speaking, it is only the superficial which can be demonstrated beyond reasonable doubt. In our interpretations we do not believe we have gone beyond the more pressing indications of the material. But only a personal and detailed study can prove it to those who are unconvinced. In this survey particularly, as in other surveys conducted by Mass-Observation methods, we are faced with the old problem of figures. Only the figures 'prove' things, and in our opinion the figures on their own are often exceedingly misleading here.

Among other things, the figures seem to prove a decrease in fecundity; they seem to prove the desirability of large family allowances in cash.

In the first case we know that they are lying—there may be a decrease in fecundity, but we cannot prove it, despite the figures. In the second case we believe that they are misleading. All through the survey we take the figures as a starting point, but frequently arrive at conclusions which they do not convey at all.

These conclusions have to be taken on trust as an honest attempt to get at the real meaning behind the words and to work out common factors and inter-relations which quantitative analysis cannot show. We give in an appendix to this report all the more important tables for anyone else to make anything else they like out of. There is no one and only valid interpretation, and all we have done is to try and build a coherent picture out of a mass of material bristling with apparent contradictions.

The Evidence

The main evidence on which this report is based is as follows:

1. About 1,000 interviews with married women between the ages of 20 and 45 in the streets and houses of London, in a factory, and in Gloucester. Of these, 787 are included in the tables of figures; the rest were made in five pilot-tests before finalising the questionnaire and give slightly different information. They were consulted as qualitative material but not included in the analysis.
2. The results of a series of questions relating to marriage, family planning, morality, attitudes to the decline in the birth-rate, etc., asked of Mass-Observation's National Panel of correspondents. These include detailed accounts by mothers and fathers—and some who refuse to be mothers or fathers—of the reasons behind their own decisions on how many children to have, and when to have them.
3. The postbag of the Radio Doctor, consisting of letters received as a result of talks in November 1943 and January 1944, on birth-rate problems. These were mainly letters from women describing their own reasons for restricting their families; some letters from fathers; and some letters generalizing about the reasons for the birth-rate decline from their own experience of others' problems.
4. A quantitative analysis of 500 letters to a birth-control clinic, made on lines suggested by Mass-Observation by a member of the staff. These letters give the reasons women express for wanting to use contraceptives.
5. Several observational studies of households with children.
6. Reports of meetings, discussion groups, etc., where problems of marriage, birth-rate, family-size, etc. were concerned.

7. Long informal conversations with women on their reasons for having a small family.

At a rough estimate about 2,500–3,000 actual and potential mothers and fathers altogether are implicated in one way or another. Various material already on Mass-Observation's files was also consulted.

The Interviews

Five main pilot investigations were made before deciding on the form of the questionnaire. The questionnaire in its final form is given in full in Appendix I. The object was to obtain as full a picture as possible of relevant facts and attitudes in each case. Some of the questions were not designed to provide quantitative information, but in order that we should know the background of individual cases. There is, for instance, no point in relating the size of women's families to whether or not they are in a job; because one of the reasons they are in a job is often that they have no children. Similarly, relating the type of dwelling in which the family lives to the size of their family, would have little meaning, because those with smaller families naturally tend to live in smaller places. Questions 4–7, on reasons for getting married and the unexpected advantages and disadvantages of married life, give quantitative information of limited value, but they, like the others mentioned, go to build up the individual case history. The difference between the women with Elementary and Secondary education in the proportion who say they married for love is interesting; but it is much more important to know, when considering an individual case, that the woman married in order to escape from her family than it is to have the very rough and unreliable indication of *how many* married for this reason which the quantitative results give.

Some of the questions are thus not discussed on their own at all in the text or are only touched on briefly. All the questions for which we consider the quantitative results relevant and meaningful are included in Appendix II. Question 2 is not discussed anywhere because the statistical results are misleading when checked on the actual case-histories, and replies are so indefinite that it is impossible to relate the intention of carrying on in a job after the war with intentions with regard to having a family.

Question 3 simply shows that the majority of married women are hoping for the best as far as their own personal future is concerned. We give the figures in the appendix, but the broad results indicate little more than the fact that most people are looking forward to the lifting of wartime restrictions, husbands coming home, etc. Individual replies, however, are often valuable in assessing the general mental outlook of the woman, and it was with this object that the question was piloted and retained in the final questionnaire.

Readers (and reviewers) should beware of taking the figures as

indicating literal facts. They indicate verbal attitudes, expressed to a stranger in the street or on the doorstep. If, for instance, one woman in eight says she was wrong in her reasons for getting married, this is no indication of the proportion of unhappy marriages. It only shows that the proportion of marriages which are so unsuccessful as to allow the wife to tell a stranger about it on first acquaintance. Similar qualifications apply all along.

The Size of the Sample

Mass-Observation is sometimes criticized for not taking large enough samples. In this survey the main interview sample is large enough to establish major differences between groups, and to suggest the probability of minor differences. We sometimes comment on differences which have a statistical probability of about one in twenty of being due to chance when the mass of qualitative material indicates that real differences do exist. It should be borne in mind that the interviews only form a part of the material available, and that rigid tests of statistical significance are not the only way of determining whether a result is in fact valid. All the figures are, however, presented for those who wish to reject conclusions which cannot be definitely substantiated by the interview statistics alone. (Appendix II.)

It would always be possible for Mass-Observation to treble or quadruple the size of sample without affecting time and costs by using cross-off questionnaires, part-time interviewers and tabulating machines. We should then have figures of indubitable veracity, and no means of interpreting them. In fact, of course, we invariably record verbatim replies, which takes at least four or five times as long per interview; which means employing skilled interviewers; analysis by hand instead of machine; saturation of the analyst and report-writer in millions of words instead of hundreds of figures. We use this costly and laborious method because we consider we get much nearer the real answer that way. But it necessarily means cutting down on quantity. We take interview samples which we consider large enough to give the level of approximation which is necessary for the purpose of the investigation. In the present case the question is: which is more important, to know to within 3–5% the number of times women say they might want more children if they had more money; or to have a more approximate indication of the number of times they say this plus 787 examples of the way they say it? In our opinion the 787 examples of how they say it are of much more practical value than an exactly accurate indication of how many say it.

Constitution of the Interview Sample

Investigations in which the size of family of the contact affects the results drastically are among the most difficult of all surveys requiring

the selection of a typical sample; and in wartime the difficulty is very greatly increased. Mothers of large families are more often at home than mothers of small families; they work less outside the home; they are busier.

If these were all the difficulties, they could have been overcome by making second and third calls at houses where the wife was out at the first call. Interview addresses would then have been compiled from street directories or some such source.

But family-size is related to geographical region of residence, not only internationally and nationally, but within the small community of town or borough. To get a typical sample of family sizes it would have been necessary to carry out a preliminary survey of the distribution of family-size in relation to age and education in each of the areas investigated. This would have amounted in itself to a full scale investigation.

Even this difficulty might have been overcome, at the cost of considerable expense and time, had it been possible to obtain access to a list detailing all the families and childless married couples in the district (which it was not). The sample could then have been stratified according to family-size in relation to the age of the mother.

However, even had we done this, the sample would not today have been representative except of the transitory wartime distribution of family-sizes in the district. Factors such as evacuation, the absence of many childless married women on war work or in the forces, the absence of others, with babies or without, who have followed their husbands to wartime addresses, would have made the sample only very approximately typical of normal trends in the district concerned.

In these circumstances we decided not to attempt to obtain a typical sample. Instead, the aim was to compare different groups of women with each other. The main groups selected for comparison were:

(*a*) Women married 5 years or less; women married 5–10 years; women married over 10 years.

(*b*) Women having less than three children; having three children or more.

(*c*) Women with secondary education; with elementary education.

The advantage of this procedure is that so long as absolute figures are not aimed at, it is sufficient that the different groups should be of comparable constitution. For example, it is not necessary that in each region women should be interviewed in exact proportion to the number of women having secondary and elementary education.

In order to obtain women of as many different types as possible, half the interviewing was done in the street and half by house-to-house methods. Interviews were not made at more than two houses in any one street, nor at houses in neighbouring streets, and were scattered

over the area. Street interviews were made only of people living in the area, and investigators were instructed that not more than one in ten of the women interviewed in the street should be accompanied by children under five years of age. In order not to bias the sample in favour of mothers of young children or of large families, they were instructed not to select the houses at which they called to interview by obvious external signs of children, such as prams outside the doors, toys, etc. By this means it was hoped to get a sample sufficiently typical for the purpose, of married women of child-bearing age of the type who could be found at home or in the street in daytime. Most of these were women who were not at work outside their own homes.

The main part of the investigation was carried out in London, in boroughs selected on the basis of their birth-rate at the 1931 census. Three high birth-rate boroughs were included, and three low birth-rate areas, with one intermediate one. The relative family-size by length of marriage of mother, both in this and the last generation, varied between the different districts surveyed as would have been expected from the birth-rates of the districts. However, the family-size of the mothers of the women interviewed appears to be in more accurate proportion to the birth-rate trend than that of the women themselves.

This was to be expected in a survey which included comparatively few women doing a job outside their home. Such women would tend to be those having no children, or very few. There would be more of these in low birth-rate than in high birth-rate areas, and so the difference between the two would be smoothed out in the present survey. It is likely also that differences between those with secondary and elementary education would have been greater in a typical sample. Throughout the present survey, the average number of children is rather higher than would be found in a typical sample.

These qualifications, however, do not on the whole apply to figures other than those relating to the number of children in the family. Attitudes which are determined by environment and education affect those with children and those without equally. Moreover, even if there were a difference in the way these two groups were affected, it is a good thing to eliminate the factor of war work, so that the effect of environment and education can be seen more clearly. The groups in the sample are not typical of the whole of their class or area, but they are more comparable to each other than typical groups would have been.

There was throughout a concentration on women married five years or less and married over ten years at the expense of the intermediate group. We saw that this was happening as the investigation progressed, but it did not seem a bad thing since it gave us the largest samples in the two groups likely to afford the greatest contrasts. We therefore made no attempt to check it. The reason for it is not clear.

As a check on the London results, investigations were also carried out at a factory engaged on light war work on the outskirts of London, and at a country town. When the investigation was planned it was intended only to examine these replies for qualitative differences, so far as regional and occupational factors were concerned, owing to the great difficulty of obtaining comparable samples under different conditions. It must, however, be admitted that this was a mistake. Comparable figures could have been obtained if only women married five years or less, having less than three children, and of elementary education had been interviewed in the check investigations. It would then have been possible to compare this group with the corresponding group in the London interviews, which was large. Even if this did not prove conclusively that any difference found affected all groups in the area, there would have been a strong probability of this being so. However an attempt was made to work out such group comparisons on the basis of the available data, and in some cases differences were sufficiently marked to be statistically reliable even for the small numbers involved. In the case of the country town, Gloucester, the sample was sufficiently comparable to London for some numerical comparisons to be made for the whole sample. The factory sample was, naturally, of a different constitution altogether. The results of these check investigations are discussed in Appendix III.

In all 787 married women not more than 45 years old were included in the interviews statistically analysed. The sample was divided as follows:

Area	*Gross Reproduction Rates in 1931**	*No. of Interviews*	*Length of Marriage*			*Children*		*Education*	
			Over 10 years	*5–10 years*	*5 years or less*	*Less than 3*	*3 or more*	*Secondary*	*Elementary*
Poplar	1·10	69	25	18	26	48	21	8	61
Bermondsey	1·09	95	45	17	33	68	27	6	89
Shoreditch	1·04	28	12	8	8	19	9	0	28
Hampstead	·43	73	23	23	27	62	11	36	37
Chelsea	·57	74	31	22	21	53	21	25	49
Marylebone	·45	74	28	19	27	57	17	33	41
Hammersmith	·86	79	31	20	28	67	12	24	55
A War Factory	—	97	13	16	68	96	1	16	81
Gloucester	·98	198	80	39	79	142	56	74	124
Total	—	787	288	182	317	612	175	222	565

*Taken from figures given by Enid Charles and Pearl Moskinsky in *Political Arithmetic*, Ed. Lancelot Hogben (Allen & Unwin, 1938).

Expressed as percentages, the following basic tables are obtained for the distribution of the sample:

REGIONS (OMITTING HAMMERSMITH)

	Total interviews	Married			Children		Education	
		Over 10 years	5–10 years	5 years or less	Less than 3	3 or more	Secondary	Elementary
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Low birth-rate London Areas ..	221	37	29	34	77	23	43	57
High birth-rate London Areas ..	192	43	22	35	70	30	7	93
A War Factory ..	97	13	17	70	99	1	16	84
Gloucester	198	40	20	40	72	28	37	63

OTHER GROUPINGS

	Married			Children		Education	
	Over 10 years	5–10 years	5 years or less	Less than 3	3 or more	Secondary	Elementary
Married:	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
More than 10 years ..	—	—	—	25	78	33	38
5–10 years ..	—	—	—	24	19	26	22
5 years or less	—	—	—	51	3	41	40
Children:							
Less than 3 ..	53	81	98	—	—	90	73
3 or more ..	47	19	2	—	—	10	27
Education:							
Secondary ..	26	32	28	33	13	—	—
Elementary ..	74	68	72	67	87	—	—
Number interviewed ..	288	182	317	612	175	222	565

These tables show that the distribution of length of marriage and education is sufficiently similar in the various groups for comparison to be possible, except in the case of the war-factory (inevitably) and, to a much lesser extent, Gloucester. The basis of comparison for these has already been described.

I. What is Happening

World Population

It is estimated that there are a little over 2,000,000,000 people in the world, of whom about a quarter live in Europe and a little over half live in Asia. Three hundred years ago there were only about a quarter of that number, nearly all of whom lived in Europe, Asia and Africa. The population of all parts of the world has increased, but not uniformly. Since 1650, for instance, the population of North America has increased by about 13,700%, that of Africa by only about 45%.

The increase in North America is almost entirely due to the influx of Europeans and Africans into a sparsely populated country. If it had not been for this migration, the populations of Europe and Africa would probably have been considerably higher, and there is no doubt that the work of the slave traders played a great part in limiting the increase in Africa.

Deaths

But the general increase in world population is due to the decreasing number of deaths per year which has taken place in the past three centuries. A population can increase either because more children are born, or because fewer people die. There is no reason to suppose that there was any great or lasting change in the birth-rate anywhere in the world until last century, when in certain parts, it began to fall. Before that time there were only four known ways of limiting the size of family—abstention, withdrawal, abortion and infanticide. All of these have been practised at various times and in various places, but with the exception of one or two countries, they were not practised on a large enough scale to disturb the birth-rate appreciably. No change took place in the extent to which these methods were used sufficient to make any great difference to world population.

But death-rates all over the world are known to have fallen. In Europe and America the cause was the improvement of medical knowledge, sanitary conditions, and general standards of food, clothing and housing. In other parts of the world, the chief cause seems to have been the improvement of internal order and security which enabled more people than before to live their life out in comparative peace. This was particularly true of countries which came under European control, for example India and Java. There an administration which has reduced the numbers killed in wars, revolutions and internal struggles has helped more than medical and sanitary improvements to reduce the death-rate.

Population Problem

It was a decrease in deaths not an increase in births which played the chief part in causing the number of men and women alive on earth at a given time to multiply. The decrease in deaths has carried on consistently till the present day, and looks like continuing for many years to come. But during the last century, in Europe and North America, people started having fewer children, and the Population Problem began.

The decline in the birth-rate started in France, soon after the Revolution. By the end of the nineteenth century most countries in Europe and North America had a falling birth-rate, and one which was falling much more rapidly than the death-rate. The situation which has suddenly come upon us today was there in embryo over half a century ago. But so long as the birth-rate exceeds the death-rate the number of people increases. The day-to-day problems of administration are the problems of an expanding population, and to look ahead to the time when people will be getting fewer may seem academic.

Today, in 1945, the problem is no longer remote. In the countries of north-western and central Europe the point has been reached, or will be reached in the next two decades, when more people will die in a year than there are babies born. Unless something entirely unpredictable happens immediately which will not only make people stop having fewer children—as they have been doing for half a century—but reverse the process and make them start having more children, a declining population is inevitable in this country, and will start almost immediately.

How the Problem Arose

In this country, the birth-rate began to fall about 1880 and has fallen ever since. There are various ways in which this might have come about:

(*a*) Fewer people might have been getting married.

(*b*) Women might have been getting married later in life and lived a longer proportion of their child-bearing years as spinsters.

(*c*) There might have been fewer women of marriageable age in the population.

(*d*) Families might have been becoming smaller although there were no fewer of them, and although women were not marrying earlier.

Less Marriage

Between 1880 and 1930 the proportion of women who married before they were fifty decreased by 2%. Over the same period the birth-rate declined by over 50%. Clearly less marriage is an unimportant factor.

Late Marriage

The average age at marriage has remained about 25 all through the period of the decline. Late marriage cannot be held responsible.

Proportion of Marriageable Age

Between 1871 and 1931 the proportion of the population who are women of child-bearing age increased from 255 to 280 per thousand of the population, an increase of 10%. This has tended to increase the number of children born, and has up to the present worked against the tendency for the birth-rate to decline.

Smaller Families

The decline in the birth-rate must therefore be put down to married couples having fewer children in their families, without any appreciable change in the marriage age of women, with a slight increase in the proportion of younger women available, without an appreciable decrease in the proportion of women who marry.

That is *how* the problem arose. It is, of course, no indication of *why* it arose, or why the decline continues. Why? is the subject of this book. But before discussing the reasons for the declining birth-rate we must be clear what is happening, and what is likely to happen in the future if the decline goes on.

What is Likely to Happen

The *crude birth-rate* represents the number of children born in a year per thousand of the population. So long as the sex and age composition of the population remains constant and marriages are contracted at the same average age with equal frequency, a comparison of crude birth-rates for various years would be meaningful.

But not all these factors are likely to be constant over a period. For instance, the proportion of women of child-bearing age who are between 35 and 45 years old increased by 27% between 1871 and 1931. Since women of this age are less likely to bear children than younger women, a direct comparison of the crude birth-rates of 1871 and 1931 would be misleading.

In order to eliminate the influence of the age of the female part of the population on the number of children born, more attention is paid nowadays to the *fertility rates* and *reproduction rates* than to the crude birth-rate.

The *Fertility Rate* represents simply the number of female children born each year per 1,000 women aged 15–45. The use of this rate eliminates any variations in the proportion of the population who are women of child-bearing age. Female children only are considered for a reason which will appear later.

It is necessary also to eliminate the effect of variations in the proportion of women of child-bearing age who are comparatively old. *Specific Fertility Rates* are used for this purpose. The specific fertility rate represents the number of female children born in that year per 1,000 women of a given age. Thus there is one specific fertility rate for women of 20, another for women of 25, and so on.

The *Gross Reproduction Rate* is obtained by adding all the specific fertility rates. Fertility rates and reproduction rates are expressed as the ratio of the number of girl babies born to the number of women who bear them. Each specific fertility rate can thus be taken as representing the chances a woman of a given age has of bearing a girl baby during the year. The gross reproduction rate represents the number of girls a woman can expect in the whole of her child-bearing period, provided she does not die before it is over.

To allow for the possibility of her dying before then, the *net reproduction rate* is used. The net reproduction rate is obtained by working out how many girl children could be expected by 1,000 girl babies born now, if the number who die at each age remains the same as it is now.

All these rates refer only to girl babies. The reason is quite simple. If the population is to replace itself, it must not only produce enough children to make up for the people who die, but it must produce enough mothers to continue the process in the next generation.

For example, if the average age of the population at a given time was low, the death-rate would also be low, because old people die more easily. A comparatively small number of births would make up for the people who died. But in thirty years time, the old people would all be dead, and the large number of young people would all have grown old. Consequently the death-rate would rise. Since only a small number of children had been born thirty years ago, however, there would only be a small number of women of child-bearing age, and these would not be able to bear enough children to make up for the large number of deaths. Consequently the population would decrease. *It is only when enough girl babies are born to ensure that the number of potential mothers is not reduced that the population is able to replace itself.*

The key to the situation is thus the net reproduction rate. If it falls below one, then the number of potential mothers being born is not large enough to keep the population going.

Up till about twenty years ago there were enough girl babies being born to replace the population. The effect of the fall was only to lessen the rate of increase. About twenty years ago the net reproduction rate fell below one, and from that time there have been insufficient potential mothers of the next generation for the population to replace itself without an increase in the average number of children each woman bears.

The decline resulting from this situation is due to make itself felt *now.*

The Future

The net reproduction rate fell steadily from 1.57 in 1880–2, to ·80 in 1930–32. But even this does not give a full picture of the decline. The rate is worked out by assuming that the specific fertility rates which hold now still hold when the 1,000 girl babies are old enough to bear children themselves. But the reason for the fall in the net reproduction rates is that the specific fertility rates are falling. Each year the number of children born to a given number of women of a given age is less than the year before. Consequently the 1,000 girl babies will bear fewer children than it was assumed they would bear in working out the net reproduction rate, and the decline will be faster than this rate suggests.

Not only the net, but the gross reproduction rate has now fallen below one. This means that a decrease in the death rate cannot now prevent a decline in the population if fertility does not increase. For even if none of the girl babies being born now died before producing their quota of children, they would still not produce enough potential mothers to replace them, and the population must eventually decrease.

The decline in population, if it is not arrested in its early stages, will tend to be come more rapid and more difficult to arrest.

This natural acceleration of the decline, once it has begun, is likely for these reasons:

(*a*) The proportion of the population who are old people will increase.

therefore

(*b*) The death-rate will rise, despite the fact that medical knowledge, etc., will probably enable people to live longer and reduce the proportion who die young.

(*c*) The proportion of the population who are potential mothers will fall.

The number of people alive, aged 60, depends on the number of children born 60 years ago, and the number who have survived till now. Since more babies were born 60 years ago than are born now, a larger part of the population is aged 60 than would have been so if the birth-rate had not fallen. In addition, more of the babies have survived than would have been the case if people of every age had continued to die at the rate obtaining 60 years ago. This also increases the proportion of old people in the population.

Consequently, when the birth- and death-rates are both falling, the part of the population which is old eventually increases.

A number of estimates based on varying assumptions have been worked out showing the proportion of the population in different age groups in the future. Dr. Enid Charles has made two estimates, the first

assuming that fertility and mortality rates remain at the 1933 level; the second that they continue to fall at the rates prevailing in 1933. But the estimate which bears the nearest relation to what seems likely to happen in practice is that of Mr. D. V. Glass. He assumes that fertility will fall at a decreasing rate till 1965 and then become constant; and that mortality will also fall at a decreasing rate till it becomes constant some years later.

According to this estimate, the proportion of men aged sixty and over rises from 14% in 1945 to 30% in 1995, the proportion of women from 17% to 33%. In the same period the proportion of the population who are children under 15 years of age falls from about 19% to 11%.

One effect of having an older population is a rise in the death-rate, since older people are more likely to die than young ones. Mr. Glass's estimate gives the following future death-rates:

Year	*Death-rate*
1935–40	12·19
1955–60	14·08
1975–80	18·10
1995–2000	23·28

That is one reason why the fall in population once it starts gets more rapid after a time. Not only does the birth-rate go down, but the death-rate goes up too.

The other reason is this. Fewer children born this year mean fewer potential mothers in 20 or 30 years time. So that, when today's girl babies grow up they will not only be having fewer children each, but there will be fewer of them to have any children at all.

These future trends are not likely to become urgent for a considerable time. That is to say, their explicit symptoms in a rapid steepening of the decline will not become obvious. But by the time the symptoms have become obvious, the conditions which must eventually produce more serious symptoms will have matured. It will be infinitely more difficult to reverse the process, for once the decline has reached this stage in its development, instead of mothers having to average rather less than one more child each to keep the population up, they will have to average an entirely different family-size. Although it may be a long time before the problem of a steep decline becomes immediate, the conditions which will make such a steepening practically inevitable may mature over the next two or three decades.

Summary

Thus the increase of population in this, and other countries in Europe and North America, which has taken place during the past century and a half is due to a declining death-rate. A rising birth-rate has only played an occasional and insignificant part. The death-rate has

continued to decline, but from the late nineteenth century on birth-rates have also declined, and they have done so more rapidly than death-rates. This country, in common with many other European countries, has now reached the stage where the population will start to decline at any moment. When the net fertility rate is less than unity, a decline in the size of the population is inevitable eventually, unless families become larger. The net fertility rate dropped below one in this country some twenty years ago.

The declining birth-rate is due almost entirely to married couples having smaller families. Other factors such as the changing age-constitution of the population, age at marriage, and amount of marriage have played no part, or an insignificant one.

The stage has now been reached where no decline in the death-rate can stop the population from falling unless mothers have more children each. In 1930–32 each married woman would have needed to have 2·72 children, in order that the population should replace itself. The average number each married woman could expect, if the specific fertility rates did not alter, was 2·19. Bearing in mind the fact that some marriages are sterile, either for physical reasons, or because the women marry too late in life to have children, an average family of three is necessary in all non-sterile marriages if the population is not to decline, and is to have a small margin of safety.

If the birth-rate were to become stabilized tomorrow and to remain stable for a long period, the population would still decline. If, as seems likely (*cf.* Chap. V), fertility rates continue to decline for a considerable period to come, then a situation will be developing in which the proportion of old people in the population is rising, and the proportion of children declining. That situation will lead to a rising death-rate—since old people die more frequently than young; and a decrease in the proportion of potential mothers in the population. When the death-rate is high, more babies will be needed to replace those who are dying each year. But at the same time the proportion of women who are in the child-bearing period will be declining. Therefore, once this stage is reached, the population can be expected to decrease with accelerating speed. To arrest the decline then is likely to be much more difficult than it would be at an earlier stage.

The problem presented by a declining population is not simply one of whether or not a few million less people will matter. A declining population means an older population, and an older population means a population which will tend to decline faster. A case could be made out for reducing the population of this country by, say, ten millions. But, if it were decided that 30 instead of 40 million was an optimum population, and if plans could be made to negotiate the difficulties involved in the transition period, it is doubtful whether any government would adopt population-reduction as a policy *because of the impossibility of knowing that stabilization could be effected at any given figure.*

Taking Sides?

That, in briefest outline, is the situation today. Various points touched on here are discussed in more detail at appropriate junctures in the text. Mass-Observation undertook the present survey in order to try and find out why people are having fewer children, and what conditions might persuade them to have more. The underlying assumption is that the coming fall in the population will be a 'bad thing' and should be arrested if possible. That assumption is debatable in so far as a smaller stable population might be better than a large population. But we are dealing with things as they stand today. If parents continue to have families of the size they are having now, the population will go on declining indefinitely and will eventually be extinguished altogether. Only those who do not like the English race can look forward to that situation. And the situation is not confined to this country. Even the Southern European countries, whose current problem is still one of a rapidly expanding population, have started along a road which must eventually lead to decline if present trends continue. Only Russia, among European countries, shows no sign of an eventual decline.

Whatever one's views about a *smaller* population, the problem of a *decreasing* population will have eventually to be solved. It is not impossible that it would solve itself, but it is much less likely than would appear at first sight. For the further the decline goes, the greater the changes in individual lives necessary to arrest it; the more strongly established the traditions and habits whose continuance will lead to a further and steeper decline.

In the course of this study we shall show the suspicions widely held today about the *motives* of those who want to see the birth-rate rise. It is no part of M-O's job to say anything about the rightness or wrongness of these suspicions. But even if they were entirely justified, if the only motive of those responsible for formulating a population policy were to provide soldiers for a future war, that would still be no reason for considering the policy bad. Although, by the very nature of this survey, Mass-Observation is implicitly taking sides, it is siding with a very broad group. The conditions of today produce the trends of today. Even if 'automatic' adjustment were to stabilize the population at some future time, it would only do so because men and women were thinking differently, behaving differently, acting under the influence of a different environment. All this survey attempts to do is to present a picture of what that different mental and physical environment might be like. Many of the changes may be coming 'automatically'. Certainly Population Policy cannot be isolated from all the other changes for the good of mankind, about which ordinary men and women have dreamed and hoped and despaired in the course of this war and of history. Today, and even more tomorrow, the number of children parents have will depend on the number they want. Those who deplore

the idea of trying to raise the birth-rate tend to overlook this fact. No policy, no legislation, can compel parents to have children. The birth-rate will go up when and not before mothers and fathers think it right that it should go up. Present facts and future outlooks will be different then. If the results of this survey help in any way to hasten on these changes in outlook and environment, only those who want the white part of the human race to decrease and eventually to disappear can legitimately claim that the survey is partisan. For unless these changes take place some time that is precisely what will happen.

II. What May Happen

There is no reason to suppose that a few million fewer people in this country would make any appreciable difference to its economic and social life. It is shrinkage, not absolute numbers, which is likely to bring about change. The problems arising from a declining population are quite different from those arising from a small or sparse population —a point which, as we shall see, is overlooked by many of those who welcome the prospect of a declining population. This becomes obvious as soon as we consider a really steep decline.

Dr. Enid Charles has worked out an estimate of the situation 70 years hence if fertility rates continue to fall as fast as they were falling in the 1930's. The facts in the year 2015 would then be as follows:

		Proportion aged			
Year	*Population*	0–14	15–59	60+	*Annual Decrease*
2015 ..	10,456,000	3%	44%	53%	About 3%

A decrease in the population of 3% per annum would mean that either 3% of the capital equipment of the country would have to be adapted to new uses each year, or the consumption of everything by each individual would have to increase by 3% a year. The most adaptable economic system could not be expected to cope with such a situation. For example, even if people were continually moving into bigger houses, there would be an increasing number of small houses of no use to anyone, and in thirty years at least half the houses would be out of use. No one would dare build a new factory, and it would become impossible to keep the old ones occupied. Improvements in methods of production would stop. People who saved would not dare to invest their money. Unless some entirely new means of combatting unemployment were introduced, the economic system would break down, or at very best be subject to drastic and frequent depressions.

Moreover, more than half the population would be over 60. Elderly people would have to go on working late in life because there would not be enough people of working age to support them. On the other hand,

there would be such a scarcity of young people that it might be common to see men of thirty acting as messenger boys. The working population would be so much older that there would be no chance for young men of getting ahead. At a time when the necessity for a highly adaptable and elastic system was greatest, the whole tendency would be for it to become more rigid.

Probably no economic system resembling the present one could survive under such conditions. It is quite likely that modern civilization would simply cease to exist and a return to more primitive methods takes its place. At least the conditions of such a society would be so different to anything we know now that it is impossible to imagine them.

This is simply an illustration of what would happen if people continued for seventy years to reduce the average size of their families as rapidly as they are doing now. It is unlikely to happen, partly because before the situation had developed that far the disaster which lay ahead would have become so evident to everyone that the whole attitude to child-bearing would have changed; partly because measures will undoubtedly be well under way for encouraging people to have larger families long before then; and partly because it is unlikely that fertility would in any case fall at current rates for so long a period. But that is what might happen in the lifetime of the babies born today, if nothing was done to stop it. Endless speculation about the social results of such a situation are possible, but not very profitable. The illustration is used simply to point the difference between a population which is diminishing and a population which is consistently small or sparse.

Effects of a Slow Decline

The likely situation, which only a very rapid change in family-size can now avert, is that there will be a gradually diminishing population for the next thirty years or so. After that speculation becomes academic, except in so far as it is useful in describing the set-up which a population policy will seek to avert. The probable effects of a slowly declining population, which we now discuss, may well be good in many aspects. But it must be borne in mind that a period of slow decline is likely to create the conditions which make a further period of accelerating decline more probable. Unless the tendancy for the population to go on declining *after* the next twenty-thirty years is arrested *during* the next twenty-thirty years any good results accruing from the initial period of slow decline are likely to be cancelled out later. There is no reason for great alarm at the prospect of fewer people in the next few decades *provided* current trends have been arrested during that period. But to suggest that events should take their natural course on the grounds that a slowly diminishing population may bring greater prosperity and happiness to the rising generation, is to ignore the future of their children, the grandchildren of the young parents of today.

Adaptability in Declining Population

The biggest economic problem raised by a declining population will be that of adaptability. In an expanding population, economic adaptation to changing conditions is made easier by the constant increase in numbers. The demand per head for a certain type of goods may decrease, but because there are more heads wanting the goods, the total demand may nevertheless increase. A new factory may be started up in the expectation of an increased demand per head which does not materialize; but there will still be a need for the new factory to supply the increased total demand arising from an increased population. Demand per head may fall off, but it may not be necessary to dismiss workers because the total demand remains the same. Further, in a growing population there is a large proportion of young people; and if it becomes necessary for workmen to change from one trade to another to meet a changing demand, these young people are able to learn a new trade comparatively easily.

But in a declining population all this will be different. Once made, errors in judging demand will be emphasized by the declining number of people wanting the goods. Small changes in demand per head will be exaggerated by a decreasing number of heads. Consequently new ventures in industry will be much more risky than when the population is expanding. There will be a tendency for the economic system to become more rigid, while the need will be for greater adaptability.

The labour force also will tend to become more rigid. The population will be older, and it is more difficult for an older man to change his trade than a young one. Further, it is possible that Trades Unions will be more restrictive about entry into trades where prospects are so uncertain.

Scarcity of new enterprises and the lack of adaptability of labour will work together to prevent supply from following demand as it should. This will mean that there will be overproduction in some fields, with consequent unemployment. Unemployment will lead to a decrease in consumption. Low consumption allied to chronic lack of confidence may well lead to financial crises and mass unemployment. That is the crux of the problem of a declining population.

Recurrent crises are a major problem of the present day, and the danger of their occurring will be greatly increased by a declining population. Unless methods are developed for overcoming this danger, the economic system which tottered in 1929 may well collapse. With an increasing population the matter is an urgent one, and with a declining population it may be a matter of life and death.

National Income

One result of a declining population will help economic adjustment. So long as crises and unemployment can be kept to a minimum, there is a

good chance that the average income per head may increase. The smaller population will have the same amount of capital goods—machines, mines, houses, etc.—as the larger population of the previous generation. Consequently each man will, on average, produce more goods than before—provided that the capital goods are not used less efficiently. So long as the goods produced are of a type that is wanted, this will mean either a fall in prices, and each man will be able to buy more; or a rise in wages, and again each man will be able to buy more.

Provided that the capital goods are not used less efficiently than they were. That is the crux of the problem of national income in a declining population. The efficiency with which the capital goods are used will depend on how well the economic system adjusts itself to a decreasing population; and we have already shown that adaptability is unlikely to be a strong point of the present economic system under the new conditions. There may be a considerable wastage of capital equipment due to the small margin for errors in industrial judgement when the population is declining. Older men who have to change their trade will lose the capital invested in the training and experience of their former trade. These things will reduce the capital equipment of the country and work against a higher average income.

But supposing the danger of crises is overcome, and the wastage of capital equipment is not sufficient to prevent the average income rising. Still another problem will arise.

An increased demand for goods based on a higher average income—which means a higher standard of living—differs from an increased demand based on an increasing population. It tends to be more a demand for luxury goods and less a demand for necessities. A taste for wheat bread does not suddenly change to a taste for rye bread. But a craze for leather armchairs may easily change in a very short time to a craze for red plush. Luxury goods are also more subject to the effect of new inventions. Gramophones give way to radios, and radios to radio-grams and radio-grams to television in a very short space of time. In fact, the demand for luxury goods is much less stable than the demand for necessities.

A declining population which has, in its first stages, successfully solved the problems of crisis and inefficient use of capital, may still fail to adapt its economic system to the new type of demand which such success would entail. Still greater adaptability would be needed to cope with this situation than had been needed in the earlier stages. The changing average age of the population, too, will change the nature of the demand and supply must follow. At every stage the key to the economics of a declining population is the adaptability of supply to demand—the supply of consumer goods, capital equipment and labour alike.

This conclusion is not surprising. Even in a still expanding population the effects of too great a rigidity in the economic system can be

seen. Unemployment is a result of this lack of adaptability. Mass unemployment arises from lack of confidence among capitalists in anticipating demand. Seasonal unemployment results from lack of adaptability of the labour force to seasonal fluctuations in demand. Unemployment arising from changes in the location of industry is due to failure of the labour force to follow the demand for labour. Even rigid nationalism, which is recognized by most economists as a contributory cause of economic chaos, may be looked upon as lack of adaptability in the world's economic system. Greater adaptability was the need of the world's economies in the 1930's. In the 1940s and 1950s and 1960s, when the population problem is growing to its acuter stage, the need for adaptability will be many times greater.

Social Services

A declining population is an ageing population, and this fact will have a big effect on the social services. According to an estimate by Mr. Reddaway,[1] the cost of pensions (excluding war pensions) would double between 1936 and 1966, even if the rates remained at the 1933 level, which they have not done. A part of the pensions bill will be paid for by an increase in the returns from death duties, which will be considerable when the population ages and the death-rate rises. War pensions, arising out of this war and the last, will decrease each year, of course. But the pensions bill for this war will be heavy at first, and it appears probable that pensions are going to cost a great deal in future.

The proportion of the population of an age to work is not going to change greatly in the next thirty years. In theory it would appear that an increase in the number of old dependants will be compensated by a decrease in the number of dependent children. This is not so, however. Old people nowadays are to a considerable extent the state's responsibility, whereas children are still mainly the responsibility of their parents, except in regard to education and minor privileges such as free milk. As a whole, the working population will have the same number of dependants to support. But since old people are supported largely out of taxation, and children largely by their own parents, the responsibility will probably be differently divided between rich and poor.

The cost of education will not go down in proportion to the decrease in numbers. A child does not just 'go to school', but goes to two or three different schools, and through perhaps a dozen different classes. The schools must be near the home of the child and give the right sort of teaching. For a considerable time it will not be possible to reduce the number of schools or of teachers without also reducing the standard of education, at least for some of the older children who will be more numerous. It is likely that existing facilities will be used for the smaller

[1] W. B. Reddaway: *The Economics of a Declining Population*, Allen & Unwin, London, 1939, p 270. The greater part of the economic discussion given here is based upon this book.

number of children, and a better quality education given—for example by having smaller classes.

National Debt and Defence Services

In a declining population a decreasing number of people will be responsible for the fixed charge of the National Debt. Although this is an internal debt, it is still a serious problem. Interest on industrial securities is not paid out of taxation, and the holder of Government bonds may feel it unfair that he should be taxed in order to pay himself interest.

In a similar way, the cost of the defence services will have to be paid by a smaller number of people. But the increase per head in these costs due to a declining population will be insignificant when compared with their size during and after the present war. It may be that measures adopted to cope with this vast increase will also solve the problem arising from a declining population. Taxation and the distribution of wealth are likely to be affected by so many things besides a declining population, that it is not very profitable to speculate about what might happen if population were the only factor.

Conclusion

A declining population will thus make it much more difficult for the economic system to work smoothly, and will make higher taxes likely. These difficulties will not be insuperable, but they will certainly be considerable enough to make the problems of the post-war period harder to solve. In all probability any radical solution of post-war economic problems will take the immediate economic problems of a declining population in its stride. But there can be no doubt that it would be easier to get straight in the thirty years following the war if the population was not decreasing.

After thirty years, if trends do not alter, the more rapid decline which will set in may well raise problems which are well nigh insuperable. Clearly the decline in fertility is of the greatest importance in considering the economic future.

These speculations are not discussed here in order to demonstrate exactly what will happen. They are speculations, and they may be proved wrong for a hundred reasons. At the best we are taking the effects of a declining population in isolation; far greater influences may be at work in the next thirty years which may well swamp any visible signs of the impact of declining numbers. But in a survey of opinion it is necessary to put forward these speculative ideas, for ordinary people too, are speculating about the effects of a declining population. A large section of the public do not know that the birth-rate has been declining for a long period; few know to what extent the population may be expected to decrease if present trends continue.

The idea is rather vaguely around that there are going to be fewer people in this country. People ask themselves—does it matter, will it be a good or a bad thing? They don't think about it very much or very deeply, but they develop a point of view. It is natural that this point of view should tend to oversimplify the issues. The ordinary man or woman looks at his personal patch of England and wonders what the effects would be if there weren't so many people. Maybe she is looking for a house and can't find one. If there were fewer people, she thinks, there would be more houses to go round. Maybe he remembers when he was out of work. If there were fewer people there would have been fewer applicants for the job. He might have got in. He thinks of the countries which have small populations, and he notices that many of them are prosperous and that they seem to fight fewer wars than the countries with many people. If England was like that, perhaps we should have permanent peace, too.

These speculations are presented here, not to prove that something *will* happen, but simply to show that things are not so straightforward as they seem at first glance. With this background sketched roughly in, we can go on to discuss the reasons why thousands of men and women today, who are aware that the population will probably decline, are not in the least perturbed, and quite frequently think it will be all to the good of the country and the individual.

III. Is It Important?

A random street sample (both sexes, married and unmarried) were asked, in June 1944, if they could say whether the birth-rate in this country had been going up or down in the past fifty years. Nearly a quarter had no idea, and one person in six thought it had been going up. Those who thought it was going up were probably confused by the recent trend and really had no idea about the more recent one :

'Up for the last three years anyway.' (F20C.)
'Well, since the war it's been on the increase.' (M40C.)

About two people out of five are thus uninformed or misinformed about the downward progress of the birth-rate since the end of the nineteenth century. This is not a particularly high proportion of ignorance, over a question of fairly remote importance to the individual here and now. But there is clearly a good deal of ground to cover before the general public is aware of the existence of a problem, let alone convinced of its importance.

The same sample were asked whether they thought it a good or a bad thing when the birth-rate goes down. Results may be compared with a question asked shortly after publication of the Registrar-General's Report a couple of months earlier. On that occasion people

were first asked whether they had seen that the birth-rate in 1943 was the highest since 1918, and then whether they thought it a good or bad thing when the birth-rate went *up:*

Opinion about birth-rate going down for 50 *years*	*Percentage expressing this opinion*		*Opinion about birth-rate going up in* 1943
	%	%	
Good thing	27	25	Bad thing.
Bad thing	50	49	Good thing.
No opinion, unimportant	23	26	No opinion, unimportant.

About a quarter believed that a declining birth-rate is a good thing, or conversely that a rising birth-rate is bad.

A rather broader question, also asking for opinions about the importance of the falling birth-rate, was put to the National Panel of Correspondents. The above two questions focus on the past and the present. The third question was focused on the future. Correspondents were presented with the proposition that the population might be halved in 50 years time if current trends continue, and were asked to say how important they thought a falling birth-rate to be. In this case an estimate depending on a continued decrease in fertility at present rates was given in order to present an easily visualizable picture within a limited time. We might expect those who had not gone into the problem fully themselves to take this estimate at its face value, and, if anything, feel the situation to be more serious and immediate than in fact it may be. Nevertheless a very large number welcomed the decline and either anticipated wholly good results, or thought that many good results might counterbalance less desirable ones.

From these three surveys it is clear that while the majority of those who have given any thought to the question at all, think it undesirable that the birth-rate should decline, a very substantial minority welcome it. Moreover, the signs are that the more thoughtful, mainly middle-class group represented by the Panel, are particularly inclined to see good in a diminishing population. In general, there is more vociferous, definite opinion among the minority; more vagueness among the majority.

This survey was undertaken with the object of finding out why people are having fewer children, and what would encourage them to have more. One of the most important things which will keep the birth-rate down and the population dwindling is the conviction that a declining population is either of little importance, or positively good. The arguments on which this conviction is based must be understood before the conviction can be shaken. The very first object of any population policy must be to secure agreement to the premises on which it is based. At present there is widespread disagreement about the *desirability* of

arresting the decline. It is likely to be a difficult enough task to secure human co-operation even from those who are convinced that the situation is urgent. If we may judge from the experience of other countries, at least part of such a policy will consist of personal adulation of those parents who are making their personal contribution towards keeping the population going. It is not difficult to imagine the comments of a mother of ten in Stepney or Poplar today if she were presented with an Order of Motherhood Glory. They would probably not reflect the satisfaction of a citizen who has done her duty. That is the negative side of the problem, and one which we shall be discussing later. The positive side is represented by those who look forward to the time when this country will be more sparsely populated, and who, if they considered child-bearing in the light of duty to the community at all, would believe that a small family was speeding on a desirable trend in human affairs in Britain.

Certain arguments in favour of a declining population occur frequently; some are clearly fallacious, others more debatable. They are presented first without comment.

There's a Bad Time Coming

When asked why they thought a declining birth-rate a good thing, several people made replies of this sort:

'Well, if nobody has children it shows that people are losing heart I should say.' (F30C.)

'I'll tell you why—the fact is that conditions aren't too good in the world—they're not as they should be.' (M55D.)

'Because there's a bad time coming when the peace is signed. What's going to happen to all the little kids then?' (M40D.)

Lack of faith in the future is a vitally important reason for not wanting children, and those who share this lack of faith are likely to sympathize with those who have few babies. But it is an explanation of the decline rather than a reason for welcoming it. We discuss it in detail in a later chapter.

Cannon Fodder

'Somebody to fight the next bloody war, that's the idea.'

This was the comment of a working woman of 25 when asked why she thought the rise in the birth-rate in 1943 a bad thing. Some people believe that a declining population will make future wars impossible, and are whole-heartedly in favour of a rapid and steep decline. Here are the views of two of them, an army sergeant, and a technologist:

'For many years I have nourished the conviction that the only way to avoid wars and disputes between people is to reduce the population of the world to

something like two million. There would then be so much for everyone to do that there would be no time to go to war. If it takes two to make a quarrel, how many quarrels may be engendered by the present population of the world? So I approve strongly of the declining birth-rate. . . . People are *not* being silly when they say, "I'm not going to have children to grow up to become cannon fodder." They have every excuse for disquiet and cynicism.'

'Birth-rate *must* be kept *down* by international agreement. World troubles are due to too many people.'

Not many have developed their ideas to this extent, but suspicion of official motives for wanting a higher birth-rate is frequent and many feel that the fewer children are born to fight the next war the better.

Suspicion

'I am still actively considering the problem myself and am not prepared to give a definite answer. I am well aware that all the cogent reasons given to show that declining population is a bad thing are genuine. But I am not convinced that the whole picture has been presented. In particular I have a lurking suspicion that the most urgent reason for increasing the birth-rate is the unspoken one, namely to keep up the supply of potential soldiers.' (Farmer.)

'I am always a bit suspicious of people who proclaim that we should have an enormous population. I think perhaps they want cheap labour, or more cannon fodder.' (Schoolmistress.)

Several people say they believe the fighting of future wars a main reason of those who want a large population, and disagree about the desirability of having children for this purpose. A housewife:

'We are frequently warned of the disaster of a falling birth-rate, but as far as I can make out the chief disaster envisaged is lack of cannon fodder. We are told that a smaller population will tend to a lower standard of living and that we could not remain a "great power" (N.B. cannon fodder). If this is so, does it matter? Until I am convinced that a declining population is a disaster, I shall remain unconcerned.'

And a biologist of 31:

'Perhaps I am apathetic, but I don't view the decline in the birth-rate with alarm. Indeed, having lived most of my life in large towns, I am inclined to look upon it with favour. Corporation Street, Birmingham, between the hours of 12 noon and 2 p.m. any weekday, especially Saturday, should cure anyone's wish for an increase in the birth-rate!

'But to be more serious. The two main views against "allowing" the birth-rate to decrease seem to be, firstly, that we shall be weakened in any future war including an economic one, and, secondly, that we shall become a nation of old people. As to the first objection, if we are to breed merely for cannon fodder then the sooner the birth-rate falls the better.'

Like Scandinavia

Closely linked with the idea that a large population means war, and a small population may prevent it, is the attitude of those who feel that there is a good deal to be said for becoming a second-rate power. Many believe that the Scandinavian countries have shown how a small population both keeps out of war and maintains a high standard of living.

They think that this country would come to a similar position if the population were reduced. Typical comments:

'I don't see that we would lose anything by becoming like the small Scandinavian democracies as they were before the war. What is the good of having a large population with vast numbers living in poverty? Much better to have fewer people living in decent surroundings.' (Schoolmistress.)

'Caring nothing for power and glory, I think a reduction would make the people of this island more independent of imports, and provided they managed to govern themselves rationally, they should be able to live more happily and peacefully, as the Scandinavian peoples have managed to do until the arrival of Hitler.' (Housewife)

The point of view of those who would welcome, or remain indifferent to, the possibility of Britain becoming a third-rate power is given in these comments, from a clergyman and an electrician:

'Of course, if the birth-rate in this country greatly declines, and the birth-rate in rival countries increases, I suppose that means that this country becomes a "second class power", a state of things which would leave me, at any rate, entirely unmoved. If the world is still to be run, after the present horror is over, by the powerful nations all with great armed forces, then of course the declining birth-rate must be considered a serious evil. But, if the world is to be so run, then it seems to me that civilization must perish, and so it will not matter after all whether the population is great or small. For my own part I think the birth-rate will continue to decline, and I am glad to think so.'

'The aspect, or prospect, which appears so frightening to politicians is the one of this country becoming a third-rate power in a military sense, amongst nations. Judging by the more enviable position of some of the smaller nations today, such as Eire, Switzerland, Portugal and Denmark, I am inclined to think military strength not an unmixed blessing.'

Some of those who believe that the decline should be checked for military reasons, think nevertheless that if it were not for military necessity a falling birth-rate might well improve amenities at home:

'In a world in which continual peace and freedom from aggression could be secured, a falling birth-rate need not jeopardise the standard of living, or the security, or the happiness, of the population. Holland, Norway and Sweden seem to possess many amenities, and their people a standard of education, which we might well envy.'

All the points in favour of a declining population mentioned so far can be traced to lack of faith in the future of the country, or distrust of the motives of those who want a stable population.

Living Space

It is widely believed that this country is over-populated, and many feel that a reduction in the population would ease the situation at home. Some assume that the alternative to a shrinking population is a perpetually rising one, and visualize steadily increasing congestion if that comes about. A married woman:

'Unless a scheme can be devised whereby houses are pulled down and rebuilt every so often, and so stop their degenerating into slums, I can only foresee England becoming one huge London with Parks (National Trust). I must confess the idea of building satellite towns round some of our bigger cities after the war fills me with apprehension.'

Others, also concentrating on the housing problem, see in a declining population the possibility of improving on the present position. A clerk:

'The fact that in fifty years' time the population may be halved seems to me of little consequence. . . . Part of what we have now has been thrown out of H.M. Forces as too bad even for gun fodder. Also, the more machines we make the less humans will be required, and the more space, light and air will be available for each person, if the population is halved. London might then become a reasonably decent place to live in. The slums of Bury St. Edmunds could then be pulled down and turned into gardens or playing fields. If we progress and this country becomes more Christian, a smaller population will be all to the good.'

Most of those who would favour a smaller population on the grounds that this country is over-populated now feel that it would improve the standard of living:

'I do not think the estimated decline in the birth-rate is of very much importance in itself. There are evidently too many people in Britain as it is. There are certainly too many ill-fed, ill-clothed, ill-housed and badly-educated, and there is too much unemployment.'

'I consider a declining population in Britain a good thing. We have the largest population per square mile of any country in the world. People want good homes, the countryside preserved around them, and room to move. Congested population means tenement flats, crowded city life, and the countryside spoiled with suburban villas.'

'Our country is rather overcrowded and a reduction in population will enable the size of our cities to be considerably reduced. I think there should be a limit to the number of people housed per acre of the land.'

'In my opinion there are far too many people in the world as it is, and when I view a Saturday night queue outside the cinema or consider the housing question I feel inclined to agree with Hitler that dive bombers and machine guns are also Good Things.'

Quality, Not Quantity

Very similar views are expressed by those who believe that a smaller population will mean better health services, better attention for children and in general a higher quality nation. A soldier puts it this way:

'It strikes me that we may well turn out to have quality rather than quantity in our population. Instead of ill-housed, ill-educated, socially underprivileged millions, we shall (or ought to) have a nation whose standards of education, social amenity, ability and good citizenship will be unprecedented; a real elite nation at last with every member of the population able to pull his or her full weight.'

And a Surveyor:

'I do not consider a declining birth-rate a bad thing in itself. It would increase the standard of living to have less people. Their education would be easier and on a higher level. What babies there were would be adequately looked after, and when they grew up they would be sure of getting a job.'

Many hold that the quantity does not matter, so long as the quality can be improved. It is quite widely assumed that this qualitative improvement will be effected. The fifty-year old housewife who says 'I prefer to see a healthy, happy few to a teeming population, a great proportion of which lives on the borderline of starvation and misery'

speaks for many others who see in a declining population the possibility of a better life for everyone. 'Good quality citizens who were *wanted* when they were babies and who have happy careful upbringing, are more valuable to the world's evolution than strained unhappy people fighting for an existence' says another mother.

These people assume that many of the social evils of today are caused by an over-large population, and that reduction in population will help to remove them. The underlying argument is that if there are fewer people, more care can be devoted to each one of them. As one woman puts it:

'If the next generation are fewer in numbers the country should be able to bring them up to be healthier and better educated than if the same resources had to deal with a larger generation.'

It is on the same basic argument that the views of those who believe *fewer people will mean less unemployment* are based. As one man puts it, there were 2,000,000 unemployed at the time he was out of a job; if there had been 1,999,999 fewer people in the country he might have slipped in. Similarly some think the current rise in the birth-rate a bad thing because:

'There'll be mass unemployment, and then what's going to happen to everybody?'

Is it a Good Thing?

Summarising people's reasons for welcoming a declining population so far, we find:

(*a*) Many people sympathize with those who feel that the future outlook is too uncertain to warrant bringing large families into the world.

(*b*) Others suspect the motives of the authorities in wanting the population to maintain itself. They think the real idea is to breed soldiers for another war.

(*c*) Others believe that a smaller population will make Britain a second-rate power 'like the Scandinavian countries'. They think that this will mean a nation too weak to make war, and welcome the possibility of settling down to developing the arts of peace. Many think it would be a good thing if Britain did become a second-rate power.

(*d*) It is frequently held that a smaller population will mean an increase in the facilities available for each individual and a better standard of living in general.

(*e*) Much the same train of thought leads to the belief that fewer people will mean fewer unemployed.

With regard to the first two points, there is little comment to make here. These beliefs will continue to be held until people are convinced that the future is something to look forward to, and that 'the authori-

ties' are not getting ready for another war. At present a clear majority contemplate the possibility of another war, mostly within the next 15–25 years. The whole question of faith in the future is discussed from the mother's point of view in a later chapter.

Those who compare future developments in this country with present trends in the Scandinavian countries are really drawing a quite false analogy. Scandinavia, and the various countries cited, have attained their present economic position and enviable social services not on a *declining* population, but on a relatively sparse *expanding* population—which is a very different thing. No European country, except France for a few years, has yet faced the problem of a declining population in practice. There *are* no parallels. To compare developments in countries with a sparse or small population with those in countries with a congested or large population, leads to completely false inferences. There is no similarity in the social and economic structure of a country in the process of becoming depopulated, and one which has for a long period been sparsely populated or is simply small.

With regard to the last two points we have shown that, while there is a good chance that a declining population may lead to a better standard of living, the problem of unemployment will become more difficult to solve; and recurrent crises may well neutralize the chance of a better standard of living.

In a declining population there is no expanding market to act as a buffer for any errors of judgement on the part of the industrialist. New enterprises will be risky, and the work put into them will often be wasted. The resources of the country will be sufficient for a higher standard of living to result when there are fewer people to share them. But there is a possibility that so large a proportion of these resources will be wasted, through erroneous judgement, or remain unused because nobody dares risk using them, that the actual wealth of the country per head will decrease, in spite of declining numbers.

Moreover the population will on the whole be older. An office boy may be paid more in a declining population than in an expanding one; but if a man remains an office boy till he is 25 this will be a small advantage. Promotion will be slower. Experienced men will be doing jobs not requiring experience. And, since it is more difficult for experienced workers to change their trade than for men just learning a trade, there will be a stronger tendency than today for one trade to go through a labour shortage, while there is unemployment in another trade.

Most important of all, there will be a bigger danger of recurrent crises than now. This will be the crux of the problem. If these crises can be overcome, the economic advantages of a declining population may be made to overcome the disadvantages. But, unless this danger is overcome, the whole fabric of society may be disrupted in a series of bigger and bigger crises, bringing in their train the inevitable mass unemployment.

III—IS IT IMPORTANT?

A declining population will raise new economic problems of the greatest magnitude. The possible economic advantages are so uncertain of fulfilment that the most optimistic must think twice before courting the risks in order to make such doubtful gains.

These points are discussed more fully in the previous chapter. They are recalled briefly and dogmatically here in order to illustrate the fallaciousness of some popular beliefs. Exactly what will happen in a situation which has never been faced yet is, of course, very far from certain. But if future developments do follow the pattern foreseen by many of those who welcome the population decline, it will certainly not always be for the reasons they anticipate.

These are the outstanding points about which further explanation and factual information are needed if fallacious optimisms are to be removed. When people are aware of the real nature of the problem, then the basis for a population programme will have been founded.

Miscellaneous Reasons for Optimism

Another reason is often given for thinking that a decline in population will not greatly affect the life of the country. A young farm worker put it most directly when he says:

'With the introduction of machines it stands to reason that we can do with less people to get through the work. Therefore I feel a declining population to be a good thing under our present economic system.'

A schoolmaster says:

'Under a planned economic system modern machinery can more than make up for numerical decline in labour strength.'

Many think that, because the machine is displacing human labour, it may be an advantage to have fewer people:

'Once upon a time there was need for huge supplies of cheap labour—domestic, agricultural and factory. Now, with the invention of vast numbers of labour-saving devices, we are almost at the stage when the human labourer is unnecessary. So why breed quantities of inferior human stock?'

'It's a matter of no importance to me. I see no reason why man should not develop machines that will assist a smaller population.'

'A decline in the population might almost be an advantage to the nation because by that time technical advances will have made such strides as to have displaced labour to a very great extent.'

Apart from the—over simplification involved, this conclusion is invalidated by the likely effects of a declining population on the economic life of the country, already discussed.

It Won't Happen

One further point must be mentioned here, namely the belief that a a population 'automatically' adjusts itself to the needs of the times. The great increase at the time of the Industrial Revolution, and the high

birth-rate which followed the last war, are often cited as examples of the way in which this process works.

Belief in such automatic and natural readjustments makes people disinclined to think the present situation of importance. They feel that nature will step in and strike a balance at the critical moment.

In fact, of course, both these beliefs are fallacious. The increase during the Industrial Revolution was due to a falling death-rate, not a rising birth-rate. The idea that millions of new citizens were provided by nature to meet the demands of the factories has no basis in fact. Indeed, so far as industrialization had any direct effect, it was to arrest the decline in the death rate by producing conditions with which medical knowledge and improved ideas on sanitation and hygiene barely kept pace.

The idea of a rising birth-rate 'to replace the ravages of war' represents a similar confusion of cause and effect. There is no good reason to suppose that a temporary rise, following a temporary decline, such as occurred in the last war and appears to be occurring in this, *replaces* anything. All that occurs is a partial recovery of lost ground. More children are born after a war because fewer children are born while the war is on. In 1914–18 a great part of the 'loss' during the war years can be put down to husbands being abroad. When they returned, they naturally started the families which would normally have been started a few years earlier. At the same time it is reasonable to suppose that other parents were putting off having children until after the war. The birth-rate rose for a time. But the general trend was unchanged. A straight line was replaced by a trough and a peak, that is all. The ravages of war were repaired, not by a rising birth-rate but by the still high rate of natural increase which war did not appreciably alter. What is happening now, in 1942–45, when the birth-rate is rising before the peace, we discuss later. But there is no reason to believe that the general trend is changing today, and this time the ravages of war will not be repaired unless the trend does change.

P.O. as Stooge

In this chapter we have adopted the somewhat unusual device of putting up public opinion as an aunt sally. Popular views are quoted and examined, and when they are fallacious, discredited. The present survey is different from other investigations reported in this *Change* series in this way: previously we have been dealing with reactions to existing situations, present behaviour patterns, likely future trends. Our job has been to report simply what people think. If, for instance, a large section of the public felt that they would like to live in self-contained flats after the war, it would be no part of Mass-Observation's function to examine the desirability of large-scale flat-dwelling. We should simply present their views without comment. Here, we are dealing with the

public's *comprehension* of a problem, and to discuss this adequately it is essential to examine and counterpose. A declining population will produce problems which can, to a limited extent, be foreseen. One man's views are not necessarily as good as another's as they are, for instance, where the more general future of the world is concerned.

One of the first moves which will be necessary before any population policy can hope to achieve the best potential results will be to present the *facts* of the situation in readily comprehensible form. The main facts shown by this survey to be inadequately understood are:

(*a*) The difference between a *declining* population and a consistently *sparse* population.

(*b*) The fact that a decline, once it has begun, tends to become more rapid, less easy to stop.

(*c*) The lack of confirmation in past trends for the belief that 'nature' will step in and effect the necessary readjustments automatically.

These facts are not controversial. They can be explained quite simply in simple language. Until they are explained and understood, a large section of opinion—including much of middle-class, usually informed, opinion—will continue to welcome the coming decline. The idea of fewer people being a good thing for the country fits in with contemporary scepticism about the future. Those who welcome the likelihood of decline because they believe it will become more difficult to wage war have a case. They are unlikely to change their views until they are convinced that every effort is being made to avoid war. But those who believe that Britain will be 'like Sweden', that the standard of living will rise, unemployment disappear, and the social services steadily improve, are basing their hopes on very flimsy grounds. They may change their views when they are in possession of all the facts.

IV. Contraception: Cause or Effect?

1975

By the time the children of today are parents the problem of a declining population may well have become the most burning social issue of their lives. The search for a means to arrest the decline may consume their attention and capture their imagination on a scale comparable with the energies devoted to plans for preventing war in the inter-war years. If the trends of the past half-century are not reversed by 1975 an optimistic estimate—assuming no further drop in fertility—gives a decline of nearly four million in the population of England and Wales[1] over 1945 with the prospect of a further six million drop in the following twenty years.

[1] Scotland's decline does not begin until 1955, Northern Ireland's till 1965 and Eire's till 1965–70.

IV—CONTRACEPTION: CAUSE OR EFFECT?

Of course, it may never happen. But it will happen under any circumstances which it is now possible to conceive as likely. It will certainly happen if people do not decide to have larger families than they are having now. As the writer of the League of Nations report on population problems says:

'. . . in the past the underlying trends of vital rates have shown considerable stability. Therefore, for present purposes, the most practical assumption is that the new world will grow out of the old one in somewhat orderly fashion.'

Projections of future populations do not take into account the effects of war and the social upheavals which follow. The casualties of war consist of:

(*a*) Deaths on military service.

(*b*) Birth deficits—i.e. the extent by which the number of births that might have been expected without war exceeds the actual number of births in the war period. This can be roughly computed by comparing pre-war and post-war trends.

(*c*) Surplus civilian deaths. This can be computed even more roughly.

In the 1914–18 war it is estimated that Europe, excluding Russia, lost in the region of 20 million people through these causes.[1] There are reasons for supposing that the present war may not result in so large a deficit. But it must be remembered that any deficit there is this time will be in the nature of a dead loss for the Central and North-western countries. In the last war Europe lost about as many citizens as she would have gained through natural increase; the population after the war was about the same size as it was before. In fact, numerically, the Continent made up for its losses as they were incurred and entered peace with an expanding population, five years behind schedule, but still capable of catching up on lost ground.

This time it will be different. In France the population was decreasing before the war, and this decrease has been greatly accelerated over the war years, apart from military deaths. England and Wales would be due to reach their peak in 1945, and thereafter to decline, without the complicating factor of war. Unless trends which were not radically disturbed by World War I are reversed, there will be no recouping on population losses after this one. The decline in Belgium and Sweden is due to begin at the same time as that in England and Wales; thereafter all the countries of Central and North-western Europe follow, till by 1970 all are on the decline. The Southern countries will probably follow later; they have given signs that they are following the same pattern. But by the time their problem becomes imminent, the experience of other countries in trying to arrest the decline will be available. They may be able to arrest the downward movement in time to forestall a

[1] *The Future Population of Europe and the Soviet Union* (League of Nations, Geneva, 1944).

declining population. Clearly it is highly speculative to project present trends forward beyond a certain point in the future, and what would happen in Southern Europe in a century's time if nothing intervened to alter the course of development is, we may hope, an academic problem.

Rising Birth-Rate in England and Wales

Unfortunately, however, what would happen in England and Wales in two or three decades time if present trends continue is far too likely to be what *will* happen to be lightly dismissed. Nor is the rise in the birth-rate in 1942–44 any real ground for hope. The birth-rate in 1943 was the highest for fifteen years, but only if such rates continue for a number of years will there be any reason to suppose that a fundamental or permanent change has taken place. It may be that many of the children born in 1942–43 were babies who would have been conceived in 1939–40 had it not been for the war, and were delayed until the horizon cleared a little. In neutral Sweden, victorious England and defeated Germany a spurt of births followed the end of hostilities in the last war. In 1931, when the last census was taken, there were more ten-year olds in the population of England and Wales than any other age group. These post-war children, conceived in the first flush of peace, do not represent an addition to the population over and above what might have been predicted. They represent delayed action. It is these delayed births which give rise to the fallacy of 'automatic' readjustment to meet the casualties of war. There is good reason to suppose that the spate of babies which followed the Armistice and the period of demobilization were literally the unborn of 1915–19.

In this war events have followed a different course. We are having a spurt of babies now. But developments in the war situation have followed a different pattern too. There has been a pretty clear-cut development from apparently inevitable defeat to apparently inevitable victory. In 1942–44 this country has begun to catch up on the population losses of 1940–1. These losses were severe, and there is a lot of ground be made up before we reach the stage which might have been expected without war. In 1938 the Rate of Natural Increase (surplus of births over deaths) in the United Kingdom was 3.7 per thousand of the population. In 1940 it was 1·0, and in 1942 it was 1·6. Since then it has been well above the pre-war figure.

We are making up some of the lost ground. But even if all the lost ground is recovered in the next two or three years and, discounting military casualties, we find ourselves in 1947 in the same, or a slightly better, position than might have been expected without war, this is no legitimate ground for optimism. Only if the birth-rate continues high for a considerable period after the war will it be possible to say that the trend has been reversed.

IV—CONTRACEPTION: CAUSE OR EFFECT?

There are two possible ways of interpreting the present rise in the birth-rate:

(*a*) People may be now having the babies that they would in normal conditions have had in 1940–41.

(*b*) They may be now having the babies they would normally have had a few years later.

The latter suggestion was made, in an interview with the *Daily Express* by Mr. Kenneth Walker, chairman of a Social Hygiene Council sub-committee investigating population problems. He is reported as saying:

'I have two theories. One is that many wives, faced with separation from their husbands, called into the forces, are having babies early in life. Also many women are choosing to have a family rather than be conscripted into factories or some other type of war work.'

There is nothing essentially contradictory about these two explanations. A hypothetical case in which both are at work would be that of a couple married in the early stages of the war. They decide that wartime is not the time to have children, and so delay the first birth by a couple of years. By this time the husband is in the forces, and may be posted overseas. It looks as if they may not have the opportunity of having children for years to come; perhaps the husband may be killed and they may never be able to have one. So they decide to act now. The child planned for post-war is born in 1943–4. Under normal circumstances it would have been born in 1941–2, and from that point of view it is a delayed birth. If the husband had not been threatened with overseas posting it would have been born after the war, and from that point of view it is a post-war baby born before its planned time. Here is a case history told by a young wife which illustrates this trend:

'When we married in the winter of 1940–41 we decided that it was no fit time for bringing children into the world. The defeat of the Allies was still too imminent, and mothers with young babies were undergoing great hardships in Europe. Gradually the situation improved. Several of my friends had babies and I longed to myself, but I agreed with my husband that, living in part of someone else's house and not knowing how long it would be before he was caught up in the forces, a baby would add too much to the complications of life, and might suffer for it. However, if Jim had wanted it, I would have overcome all the difficulties. Then suddenly Jim was caught up in the Army, and only a few weeks after that he was on embarkation leave. We decided at once that we would try to have a baby, so that there would be something of him left for me to look after when he went abroad.'

This is a clear-cut case of changed decision. Less consciously planned, but with the same motivation, is this account from a young soldier, of how his first baby came to be born now instead of after the war:

'I began married life in November 1940 with the intention of having children, but not immediately. I was married as an infantry soldier, and consequently with the prospect of leaving for overseas probably before the child was born, assuming even that it was conceived shortly after marriage. I felt that a child would probably be an inconvenience to my wife while I was away. Conflicting with this was the

feeling that there was quite a possibility that I should be killed, and from that point of view I, and, I think, my wife, felt that it would be a good thing to have a baby while the going was good. Possibly it was this latter point, coupled with the feeling that after all we were married now, and therefore that a lesser degree of caution was indicated, that led us to be somewhat careless. Anyway, before long, my wife became pregnant. . . . The child, a boy, has been very healthy up to now, and I have never regretted becoming a father, while my wife expresses similar sentiments. We propose to have at least one more child, but not until after the war.'

Others, with one child or more already, are narrowing the gap which they had originally planned in order to make sure of having the child at all:

'We did begin married life with the intention of having children after a year or two, and duly carried this out. We meant to have another child about two years later, but with Tom shortly leaving for the Second Front we are trying to have another now, when my first is only ten months.'

More, whose husbands are at present comparatively safely in this country may well be following suit in 1944–5. Here is a childless woman of 28:

'When we have been in the middle of a blitz, my husband and I have often turned to one another and said how grateful we are not to have any children to feel responsible for in these trying times. On the other hand, I have always said that if he should have to go abroad, then I really should like to have had a child because I do think that in those circumstances it is something for a wife to hang on to and does help to make the gap less painful.'

Perhaps the most common reason why so many children have been born in the last two years is simply that parents have got tired of waiting for securer times and decided to 'chance it' now. Two cases, told by the fathers:

'Our second girl arrived in January 1940. We had been rather sorry the baby was on the way when the war broke out, but the child proved a great joy in those anxious 1940 days. It was a great pleasure to see someone developing without a knowledge even of the Hitler menace. We then thought: "No more until the war is over'. But once more when our little girl began to be able to dress herself we had a home without a baby and after some hesitation my wife decided again to have a baby, and our third child, a son, was born last month.' (Estate Agent.)

'We used contraceptives for the first one and a-half years, during which time we each had an outside occupation (wife part-time), having decided not to start a family till the war ended, at the earliest. However, as it soon became obvious that the war would last a long time, and we were both approaching thirty (and some of our friends had commenced to produce children), we also decided to chance our luck.' (Engineer.)

Mothers pushing prams in the streets of London were asked, informally, about their reasons for having a baby now. There was no intention of trying to obtain quantitative results—it is, in any case, practically impossible to frame a set question on this subject. But it seemed possible that the National Panel, being a largely middle-class sample of more than normally thoughtful people, might suggest a trend largely confined to the middle class, or at least less conscious in other groups. In fact, the street results are very similar. Here are two examples:

'We were married in 1936 and we planned to wait three years before having a baby. Well, just as the three years were up the war started, so we decided to put it

off and see what happened. Then in 1940 we thought we wouldn't wait any more, as the war seemed to be going so slowly and we hadn't had the gas attacks and famines and things that everybody expected. And then of course the blitz started and we had to put it off again. It was in the summer of 1941 I got fed up waiting. I was nearly thirty then, and it's no good having your first baby after thirty, so we went ahead. I'm glad we did now, it's turned out all right.'

'Well, we'd been thinking for some time we didn't want too big a gap between James and the next, but we'd kept putting it off and putting it off, thinking better wait a bit till the war's over. But when Jimmy was two I thought, well, there's a big gap between them, I don't know. And then my husband was posted for overseas and I thought, goodness, we'd better get on with it if we're going to, and we were just lucky, it started on his very last leave. I think it's best to have them while you can these days. You never know what's going to happen.'

Though it is not possible to say how widespread these motives are, they are certainly frequent enough to account for a substantial part of the current increase in the birth-rate. They have one factor in common: *in no case do they suggest that the parents in question have decided to have larger families.* If and when the birth-rate has continued high for a few years after the war, then there may be cause for optimism. Till then, the most that can be said with certainty is that parents have, for one reason and another, decided to have their children now instead of earlier or later. We may expect the delayed children of 1940–41 to go on appearing for a year or two more; we may expect more of the advance children of 1945–6 to put in an appearance as more husbands are drafted overseas. With the end of the European war, we may expect a short sharp burst of pre-planned children over a few years. In any case it will not be surprising if a relatively high birth-rate is maintained for a little longer. *But as yet there is absolutely no proof that parents have decided to have larger families, and until that is proved there is no reason to suppose that the trends of the past half century have changed.*

Cashing in on Race Suicide

We elaborate this theme in some detail because, in the course of this investigation, it was sometimes suggested that by the time the Royal Commission have concluded their deliberations there will be no population problem to be solved. Crude birth-rates unrelated even to other crude birth-rates are easy game for the amateur optimist. If the birth-rate goes up when it is meant to be going down, and does this in the middle of a major war, a crack at the experts is perhaps inevitable. But we are concerned here with the repercussions of popular attitude, and anything which helps to make ordinary men and women think the population problem unimportant, or that it will solve itself by 'natural' means is harmful in the long run. The rising birth-rate is doing this, and if it continues high in 1944–5 a probably baseless optimism may increase. When, eventually, the time comes for the deliberations of the experts to be translated into means of persuading parents to have more children, minds may be less prepared because of such easy and fallacious optimisms. The first move in any campaign involving a change in public

attitude or habit is explanatory. People have got to understand the implications and meaning of the problem their action alone can solve. We have already shown (Chapter III) that to many people a declining birth-rate seems a good thing. This is largely because they have not troubled to look into the details of the mechanism and the increasing difficulties of arresting a decline once it has started. If the rise in the birth-rate is maintained for another year or two, it may be difficult to persuade many people that there *is* a 'problem'. Explanation is called for while the subject is fresh in people's minds—perhaps at the time of publication of the Registrar General's Report—to counteract the natural feeling of the layman that a rise at such a time necessarily means all is well.

There is, as yet, no reason to depart from the usual practice of population experts in assuming that 'the new world will grow out of the old one in somewhat orderly fashion'. If we do not project the present too far into the future we can build up a picture that is not imaginative, though it may be inaccurate in detail, and may be proved utterly wrong by some external development which cannot be foreseen.

In twenty-five years' time it is likely that the population problem will be a major social issue in the sense that the prevention of war has been in recent decades. As with any other popular movement, the public's attitude will be determined not only or mainly by the 'facts' brought to light by specialists, but also by the use made of the facts, the twists given to them, by various bodies for which population policy is an incidental platform point. Instead of the slogan 'Capitalism Means War' the Parties of the Left may adopt the slogan 'Capitalism Means Race Suicide'; and the Parties of the Right may well reply that Socialism means State ownership of children, and saps parental initiative. The innumerable organizations whose objects are to improve the conditions of the community, the religious and other sects which are endeavouring to put purpose into man's life, the old and the new organizations whose purpose is to prevent the recurrence of war, may well take up the population theme. More specialized will be the appeal of those who see in infertility and sterility a new use for their wares. Present crude stimulants may give place to new refinements as the facts about sterility become known. The makers of men's underwear may be expected to provide new types of undergarment for office workers when the sensitivity to heat and stuffiness of testicular function becomes widely known. Vegetarians and herbalists as well as the makers of patent medicines will no doubt put new products on the market and find new uses for old. Temperance movements will hardly be slow to capitalize the connection between the high mortality rates of the early eighteenth century and the excessive drinking of the time.

This is not a remote fantasy, but a state of affairs which may reasonably be expected within a few decades. In 1945 we are on the threshold of development of a problem which, on such a scale, is something new

to Western civilization. Because it is new and there is no real parallel in history, it is difficult to visualize population problems as something of everyday importance to ordinary people. But it is necessary to visualize them on this scale, in advance, in order to prepare for developments which seem inevitable if the fall in fertility is not rapidly checked, and reversed. Experts in every branch of knowledge know well enough the distortions and perversions of established fact which may penetrate the minds of ordinary people once their special field becomes 'popular'. The machinery available to the popularizers and exploiters is usually greater than that available to the expert. It is well that those whose serious concern is the future of the race should be armed in advance against the possible red herrings which may divert public attention from the main issue.

Contraception

Most of the likely popularizations will be concerned with stressing one aspect of the problem to the exclusion of others. We may expect a decline in population to speed forward movements for larger Family Allowances, better housing, day-nurseries, domestic help schemes, painless childbirth, and so on. These are things which are good in themselves, though experience in other countries indicates that no one of them alone is likely to go an appreciable way towards solving the problem. Popular movements along these lines can only be harmful in distracting attention from the whole problem to a relatively insignificant part. They can be likened to advertisements for patent medicine which promise full cure and give temporary partial relief. Provided the ingredients are innocuous, the only harm likely to result is delay in realising the necessity for expert advice and full treatment.

Most popular remedies for a declining birth-rate will probably come under this head. At worst they will do no great harm, and at best they may cumulatively do appreciable good. There is, however, one likely popular movement which has potential consequences, whatever its results in arresting the decline, unpleasant enough to be worth considering now in some detail. A movement for banning the sale of contraceptives or prohibiting the spread of information about them seems a likely possibility. If such a movement were successful it would necessarily result in the production of unwanted children, if indeed it succeeded in increasing family size at all. Insofar as parents remained determined to restrict their families they would resort to other means of birth control against which legislation is practically impotent—abstention, withdrawal, self-induced abortion. Such a movement would not be good 'in itself', it would only be justified as part of a population policy if it were likely to lead to an appreciable increase in family size without involving other problems at least as difficult as those it helped to solve.

IV—CONTRACEPTION: CAUSE OR EFFECT?

Origin of the Idea of Family Limitation

Birth-control is commonly referred to by population experts and others as the main reason for, or cause of, the declining birth-rate since the last two decades of the eighteenth century. Professor Carr-Saunders includes in his definition of birth-control, abortion, contraception and abstention from intercourse. He is exceedingly cautious in attributing the fall in the birth-rate to birth-control even within this wide definition but in the course of argument he makes the following remark:

'All these peculiar features of the decline in the birth-rate are compatible with the view that birth-control is the cause. There are additional facts which hardly permit of any other explanation.'

Similar statements could be quoted from other sources. There is no quarrelling with their real implications in the context in which they are written. They imply simply that families have become smaller because, or largely because, parents have taken steps to prevent their being larger. But the use of the word 'birth-control' in a sense far more sweeping than the popular conception, together with the suggestion of a direct causal relationship between birth-control and birth-rate is open to objection. There is ammunition here for the foundation of a movement for the abolition of contraceptives based on the statements of the experts. In popular usage birth-control today means contraception; certainly it does not include abortion and abstention. Remove the cause and you will remove the effect. Remove contraceptives and the birth-rate will return to its pre-contraceptive level. Those who say that birth-control is the cause of the declining birth-rate are laying themselves open to misuses of their own statements which they would, no doubt, be the last to desire.

But there is a broader query than this. To what extent can the spread of information on the voluntary control of family size be called a 'cause' at all? To what extent is it rather an 'effect' of a demand which if it had not been met in one way would have been met in another? The potential effectiveness as well as the desirability of prohibiting the use of contraceptives hinges on this question.

History of Birth-Control

Medical prescriptions for contraception have been found as far back as 1850 and 1550 B.C. They may not have been very efficient, but neither are some of the spermicides widely used today. A Chinese recipe for abortion over a thousand years old exists, which can hardly have been less effective than some existing remedies for female irregularities. Other places and other times have used methods corresponding with the sponge of eighteenth-century France and nineteenth-century England. Exposure of infants has been sanctioned, in the Roman Empire for instance. There is nothing new about the idea of controlling birth. There have been differences of technique, but even the technique

of exposure is not so remote today as not to occur to the really desperate.

The simplest method of birth-prevention is that of abstaining from sexual intercourse. It is the only 100% safe method, but is unlikely to appeal to any but those whose desire not to have children is unusually strong. The second simplest, though less safe, method is to have intercourse with those who are least likely to have children. The earliest demographers remark on the relative infertility of prostitutes, and the problem of those men who prefer their services to the responsibilities of a married life with children has been a matter of concern at various times. In the seventeenth century, Sir William Petty wrote:

'Now there be in effect 112 males for 65 females yett it is found by observation that but between 30 and 40 of the teeming women are att present married, by reason the prolifick people are afraid they shall not be able to maintain the children they shall begett. . . .'

True, he was advocating provisions for the illegitimate children which might result from such a union, but that does not seriously affect the argument. When men have felt the burden of children too much and have known no means of preventing it in marriage, they have to varying extents refrained from marriage. The modern device for checking this practice would be a Batchelor Tax. In 1750, Thomas Stuart suggested:

'Oblige every Man at home to marry his whore, or pay a Smart Fine towards the support of fruitful married Poor, instead of paying Cessments towards the Maintenance of Bastards.'[1]

Nor is refraining from marriage to avoid child-birth simply an academic possibility, a method used in the past but unlikely to be taken up on a wide scale today. Precisely this method has been widely employed in the Irish Free State, where Catholicism is still a live force, over the past half-century. There the proportion of unmarried women in the age group 25–35 has nearly doubled since 1841, the proportion in the age-group 35–45 increased by nearly the same amount. The specific legitimate fertility rate remains almost exactly constant: those who marry are having as many children as ever they were. That is the hard way; birth-control is the easy way. But the experience of Ireland shows that birth-rates can decline without widespread recourse to contraceptive measures, if the motives for not having children are strong enough.

There is no need here to discuss in detail the various means of family limitation which would remain open if modern means of contraception were withdrawn. They include abortion, less frequent intercourse, intercourse in the 'safe' period, *coitus interruptus*. Apart from abortion, legislation cannot touch them. There is already stringent legislation against the first, but it is practically impossible to legislate effectively against abortions induced by the mother herself. From drinking gin to attempted killing of the embryo with a knitting needle, a whole series of ways and means exist which are used, and no doubt

[1] From *Political Arithmetic*, L. Hogben (Ed.), Allen & Unwin, 1938.

will be used whenever babies are unwanted enough for mothers to risk health and life in destroying them. The methods outlined above are the alternatives to contraception. It can scarcely be held that they are desirable alternatives, and the only good reason for withdrawing or restricting the availability of contraceptives must be an assumption that other methods would not replace them to anything approaching the same extent. To suggest that other methods might have less efficient results although they were extensively tried would hardly be a valid argument. *A reductio ad absurdum* of possible solutions to the population problem can be reached by dovetailing all the conditions under which people reproduce rapidly now. Poverty, overcrowding, and lack of knowledge of simple means of preventing birth are three of them. Given all three, people will still reproduce at Victorian rates. But the encouragement of ignorance is at least as debatable a method of promoting births as the encouragement of overcrowding.

We shall show later (Chapter V) the very wide extent of ignorance which still exists on contraceptive methods. There is a long way to go before every child is a wanted child, and there can be no doubt that the birth-rate would be considerably lower if that stage had been reached today. However, we are approaching nearer that stage, and there is always the possibility of a really effective, uncumbersome, uncomplicated, cheap contraceptive being invented which will speed up the process. It is therefore important to ask whether the provision of contraceptive information and the dissemination of propaganda may have built up a false demand, or whether a demand existed which was met by information, and still exists in those places where propaganda has not yet penetrated.

A partial answer to this question is given by history.

Up to 1870

Until the industrial revolution the family was an essential unit in the domestic economy which then existed. Goods were made at home, for use and for sale; the housewife was a craftswoman and her husband a craftsman; and the children helped in the family occupation as soon as they were of an age to do simple work with their hands.

When the Industrial Revolution began, it was therefore a perfectly natural thing[1] for husband, wife and children to move together into the new factories. The employment of women and children was not a new phenomenon. It was the unit that was new. Instead of the autonomous family working in co-operation for the good of each of its members, domestic life was broken down to an increasing extent and replaced by a new group life in which the family unit counted for nothing. Industrialization meant that the family was no longer

[1] i.e. it was no new thing for women and children to work with their hands on the same jobs as their menfolk. The introduction of women to factory work was, of course, strongly resisted.

economically necessary. The breakdown of the unity of home was accelerated by the long hours of work, and by the reversal of the previous order of things caused by the demand for cheap labour. As early as 1795, a Dr. Aikin, describing the country round Manchester, refers to the danger to domestic life arising from the employment of women and girls in the mills:

'The females are wholly uninstructed in knitting, sewing and other domestic affairs requisite to make them frugal wives and mothers. This is a very great misfortune to them and to the public, as is sadly proved by a comparison of the labourers in husbandry, and those of manufacturers in general. In the former we meet with neatness, cleanliness and comfort; in the latter with filth, rags and poverty.'

H. de B. Gibbins, who quotes this passage[1], says later, in reference to the first two or three decades of the nineteenth century:

'A curious inversion of the proper order of things was seen in the domestic economy of the victims of this cheap labour system, for women and girls were superseding men in manufacturing labour, and, in consequence, their husbands had often to attend, in shiftless, slovenly, fashion to those household duties which mothers and daughters hard at work in the factories were unable to fulfill. Worse still, mothers and fathers in some cases lived upon the killing labour of their little children, by letting them out to hire to manufacturers, who found them cheaper than their parents.'

The industrial foreground of the period is, perhaps, more familiar than the domestic background. Domestic life as it had been known for generations virtually ceased to exist for families taken up into the factories.

During this time there was a great increase in the population of England and Wales. This was *not* due to a rising birthrate, but to a declining death-rate. The Industrial Revolution certainly cannot be said to have played any part in causing this increase; but the living conditions which it created probably played a major part in retarding the downward progress of the death-rate for half a century. Except for a short period, developments in medical knowledge, sanitation, etc., kept pace with the conflicting influences of industrial life, and the death-rate continued to decline. The fluctuations in the rates of natural increase which occurred up to 1880 are almost entitrely due to fluctuations in the death-rate, and so far as industrialization can be said to have affected these trends, the effect was to cause more deaths than might have been expected without it.

The birth-rate varied only slightly, around a high level. Married women were producing as many babies as could reasonably be produced. As Sir William Beveridge put it:

'Out of every three married women under forty-five years of age in 1876, one had a child born in the course of that year and two did not. . . . If we think of the time before birth and after birth, and the numbers who had no children at all, the 1876 proportion makes wifehood for all the rest almost continuous motherhood.'

Then, around 1880, the birth-rate began to fall. With minor fluctuations it has fallen ever since, and there are no signs that it is stopping.

[1] *Industrial History of England* (Methuen, 1890).

IV—CONTRACEPTION: CAUSE OR EFFECT?

The decline in the birth-rate coincides very closely with the first big step-up in birth-control propaganda. The Bradlaugh-Besant trial is usually taken as a turning point. In 1876 a Bristol bookseller was imprisoned for publishing a pamphlet called *Fruits of Philosophy* which advocated family limitation. Charles Bradlaugh and Mrs. Annie Besant created a test case by re-publishing the pamphlet and informing the police where and when it was to be sold. The trial created tremendous attention, the pamphlet was condemned as obscene, but the decision reversed by a Court of Appeal on a point of legal procedure.

However, by the time of this trial, birth-control propaganda had been going on for over half a century. The first advertisements for contraceptives in London date back to 1776. Francis Plaice published his *Illustrations and Proofs of the Principle of Population*, in 1822, and in 1823 had three advisory handbills printed, aimed at the working classes, which advocated *coitus interruptus* and the use of a sponge. These were widely distributed. *Fruits of Philosophy* itself had been in circulation for forty years and had sold 40,000 copies before the trial sent sales rocketing up to 200,000 in five years.

There can be no reasonable doubt that families became smaller largely because parents began deliberately to limit them. But it is quite a different matter to suggest that birth-control propaganda *persuaded* people to have smaller families. Actually the Bradlaugh-Besant trial coincides so closely with the beginning of the decline as to make it look more like one of a series of symptoms of the growing self-consciousness about the family than a direct cause of family-limitation. Contraceptive information had been available for many years before and had had no appreciable effect on the birth-rate. Without some predisposition in the late seventies, it is very doubtful whether a substantial increase in publicity would have had so immediate an effect.

In point of fact, there is little reason to doubt that such a predisposition was crystallizing about this time. Many of the basic beliefs of generations past were being questioned. It was shortly before the birth-rate decline began that Darwin's *Descent of Man* was published. The emergence of an organized working class movement belongs to the decade preceding the decline. Trades Unions were legalized in 1871; the National Federation of Employers was formed in 1873. It was not only the basis of family life as it has been known for generations which was crumbling, but the whole structure of social relationship and fundamental beliefs.

Ginx's Baby

It is not surprising that, at a time when so many accepted things were being questioned, the purpose of family life should be questioned too. About the time when the birth-rate began to decline, a new

consciousness of family life as something which needs defence and explanation becomes manifest. In 1877 the book on which Engels based his *Origin of the Family* was published by Macmillan and Co. (*Ancient Society, or Researches in the Lines of Human Progress from Savagery, through barbarism to Civilization.* Lewis H. Morgan.) On a different plane Mary Sumner was laying the foundations of the Mother's Union, which held its first diocesan conference in 1887 and passed a resolution embodying as its first two principles:

'That the prosperity of a nation springs from the family life of the home.'

'That family life is the greatest institution in the world for the formation of the character of the children.'

And, on another plane still, the formation in 1877 of the Malthusian League with the object of propagating the doctrine of family limitation.

To the 1870s too, belongs the publication of a novel called *Ginx's Baby*,[1] which strikes a note, familiar enough today, but a new conception then. The novel, by a Mr. Jenkins, deals with the career of the thirteenth child—one of triplets—of Mr. and Mrs. Ginx. Mr. Ginx, feeling his family to be too large, attempts to drown the infant, but it is rescued by a nun. It grows up oppressed on all sides by society, and eventually drowns itself in the same river where its father had tried to drown it earlier on. The impact of society, as described here, strikes a peculiarly familiar note:

'Wherever he went the world seemed terribly full. If he answered an advertisement for an errand boy, there were a score kicking their heels at the rendezvous before him. Did he try to learn a useful trade, thousands of adepts were not only ready to underbid him, but to knock him on the head for an interloper. Even the thieves, to whom he gravitated, were jealous of his accession, because there were too many competitors already in their department.'

'The world seemed terribly full.' That argument, as we have shown, is very much alive today in the minds of ordinary men and women who lived through the inter-war period of unemployment. Mr. Ginx tried to solve his private over-population problem in a private way; and millions of parents are doing the same thing by less drastic means now.

Equally familiar to the present generation of parents is the situation of Britain in the 1870s, recounted by a modern historian, and satirized in 'Ginx's Baby'.

'Never was Europe closer to a general conflagration than in the early spring of 1878, when Lord Beaconsfield's Cabinet came to Parliament for six millions, ordered the Fleet to pass the Dardanelles, called out the reserves, and shed Derby and Caernarvon, the two ministers who stood for peace.' (H. A. L. Fisher: *A History of Europe.* Arnold, 1936.)

'There was general impression that English honour was at stake, and the previous Fogey Government had ordered an expedition to cross the desert and punish the Sheikh. You would never have believed what it cost if you had not seen the bill. Ten millions sterling was as good as buried in the desert, when one tenth of it would have saved a hundred thousand people from starvation at home.' (*Ginx's Baby.*)

[1] *The Eighteen-Seventies.* Essays by Fellows of the Royal Society of Literature. Ed. Harley Granville-Barker. Cambridge 1929.

Here it is not difficult to see the beginnings of the familiar current argument that all would be well with society and the birth-rate if only the government would spend in peaceful development what it spends on war.

These are just some of the pointers which suggest that, at the time when the birth-rate began to fall, people were becoming predisposed to the idea of limiting their families and might well have done so even if simple means had not become widely publicized. The birth-rate began to fall, just at the time when current trends and moods would have suggested family limitation as a logical step. That does not mean that contraception was not the means whereby limitation was effected. It does suggest that knowledge of contraception was, in considerable part, the result of a maturing demand, that the Bradlaugh-Besant trial was a symptom of the times at least as much as it was the cause of the spread of new ideas.

In considering contraception, then, it must be borne in mind that, to a large extent, birth-control as we understand it today, is a symptom of the desire to limit families. Restriction on the sale of contraceptives or the spread of information might help to increase the birth-rate, but it would not help to remove the cause of wanting to have small families.

The present survey is concerned with the cause. We have not considered it relevant to discuss public attitudes to the availability and spread of contraceptive knowledge. What is relevant, however, is the extent of ignorance which still exists, the degree to which those who use contraceptives find them efficient. For, unless legislation attempts to call a halt to present trends, the time must gradually approach when all children will be wanted children. In assessing likely future trends, the degree to which 'unwanted' children are being born today is one of the vital factors.

V. Are Families Planned?

Small Family 'System.'

The large family of the nineteenth century was an act of God. The small family of the twentieth is an act of will. These facts have led writers on population problems to speak of the Small Family System, opposing to it the lack of system which prevailed hitherto. Of course, in general terms, there is system today where before there was none. But it is very far from being a perfect system, and the number of families which have either failed to reach the size they were intended to reach by their parents, or have surpassed it, is still very large indeed.

Estimates of the proportion of parents who use some means of trying to control the size of their families vary upwards to 90%. If

this figure includes all those who at any time, however irregularly, employ any method however inefficient, it may possibly be correct. From the results of this investigation it seems certain that the proportion who use any method *consistently* is considerably smaller, and the proportion who use fairly adequate measures is very much smaller. So far as contraceptives go, complete ignorance of any measures which can be used by the woman is still widespread today.

The mother of a boy of nine, now pregnant, sharing a house in Bermondsey, made this comment on family planning:

'If people decided about that, there wouldn't be any born. It's because they don't decide that there's any population. Some people have all the luck. Oh yes, my husband and I agree. As long as he has his rations it doesn't matter how many babies he makes.'

And a young working-class mother in Chelsea said, of her experiences in hospital with her new baby:

'Some of these women, and some of them quite old, that were having their babies the same time I had Billy, they said their husbands wouldn't leave them alone, they didn't want to go out of the nursing home, some of them sobbed and cried, they didn't want to go home, for fear of starting one right away—two of them had had seven or eight children, and one or two misses as well. I've never used anything myself, my husband does. But you know, I thought it was wicked, these poor women, just had another kid and terrified out of their wits to go back to their own homes in case they should get like that again right away.'

And here is a working girl of 21 from the East End, who has already had four babies:

'Oh, there's enough babies in Poplar, if it's babies you want. I wish I knew how to stop them. The lady doctor at the clinic said, now mind you tell me when your husband's been home on leave, and I'll help you. So I went and told her he'd been home on leave. And she gave me some pills and a bottle of black medicine, and I found out they were both iron to help the baby to grow—not to stop it at all.

'We don't know how to stop 'em do we? I wish you'd tell us. We can't find out a thing in Poplar. I've heard of that woman, Marie Stopes is it? and I'm going to write to her. I've had my four a lot too quick, and I want a rest from having babies.'

In the questionnaire part of this investigation it was decided not to attempt to get a quantitative indication of the extent to which various methods are used for limiting families today. While it might be possible in an interview to obtain a true statement on the types of contraceptives used or known about, even this is doubtful. It is practically certain that we should get a very inaccurate indication of the extent to which those who knew used them, and an even less accurate indication of the extent to which *coitus interruptus* and other methods not requiring apparatus are employed. Instead, the generalized question was asked:

'*Do you think people should decide when they get married how many children they are going to have, or work it out as they go along, or leave it to chance?*'

The question is not entirely satisfactory, in that the second alternative remains somewhat ambiguous. It may, for instance, imply to some

ESESZ

people that the first child can be left to chance and the others planned. To most the first two alternatives seem to have implied what they were intended to imply, namely a choice between planning the number of children wanted at the outset, and planning them according to circumstance as the marriage progressed. The third alternative also presents some ambiguity. but this is not serious in evaluating the results. When 'leave it to chance' was chosen, it may sometimes have implied that it was no use planning, because the plan would not work, although a separate category was used for those who specifically said this. It sometimes meant that it was impossible to plan; and occasionally that it was wrong to plan. Thus, a few of those who had had experience of a breakdown in their own plan through inefficient or inefficiently used contraceptives or other measures; those who knew nothing about contraceptives or considered other methods too inefficient to be worth considering; and those who believed that the course of nature should not be interfered with; all these tended to say 'leave it to chance'.

If these ambiguities are recognized, the results show a pattern which can be explained by reference to the verbatim answers.

There was considerable difference between the replies of those who had been married a short and a long time:

	Percentage expressing this attitude among those married:		
Attitude to Family Planning	*Over 10 yrs.*	*5–10 yrs.*	*Less than 5 yrs.*
	%	%	%
Decide in Advance ..	16	18	39
Work it out as you go ..	21	27	21
Leave it to chance	41	32	28
Depends	4	3	2
Impossible to decide ..	14	17	7
No opinion	4	3	3

While a majority of all newly married couples and a majority of those married 5–10 years who give a definite opinion are in favour of planning, either in advance or as circumstances suggest, only a little over a third of those married over ten years are in favour. These figures probably reflect the relative lack of knowledge of birth-control among older women. The most important difference here is that between the younger and older couples on advance decision, in conjunction with the small proportion of newly married couples who suggest that it is impossible to decide on the number of children the marriage will produce. As we shall see later, belief in the possibility of planning a family in advance with meticulous accuracy leads to many disappointments in later years.

There was a difference in the replies from low and high birth-rate areas which is probably significant. In the low birth-rate areas 51%

favoured planning, and 24% voted for leaving it to chance; while in the high birth-rate areas only 41% favoured planning and 34% leaving it to chance. This indicates the prevalence of unplanned families in the high birth-rate areas, which is what we should expect from verbatim comments.

A similar but stronger difference was found between those who had left school at 14, and those who had had a secondary education:

Of those with a Secondary Education:

63% said families should be planned
16% said leave it to chance.

Of those with Elementary Education:

42% said families should be planned
40% said leave it to chance.

Those who favour leaving things to chance are thus most frequently found among older people, those who live in areas where the birth-rate is high; those whose educational standard is low. In fact among those groups where families are larger and knowledge of contraceptives least prevalent.

Women were then asked, if they had voted for either of the first two alternatives involving planning, whether they had definitely made up their minds about it yet themselves. 75% of the whole sample said they had. The numbers here are not large enough for further division into subgroups. But it is clear that if one quarter of those who say they favour planning admit not having reached a definite decision themselves, the real proportion of planned families must be considerably smaller than might at first appear. If we take the group married less than five years, which is most favourable to planning—nearly one quarter of the 60% who say they favour planning also admit that they have not yet made up their own minds. At the most only half the families in this group can yet be considered planned in the sense that the parents have decided on the number of children they intend to have. And this is an outside figure leaving out of account altogether any accidental breakdown there may be in putting plans into practice in the future. For one thing those who have already made a slip may favour planning and have made up their mind about their own case. Though their plan has fallen down in its early stages there is still a good possibility that their complete family may be the size they want it, so that they can still legitimately say that they favour planning and know their own plan. At a rough estimate *these results suggest that about one family in three turns out more or less in accordance with a plan made by the parents. But the proportion which turn out according to a plan made at the outset of married life, is smaller and may well be as low as one in five.*

The most revealing breakdown, however, is obtained by correlating present number of children in family with attitudes to family planning. This shows:

Attitude to Family Planning	*Percentage expressing this attitude among those with*	
	Less than 3 *Children*	3 *or more Children*
	%	%
Decide in Advance	29	13
Work it out as you go	25	12
Leave it to chance	30	48
Impossible to decide	10	18
Depends	3	3
No opinion	3	6

If this table is reduced to essentials it shows:

	Less than 3 *Children*	3 *or more Children*
	%	%
Plan	54	25
Leave to chance, no good planning ..	40	66

It is a safe assumption from these figures that a clear majority of the families with three children or more are either unplanned, or the result of plans which have not worked.

'*It's Your Fate*'

Frequent, especially amongst working mothers in the high birth-rate areas, was a sort of depressive fatalistic attitude towards having children. It was typically expressed by this East End mother:

'Well, I think it's no manner of use to decide at all, for your fate's your fate and you can't alter it.'

To many of these women the number of children to be born into their family seems as uncontrollable as the weather:

'Well, what's to be will be. You never know what's coming to you.' (Age 38, 5 children.)

'What's the use of *talking?* These things happen, don't they?' (Age 34, 3 children.)

'Well, it's no good wishing; you've to take what comes, haven't you?' (Age 38, 6 children.)

'I used to say I didn't want more than three. Oh, well, I don't know, if you fall for them you do; it's your fate.' (Age 37, 6 children.)

Frequent though this type of remark was, it must be remembered that they represent only spontaneous comment, switched to the personal from a question which only asked explicitly for general statement. The problem of whether to plan or not is meaningless to a woman who has *no* knowledge of possible means of planning, and it is quite possible that many mothers answered this question more or less at random

because they did not know what it implied. Some of these may have chosen 'Work it out as you go along' as an alternative, and thus swollen the number who appeared to favour planning although they knew nothing about it. On all counts, therefore, the proportion of three fifths of the mothers of three or more children who have not planned their families is an inside estimate.

Lack of knowledge about birth-control is explicit in remarks of this kind:

'Just leave it to chance. 'Ow can you decide?' (Age 32, 4 children alive, 2 dead.)

'I wanted one or two. I didn't bargain for five. I didn't know no better.' (Age 45, 5 children.)

'Well, I didn't want the three I've got. I suppose I'll have to have all I get.' (Age 37, 3 children.)

Between these and those who appear to have used some method of birth-control unsuccessfully, there are a number of ambiguous remarks like:

'We didn't want four. But that's how it happened. It sort of came about.' (Age 41, 4 children.)

'Well, it's what you've got, not what you want. I only wanted two at first. I knew I didn't want this one while the war was on. Well, it happens and you can't help it. (45, 3 children, now pregnant.)

'I don't really think anyone can decide a thing like that. You're always meeting people who'd like more and could only have one, and that wanted two and got eight. Children don't seem to be distributed where they ought to be, and it's nobody's fault.' (Age 35. 2 children.)

Two significant comments came from mothers of eleven children each. One, aged 43, with a baby of five weeks and an eldest child of 16:

'When I had my first, I said I wouldn't have no more. I think I've said that with all of them. But when they come it's different. I wouldn't be without one of them, and the baby's a dear little thing, though I didn't want her at first.'

And the other:

'I wanted two or three, not all the crowd I've got. I suppose we weren't of the same mind, and it takes two to be careful. I should say work it out as you go along. You never know what'll happen along in another nine months.'

'Being careful' in the language of the working mother means withdrawal, or *coitus interruptus*. It is the general phrase used in the literature of birth-control clinics and is variously and accurately described as 'even with the greatest care . . . unreliable' (*Family Planning Association*); 'of course, definitely unsafe' (*Birth-Control Advisory Bureau*) etc. 'It takes two to be careful' may simply imply that the wife's co-operation is necessary if the husband is to exercise the necessary self-control. But it is also quite widely believed that if the wife 'holds herself back'—i.e. has no orgasm—conception is unlikely, and this may be implied. However, the significant point is that even a woman with eleven children who aimed at two or three, can still speak of working things out as she goes along. This reply would have been classified with those who favour planning, and others

who use equally ineffective methods equally ineffectively may have fallen into the same group on similarly tenuous grounds.

Other women imply that, so far as their knowledge goes, control over the number of children they have is entirely up to the husband. One, aged 29, with three children and one miscarriage, said:

'Well, you know what men are when it comes to *that*. No use *talking*.'

And the investigator notes, from conversation: 'Woman seems only to have heard of female contraceptives in connection with abortion'. Again:

'Well, it's no use deciding because its more chance than anything. When your husband has been away for a long time and comes home, you gets excited and forgets yourself.'

A forty year old mother of seven:

'Well, I wouldn't have had none if I'd had my way.'

Many of those who have had children they did not mean to have, do not say whether they used any means of preventing them:

'Mine wasn't wanted. I don't think women should have children till they're thirty to thirty-five.' (Age 21, pregnant.)

'Well, it's not always them that decides. We didn't mean to start having a family till the war was over.' (Age 23, 1 child.)

'They should plan, although this one didn't come according to plan.' (Age 24, 1 child.)

Then there are those who, without specifically saying that their views are based on experience, simply remark that it's no good trying to plan a family:

'I don't think they really can plan. I feel you can't always arrange these things; you can't always be too clever.' (Age 27, 1 child.)

'I think it's a matter of chance. I don't really think anything will make a difference really. I always think that what's to be will be.' (Age 34, 1 child.)

Only a very small number of women spontaneously said that they thought there was anything *wrong* with planning. Numerically, definite feeling against family planning seems unimportant.

Clearly, if only children deliberately conceived were born today, the birth-rate would be much lower than it is. It is doubtful whether more than half the families of three or more children would contain as many if the parents knew simple and convenient ways of limiting them. That may be an overestimate; we have no accurate information about the proportion who definitely do not *believe* in planning. But the average size of family necessary to keep the population stationary is at least three; many must have more to balance those who have fewer. If anything approaching half of those who achieved or surpassed this number have only done so by 'accident' then increased knowledge of contraceptive technique is likely to bring the fertility rate down steadily for many years to come.

It seems unlikely on the face of it that *other things being equal*, the fall in fertility ascribable to increased knowledge of birth-control will be completed in 20 years time. We have in this chapter been discussing

trends in urban areas, mainly in London, where knowledge is probably more widespread than elsewhere, and certainly more widespread than in rural areas. But even if these trends were as pronounced in other parts of the country, the gap in elementary knowledge is so large, after more than half a century of propaganda, that twenty years seems a short time in which to bridge it. However, it is of interest to see what would happen if the fall in fertility did stop in a couple of decades' time. Mr. D. V. Glass has worked out an estimate which assumes that fertility rates continue to fall at a decreasing rate till 1965 and then become constant; and that mortality falls at a decreasing speed until it becomes constant some years later. If this happens, the population of England and Wales will fall by nearly 15 millions in half a century's time.

If other circumstances which at present induce parents to *want* fewer children remain constant, this is probably an optimistic estimate. The other extreme is represented by an estimate made by Dr. Enid Charles. She assumes that fertility and mortality rates continue to fall at the rate prevailing in 1933 indefinitely. In that case the population would be halved in fifty years' time, and reduced to one tenth of its present size in a century.

These projections are not predictions and are not intended to be. They are simply estimates of 'what would happen if . . .'. The further ahead the estimates are made, the less likely it becomes that the assumptions on which they are based will still be correct. The situation now, in 1945, indicates clearly enough that *unless existing motives are modified or removed, fertility rates will fall for a long time ahead.* Of course, some new invention in the contraceptive field might cause them to fall precipitously over a shorter period, and become stabilized more rapidly, but that would only make the problem worse. The object of this survey is to suggest means by which the existing motives can be modified or removed and the assumptions on which population projections are based be falsified. But it must be remembered all the time that a mere stabilization at present rates will *not* avert a falling population. At present, more people are likely to have fewer children for a long time to come. The formidable task of those responsible for population policy is to devise conditions under which people will not only stop wanting fewer children, but will start wanting more.

VI. Marriage Bases

Reasons for Getting Married

We asked women about their reasons for getting married. The question was not intended to go very deep, or to produce reliable quantitative results, but simply to give a personal background to individual cases.

However, these rather superficial verbal responses illuminate certain social attitudes and indicate some interesting group differences. Answers by length of marriage were as follows:

Reasons for Getting Married	*Percentage giving this reason among those married.*		
	Over 10 *years* %	5–10 *years* %	5 *years or less* %
Love	25	37	44
Home of own, to settle down ..	33	33	18
'The Usual'; wanted to ..	17	18	14
Children	8	14	7
Companionship	4	2	1
'Had to'	2	2	3
The war	0	0	11
Other reasons	6	2	4
Vague, evasive, forget	21	13	9

There is nothing very surprising about these numerical results. The proportion who say they married for love tails off with length of time married, and failing memory of the early days. Less than a fifth of those married during the war say they married to have a home of their own. But since only about two-fifths of the war-brides *have* a home of their own so far, and only 6% live in a house which they have to themselves, home-building reasons are naturally weaker here.

Only about one woman in ten says she married in order to have children, and many of these only mention children in conjunction with other factors.

There were group variations in the proportion of women saying they married for a home, and for love. Thus:

In the high birth-rate areas 24% said they married for love and 38% for a home.

In the low birth-rate areas 38% said they married for love and 25% for a home.

Among those with Secondary Education 42% said they married for love and 21% for a home.

Among those with Elementary Education 33% said they married for love and 29% for a home.

And there was also a slight difference between the proportions in these groups saying they married to have children—high birth-rate and elementary education saying this more.

Getting Away from Home

'To have a home' most usually meant something positive, but among the working class it often meant little more than an escape from

difficult conditions to less difficult ones. Many gave as their reason for marriage that they wanted to get away from their parents' home:

'Oh, a home and company—the sort of company I liked. My hubby's a very quiet man, and we were too rowdy at home. I wanted to be out of it.' (31D, married at 21.)

'Well, things weren't too good at home. You're more comfortable married.' (29C, married at 21.)

'To get out of my Mum's house more than anything. My Mum and Dad were always squabbling; he's fond of his pint, and he used to have more than was good for him, and that used to set them off. I wanted to get married and have a home of my own and a bit of peace.' (27D, married at 18.)

'Well, I'd left home. I'd had a rotten life at home. My chap said it was best to get married.' (27D, married at 22.)

'Well, it was my father more than anything. He was an old drunkard and he made my life a misery. I was glad to get married and be out of it.' (29D, married at 25.)

'Well, my mother died when I was three and my father married again and I had four step-sisters and one step-brother, and though my stepmother was all right, I always felt I was in the way. I suppose it was that more than anything.' (27D, married at 23.)

This sort of motive largely accounts for the differences in the proportions saying they married to have a home. Miscellaneous reasons of an equally negative nature included 'There was a flat going next to mothers'; 'I hadn't any people behind me, so I thought I might as well'; 'To avoid the call-up'; 'He worried me into it'; etc.

War-Marriages

One in ten of the war-marriages were made when they were for special war reasons. Typical comments:

'The war. You get barmy when a war's on—everybody gets excited.' (22D, married at 20.)

'The war coming along rushed us into it.' (24, married at 20.)

'There's a war on—otherwise I wouldn't have married so soon.' (23C, married at 19.)

'Well, the war and the excitement and the blitz—feeling you might be gone tomorrow.' (23D, married at 20.)

'Had I any reason? I don't know. My husband was going into the forces. Is that what you call a reason?' (21C, married at 20.)

Many courtships have been telescoped by wartime factors. For instance:

'Well, he was home on embarkation leave so we got married.' (25C, married at 23.)

'Well, in the first place he was going abroad, and we've been together a long time. So we got married, and had a short while together.' (25C, married at 21.)

'Well, we were courting four years, and engaged before the war, and when the war came along we were in a hurry and got married.' (28C, married at 24.)

'I liked him and he was called up and I knew he'd go abroad sooner or later, so we got married.' (25D, married at 21.)

'Well, we knew each other a long time, ever since we were children, and I knew he was going abroad, so we married and my parents didn't mind.' (20C, married at 18.)

'Well, he was going abroad, and we'd known each other for a long time, so we married.' (20C, married at 19.)

'The main reason was he was going abroad and I wanted him to know he'd have someone to come back to.' (18D, married at 16.)

Apart from these very early and sometimes precipitate war-marriages, and those who married to get away from their parents' homes, women answered this question in the main conventionally and briefly. Love, a home, companionship. Only a small minority mentioned children, and these usually as a second reason. Though this may seem very much the result we should expect today, the comparative lack of stress on having a family, compared with having a home, is perhaps symptomatic of the time.

Essentials of Marriage

These are the reasons people give for getting married themselves. Another survey was made among the National Panel of correspondents on the factors which they thought essential to a successful marriage. These idealistic views from a predominantly middle class, thoughtful sample, list the essentials in the following order of frequency:

Factor	*Percentage of replies mentioning this factor as essential to a happy marriage* %
Like interests	61
Tolerance, give and take	52
Affection, compatibility	30
Sufficient Money	27
Children	24
Love	23
Physical Attraction	22
Mutual Trust	21
Sexual Adjustment to each other	17
Mutual Respect	17
Similar backgrounds	13
Equality	13
Health	12
Different Interests	11
Correct Age Relationship	9

These are the things which occur to people *spontaneously*. If the same people had been asked whether they thought each of the factors an essential, many more would have answered yes. Thus, the fact that only one person in four mentions children, does not imply that the others do not think children important, but that children do not come to mind in three-quarters of all cases when they are asked to name the essentials of a happy marriage. The table is a fair index of the home set-up which a more than usually thoughtful lot of people think of as an ideal basis for marriage, and children come below the interests, character, mutual tolerance and general position of the partners in this ideal scheme.

All these indications show that, however vital children may eventually be in married life, the future of the couple as mother and father of a family does not loom very large among the reasons people take into account when they decide to marry. Probably this is no new thing; very likely a similar survey in Victorian times would have produced similar results. The results are important, not because they show any new or startling development of ideas, but because they help to place family life in its context. *People don't often marry to have children, nor does having children often form an immediate part of their ideas about married life.* They marry because they think they will get along well together, because they want a home, because they're lonely; because they're in love and because they want to settle down. Many neglected truisms need restating in a consideration of birth-rate problems. This is one of them. Usually, when a man and woman decide to marry, they do not look fifteen years ahead and see themselves with the bloom worn off and a specified number of children for whose upbringing they are responsible. Children, as a concrete proposition, come into it later; as a concrete problem, maybe not for some years. Often, as we shall show, children are planned for *when* the bloom begins to wear off, not so much in order to complete a happy marriage as to prevent the marriage from becoming unhappy as areas of common interest decrease.

One of the commonest reasons for having children at all is in itself implicitly an argument in favour of small families. Children 'hold the marriage together'; that, in essence, is one of the most frequent motives given for thinking children of great importance. A few children provide a common interest in the home when interest in each other is waning, but a lot of children are likely to provoke new tensions and difficulties. This is just one of the many ways in which a small family *seems the common-sense thing* today. Very many parents are not *prevented* from having a large family by external factors; a large family simply does not meet many of their main reasons for having children, doesn't enter into their scheme of things at all.

The Snags of Married Life

Women were asked whether there were any disadvantages about married life which they hadn't thought of before. Between 35 and 40% in all groups were able to specify some unforseen snag, but apart from war-difficulties among the more recently married, no single item was at all frequently mentioned. Points mentioned by 3% or more of any group were as follows:

Loss of Freedom	(8% of those married 5–10 years)
Work	(7% of those married 5–10 years, and 6% of those with three or more children)
Lack of money	(6% of those with three or more children)
Children	(5% of those with three or more—but only ½% of the rest)
Husband Trouble	(4% of those with Secondary Education)
Health	(3% of those married over 10 years)

These snags must be pronounced for women to mention them in answer to this question, as the quality of the verbatim comments confirms. They are the aspects of married life which women hadn't catered for, and which have made the home a considerably less contented place than they hoped and expected it would be. The relative lack of freedom, and the work involved in keeping a home are the unforeseen snags most often mentioned by any group. They are the factors which, as we shall see, mainly constitute the explicitly 'selfish' reasons for family limitation, and they are most frequently noticed by women married 5–10 years, the period when the decision whether or not to increase the family is most likely to come up for practical consideration. For about one woman in twelve, after 5–10 years of married life, the loss of freedom involved in being a wife and housewife, has assumed proportions considerably greater than she planned for; and the work of the house has assumed greater proportions for nearly the same number.

These difficulties, as well as those connected with money, are frequently linked up with children. The 5% of mothers who say specifically that children are their unexpected marriage-snag, are only some of those whose unplanned-for troubles arise mainly from this source. The unforeseen difficulties of married life would, in any case, nearly always be accentuated if there were more children.

The Unforeseen Advantages

A similar question about the advantages in married life which women had not thought of gave the following results:

Freedom	(6% of those married 5–10 years)
Children	(5% of those with three or more)
Companionship	(6% of those with Secondary Education)
	(3% of the newly-married)
Home Security, not having to earn living	(4% of those with Secondary Education)

The unexpected good points about marriage occur most frequently where their opposites are most frequently found as unexpected snags. Thus the changes in her pre-marriage routines make themselves felt after some five or six years of a wife's career—and she decides either that the restrictions on her activities are unexpectedly irksome, or that the new freedoms which marriage has given her are unexpectedly pleasant. When the family has reached three or so children, children begin to take a larger part in her life than she had thought they would, and she decides either that they make too much work, or that they bring unexpected happiness. Among the more educated especially, after the first few years, the personality of the husband becomes of more importance to the wife: either she decides she has made a mistake, or she finds the companionship of her husband unexpectedly satisfying.

These are the tension points of marriage, where the partners survey their decision in the light of experience. This question was designed only to bring out real tensions which were making lives unexpectedly unhappy, real fulfilments which were making them unexpectedly happy. Children, and the difficulties and fulfilments arising from them, come out high on both sides—though it is only in a minority of between one in ten and one in seven cases that each point affects any group seriously either way. But we can see from these results, and it is apparent from many other facets of this investigation, that children are one of the least adequately foreseen and planned-for sides of married life. While in many cases they bring unforeseen happiness, that does not necessarily lead to a desire for *more;* whereas the unforeseen tensions are exceedingly likely to cause people to *stop* having children.

Unsuccessful Marriages

Discounting war difficulties, 29% or those married 5–10 years were able to point to some disadvantages which they had not thought of before they married. These are the marriages that don't turn out as well as expected; not very much wrong in many cases, but much of what is wrong due to inadequate forethought, only a little to circumstances which could not have been weighed up earlier.

Out of these develop the broken marriages. Marriages which end in divorce do not, perhaps, matter so much from the purely numerical birth-rate point of view, as the separations and estrangements. They delay births but they do not necessarily stop them. But the bulk of unsuccessful marriages do not end in the divorce court. Many end in legal separations; many more in voluntary separation; others in a psychological separation where neither party is likely to want more children, though both still may be living under the same roof.

In order to obtain some idea of the frequency of really unsuccessful marriages, we asked women whether they thought they were right or wrong in their reasons for getting married. Between one in twenty and one in twelve in all groups except the newly-married said definitely that they thought they were wrong. One more or less total failure in twenty seems a basic minimum. All the motives of personal and social prestige point to an affirmative answer to this question, and many of those who gave an undecided reply no doubt felt far from certain whether their marriage was turning out a success. If we add half of those who were not sure enough to say definitely they were right, this would mean that about one marriage in ten must be counted a comparative failure from the wife's point of view. Even then we know, from occasional glimpses afforded in other parts of the interview, that many marriages which are far from being a positive success are excluded. A woman married for 11 years, for instance, who says she

married for 'A bit o'love. Oh, I was definitely in love', thinks quite definitely that she was right about it, yet says:

'With the children, you try to shield them from their father's anger if they do something wrong, and then he turns on you and says what were *you* doing while they were doing that? They make more trouble for you.'

Some of the breakdowns have resulted in separations, but by no means all. A woman married at 18, now 27, for example. She says: 'It wasn't love. I made a mistake. I was wrong.' About the disadvantages of married life:

'Yes, plenty. For one thing you're tied too much. I like dancing and enjoying myself, and my husband likes sitting at home.'

Asked whether she and her husband agree about family-planning:

'He don't talk much—he just says hello and goodnight.'

And after the interview:

'It wasn't till the lodger came along that I knew I was so discontented. He's just the same type as I am—he likes laughing, he likes a joke and he likes going to dances. Oh, the capers I've been at and the lies I've told my husband. The truth is I married him to spite his mother—and now I wish she'd kept him. But he's a gloomy man with never a laugh in him—just sits by the fire and says nothing. There's a girl writes to him. She's welcome to him for all I care—and yet he won't let me go to a dance if he can stop me.'

Asked how many children she would like:

'None. . . . No, two, a boy and a girl.'

We are re-stating platitudes here of course. The lack of adequate forethought with which many people enter marriage, the inadequacy of motives which bring two people together when they are young for holding them together later; these things are commonplace enough. And the domestic frictions which result when reality steps in are top laughter point in most music hall shows. But this familiar pattern has a new relevance in relationship to the birth-rate. Physical separations, legalized or private, put a stop to child-bearing. Psychological separations under the same roof are likely often to do the same thing. If something approaching one marriage in ten has gone so wrong, that the wife is ready to admit it to a stranger on first acquaintance, then the number of children who remain unborn for this reason is likely to be high. Unsuccessful marriage is, from the birth-rate point of view, a wasteage problem, just as much as infant mortality, and apparent sterility and sub-fertility.

Hitherto the chief responsibility assumed towards marriage by the State has been that of preventing its lawful dissolution, except under very stringent conditions. Where lawful arrangements can be made for husband and wife to part, it has been comparatively easy to obtain a separation order, difficult to obtain a divorce. From the point of view of the birth-rate this has meant that a broken marriage most often leads to a position in which neither partner is able to have legitimate children. Up to a point easier divorce might possibly lead to more

children, but so many complicating factors would arise that it is impossible to be sure that this would be the effect. The basic question is how to minimise the number of unsuccessful marriages, and the population problem may well lead to innovations in school syllabi in this respect. In the past, holding marriages together would perhaps have been an important part of population policy, had such a policy been necessary. But today, with increasing knowledge of contraception, even a fairly unsuccessful marriage may mean fewer children. The vital birth-rate problem is to find ways of reducing the frequency with which 'unexpected' snags arise to cause friction. Education for marriage may be part of the answer.

VII. The Place of Children in Married Life

A great deal is written about childless and one-child marriages. Titles of books on birth-rate problems—*Parents Revolt, Twilight of Parenthood*—tend to suggest, despite their contents, the idea that parents are coming to consider the bearing of children of little importance. We found no signs whatsoever in this investigation of any widespread belief that children are not important to married life. On the contrary in every group people were as unanimous as they ever are in any sort of opinion study in believing that children *are* important to the happiness of a couple.

Analysing results by length of marriage, we find no significant difference between the views of the three main groups:

Q.—*How Important do you think Children are to married life?*

Opinion	*Percentage expressing this opinion among those married*		
	Over 10 yrs.	*5–10 yrs.*	*Less than 5 years*
	%	%	%
Very important	67	63	55
Important	21	22	28
Not very important ..	7	5	6
Depends, don't know ..	5	10	11

It seems that there is little for the older people to teach newly-married couples about the importance of children. Between eight and nine mothers out of ten say definitely that they consider them important. The difference in stress between the recently married and those married over ten years seems, when the verbatim comments are considered, to be a result of experience rather than a difference of attitude at the time of marriage.

Analysis by education, and by the number of children in family, shows some variation in the distribution of those thinking children

very important, and merely important; but no significant differences in the proportion thinking children unimportant. Those with large families more often say that children are *very* important. And those with Secondary Education are more inclined than others to say that children are important rather than very important. *But there is no significant difference between views in high and low birth-rate areas.*

No stress should be laid on these slight distinctions. The important point is that everywhere the overwhelming majority of women think children necessary and desirable in married life. This trend is still further confirmed by an investigation among Mass-Observation's National Panel of correspondents. The 'revolt against parenthood' is often assumed to be strongest among the middle classes, who started to restrict their families first, have restricted them most and to whom the familiar baby-car versus baby-child argument most nearly applies. They answered a similar question as follows:

Importance of Children	*Middle Class sample*	
	Men	*Women*
	%	%
Very important	72	81
Important	2	4
Not very important	5	5
Depends	13	8
Vague, don't know	8	2

This sample includes married and unmarried people of all ages, and the results show clearly that even among a middle class, thoughtful sample, the great majority think children of very considerable importance to married life. The presence of middle-aged spinsters and bachelors in the sample does not appreciably affect the results; they are just as convinced of the importance of children as married people.

The fact that more of this sample say that children are very important is probably due almost entirely to the different technique adopted. In a verbal interview the answer to a question is frequently confined to a phrase or two, whereas the written replies of correspondents discuss their views in detail. Probably if those who answered the verbal question with some such phrase as 'Oh, they're important all right' had been pressed further, many of them would have indicated stronger feelings.

There is, then, no indication whatsoever of any important trend towards not wanting children at all. As we shall see later this fact is fully substantiated by other data in this study. It can be taken as a fundamental assumption on which any population policy and any further attempt to discover the reason for declining fertility must be based. People have not yet reached a stage at which the idea of marriage without children is contemplated *as an ideal* by any but a tiny minority.

What's Marriage Without Them?

The quality of the verbatim comments shows that these replies represent no mere formal acceptance of the necessity of children to complete a marriage. Answers like the following abounded:

'They're the main thing.'

'They're the reason for getting spliced, aren't they?'

'Oh, they're all of it. It's not married life if you don't have kids.'

'I don't think it's anything without children.'

'I don't think there's anything in life without children.'

'Every married couple should have children. That's how much I think children are important.'

Keeping the Home Together

From the mother's point of view, and more particularly from the working class mother's, far the most frequent form of spontaneous comment concerned the importance of children in keeping couples together, and reducing friction in the home. A considerable number of these remarks appeared to be based on personal experience:

'Now I do really think they're very important, it brings man and wife together. I know there'd be a lot of marriages broken up if there wasn't any children. You might say cross words to one another but children keep you together. You're not so likely to fly at one another. At the back of your mind you're always thinking well you mustn't keep on, for the children's sake. They get a bad impression, that's what I always think.'

'They can make a home and they can break a home, too. I don't think I should have stayed with my hubby if it hadn't been for the thought of the children.'

Others were less specific, but it is very widely felt that children help to create a congenial atmosphere between husband and wife:

'Oh, very important. It's the children keep the home together. Without kids people get apart—there's nothing to keep them together.'

'Very. They keep you together. You wouldn't put up with a lot if it wasn't for children.'

'I think sometimes if it wasn't for the children that you wouldn't keep together.'

Again, especially among the working class, wives feel that children steady their husbands and make them fonder of home:

'I think they're very important in lots of ways. It's the children who make the home. I think they count a lot in married life. The husband gets attached to the home. Otherwise he finds every excuse for going out in the evenings.'

'I don't think you'd be steady without them—not to make marriage last. The men would soon be running after other women. It's often children that steadies them.'

'Everything. They keep you together. Without children married life is all right for a while, but after a while you get tired. It keeps a man and wife together. I know the first thing mine does when he comes home is to ask how Deanna's been, and on Sunday the first thing he does is to get a pram while I dress Deanna and he takes her out for a walk while I get the dinner ready.'

One point of importance which emerges from these replies is the fact that, although most people believe children to be vital to married

life, they do not necessarily believe it desirable to have children in the first few years. The dominant conscious motive, of having children to keep interest on the marriage alive, leads naturally in the direction of starting a family when life alone together gets monotonous.

Obvious

All this represents no very startling discovery, but the most 'obvious' facts need assembling and interpreting in the light of forthcoming developments. Among other things, population policy will probably involve an attempt to change basic attitudes which have hitherto been accepted without question and without examination. The whole question of why people have children at all needs examination, eventually at a far deeper level than the present study attempts. But some of the more superficial motives and fulfilments can be marshalled now. The outstanding fact to be taken into account is this: for the most part, today, *parents have children for the parent's sake, not for the child's or the State's, or because they think it is the duty of parents to bear children. Except for some Catholics there was no sign in this survey that bearing children is considered anything other than a purely personal concern, and the main explicit reasons today, for thinking children important, involve essentially bearing no more than a single child.* That is to isolate the unisolatable; unconscious motives and those incompletely understood by the parents themselves of course play a vital part. Maternal and paternal feeling will no doubt ensure many fair-sized families always. But 'maternal instinct' has not prevented drastic reductions in family size in the past. The home can never again be what it was when parents and children worked together. More and more home life becomes a voluntary communal association. There can be little doubt that this trend will be accentuated by future developments in the social services. The birth-rate problem itself suggests that the State should take many more of the burdens of parenthood from the parents' shoulders. A far wider provision of nursery schools may well occur. But the more children are taken out of the home, the less important will they be as a common and binding interest between husband and wife. While external motives for not having children may be reduced, private motives for having them may be reduced as well, and the net result be imperceptible.

Here, as elsewhere, one conclusion is inescapable. Unless the whole motivation of childbearing is changed, no social improvement on earth can be guaranteed to increase family size. When women bear children because they feel it is good that children should be alive, a direct relationship between social amenities and family-size may be established. As things stand today, first children are mostly born for the sake of the parents, second children often for the sake of the first—to keep it company—and third children often in the hope that

they will be of a different sex from the first two, or by mistake. The inter-relation between this sort of motive, and the sort of motive for child-bearing which may be encouraged by social measures, is far too complicated for anyone to foresee the likely net results. Social improvements in themselves lead to the likelihood of less marital friction, more opportunity for husband and wife to find other mutual pleasures than children. They may increase the scope for mutual pleasures and reduce the desire for children, if attitudes remain as they are today. A man may have more desire to be in the home in a Portal house than a Poplar tenement. But his wife may find it less essential to have children in order to hold his interest in the home. Nursery schools, creches and labour-saving gadgets may reduce the work a mother must do, but they will also increase the time she has to spend with her husband outside the home, the attention she can devote to him inside. And that may mean that couples, not homebound anyway as so many are today, will see more disadvantages and fewer advantages in having children. The standard of living may be raised, but that again will reduce friction in the home and enable couples to devote more time to one another.

While the reasons for having children are predominantly 'selfish', there is always the possibility that these 'selfish' desires may find other channels of fulfilment. Nearly all the likely social measures for increasing the fertility rate represent a continuation of trends which have been a feature of the period over which the birth-rate has steadily declined. By themselves these social improvements only provide conditions under which it is easier and pleasanter to have a large family. At the same time they provide conditions under which it is easier and pleasanter to do all the other things to which people are devoting their time and energy instead of having an extra child today. They do not begin to tackle the problem of creating the *desire* for larger families, except in so far as it may be stimulated by simplification. If we consider only the present generation, simplification might well produce more children because it would be a *change* of circumstance and environment. That is the possibility with which this book largely deals. But in the next generation the new environment will be the accepted standard, and, unless basic desires have changed, people may well find different means of using new opportunities than having extra children. A child-allowance of, say, 15/- a week, might be enough on its own to produce more children from parents who remember when there was no child allowance. A new home may produce more children from those who have lived in a Bermondsey flat. But when these conditions become standard, it may be found that the increase is temporary and confined to a generation who have known change.

These facts and possibilities must be stated before the real meaning of the results of this investigation is clear. When a mother is asked whether there is anything she thinks would make her want more

children, her mind naturally turns to all the things which are wrong with her domestic life now. If by some miracle these difficulties could be removed overnight; if the mothers of Poplar could each be given a little house with a garden and the middle class mothers of Hampstead be provided with teams of domestic helps tomorrow; then, perhaps, the birth-rate would rise rapidly for a time. But these things will come gradually. There will be no sudden change from bad to good which will transport individual mothers into their private and simple utopia. So when we find, for instance, that well over half of newly married wives think that having the sort of house they like would change their ideas about the size of family they want, this fact must be interpreted with the utmost caution. First, few will find their dream-home in one move. Secondly, in many cases it will be these mothers' children, not themselves, who will be parents when dream-houses are available. By then standards will have changed. If you give a man £1,000 today, he may do with it what he said he would do yesterday. But if, over a period of years, he gradually gets around to the position in which £1,000 is available to him, his ideas on its disposal may have changed completely. The same applies to the speculations of mothers discussed in the present survey. At best they represent what might happen if the new conditions were suddenly, miraculously there tomorrow. They show the tensions which exist over children, and it is important that these tensions should be removed. But making it easier to have children will only be effective if the desire is there too.

VIII. Social Attitudes to Large Families

'The best argument I know against marriage
Is other people's children in a railway carriage'

(*London Opinion*, Oct. 1944).

The small family of two or three is today the accepted, natural thing for parents to have and to want. As with any other fashionably accepted norm, a deviation is considered strange, and may be pitied, despised, distrusted, ridiculed in turn. A Lancashire housewife of 53 writes of her personal experience of people's attitude to large families:

'My own opinion is that people wish to have a small family on account of public opinion which has now hardened into custom. It is customary—and has become so during the last twenty-five years or so—to have two children and no more if you can avoid it. A family of five or six children loses in prestige and, some think, in respectability. It is on behalf of their children that parents feel this most keenly. If anyone doubts this let him walk along a seaside promenade with five or six children of varying ages and see the attention they attract. Some years ago I sat in a train and heard a woman exclaim to her daughter: 'Look at that lady on the platform with six children! If I had six children I would never take them out.' The daughter remarked charitably: 'Perhaps they aren't all hers.'

VIII—SOCIAL ATTITUDES TO LARGE FAMILIES

Recently in a bus queue a young man said to his girl: 'See that lady with the child in her arms, she has another who can only just walk, and third of about four or five' (Actually they were a little older) 'Isn't she well supplied!' Inside the bus, the conductor said in an amiable way 'You ought to be allowed free on the bus with this lot.' Fortunately the woman had a sense of humour for she remarked to the elder child: 'It's a good thing we didn't bring the others.'

Two is certainly the correct number of children in a British Family. People do not approve of 'only ones', besides one may be deprived of an only child by death. With two, things are more certain. Nobody seems to desire three children, and I know of only five families with three children. One of these mothers, said to me: 'I was so ashamed when the third was expected, I wouldn't go out if I could help it.' This is an extreme case perhaps, but I have heard of others similar.

In the letters to the doctor, several women write of their own experiences after raising a family larger than the accepted norm. Here is the case of a mother of four:

'I am the mother of four young children and I might add that they are all very bonny infants, and therefore in no way to be deplored. *But* if you could only *see and hear* how we, their parents, are condemned, pitied and ignored in turn by worthy(?) citizens, and even our own relatives.

'We have been called lustful and irresponsible producers, when in actual fact we are two young people very much in love, the *dreadful* result of which is our four beautiful young children. We cannot, by many standards, afford these children at all, but then I, for one, believe that courage and self-sacrifice are more important by far than wealth. The people who have children and can afford them cannot possibly know the wonderful feeling of achievement that follows when one can see ones children growing daily more lusty, and knowing that it is because their parents are willing to give up personal ambitions and selfish pleasures for their sakes. How I smile when young women friends pity me my lost figure, and deplore the fact that I never go out in the evenings. . . . I fully believe that selfishness, as a result of the last war is at the root of the trouble which created the fashion of having small families.'

Large families today are considered old-fashioned at best, at worst somehow indecent:

'I think at one time too it was thought more fashionable and "refined" to have only one or at most two children. Only the unintelligent poorer classes bred prolifically.' (Housewife, 39.)

'Fashion affects some better-off women who consider a large family old-fashioned or Victorian, although they could afford both time and money.' (Army Captain.)

'An idea that has been about for, say, twenty-five years that one child (possibly two children) is/are enough, with the result that people are afraid of their neighbours' criticisms if they have long families.' (Secretary, 41.)

'Vague social feeling almost of immorality in having a lot of children.' (Telephone Engineer, 30.)

The old social attitude which considered it immoral to restrict families is giving place to an attitude which considers it immoral *not* to restrict them. A father writes of his wife, who has had five children and is expecting a sixth:

'I am sufficiently egoist to say "to hell" with what the neighbours say. But what misery the wife suffers by those nasty loud remarks, not to her, but at her, concerning rabbits and their habits etc. She says she feels able to walk about freely now, but does query if those that pass these sorts of remark are sufficiently interested in these problems.'

But not all feel able to brave the neighbours' comments. Here is a mother of two small children:

'I am a young mother (under thirty). I have a girl and a boy which my husband and myself adore. We always wanted a family and our ideas were sorted out before marriage. Why not? It makes things easier and marriage the real thing.

Directly I had my little boy (my second child) people and relatives said "One of each, how nice, now you won't want any more." So far so good, but I wouldn't mind one more child, preferably a girl (boys wet too much).

Yes, three or four children is considered vulgar and quite out of date. One hears these things. Three's a crowd and looks it when all stagger on a bus. People stare and their faces tell one they feel sorry for you. I guess a mother does look harassed sometimes.'

As a conscious factor restricting family-size, the social attitude to large families does not loom large, and it is mostly found among the middle class. But it is there as constant background, forming pre-marriage attitudes and helping to turn decisions in the fashionable direction. An older woman, with four grown children of her own, believes that large families will have to be made the fashion before women will start bearing more than one or two children themselves:

'I would like to say first that it must be the fashion to have a family. As the world knows a woman will do anything to be in the fashion. Every woman book-cover should have a happy mother with her pretty baby, posters showing fathers out walking with their boys, on a holiday, in the garden, always with the children to the front. With it there must be help to rear them, with a nice house, extra money and help with the work, and not to look down on them as has been the fashion for so many years.'

This is one of the first tasks of any population policy, to popularize the idea of large families and break down the purely fashionable motives for restricting numbers to one or two children, or three at the outside. At present the parents of four or more often have to contend with a lowering of social status over and above the lower economic status which a large family brings. If this attitude is replaced by one which considers it not only decent and proper to bear more children than a minimum, but a positive contribution to the community, some of the groundwork for larger families will have been done. Other countries have their 'Leagues of Large Families', giving communal purpose to those who have many children and devoted to propagating the idea that big families are desirable. Organization of this sort may not get very far by itself, while the fashionable size is also so frequently the sensible size. But it will be a start. It will help towards a change of attitude, although much more may be needed before this is translated into a change of habit.

Having Children after 35

Again we found a feeling almost of shame among some women in the 35–45 age group about the mere idea of having children at that age. A working class woman of 37, with three children of whom the

youngest is four, said when she was asked why she didn't want any more:

'My Gawd! I don't want no more, me at my age!'

And another, of the same age, with three children, of whom the youngest is nine and the eldest fourteen:

'We've managed very well up to now, but I shouldn't want any more now—I'm thirty-seven next birthday—you're thinking of getting the kids started in life—you're not thinking about more babies, it's not the time.'

Those with children who have left school, and more particularly those with an adult child, often think it would be absurd for them to contemplate another. A woman of 43, with five children between the ages of 16 and 24:

'I couldn't. Why, my boy that's with me is sixteen, and I've got grandchildren. All that's done with for Granny.'

And another with four children between the ages of five and twenty:

'Well, when you've got a girl of twenty you leave such things to the younger. I wouldn't fancy having a baby now, not with my girl being turned twenty years.'

A 38-year old woman who married at 18, and has four children, youngest eleven:

'Well, when you got a girl eighteen and engaged to be married, it's no time for mamma to start that sort of thing. No, I feel that's all done with now—be looking forward to the Change next.'

And a 36 year old mother of three, eldest fourteen:

'When your eldest is as old as mine—she's fourteen—you somehow feel you don't want to go back and start having more babies.'

Perhaps the background idea which helps to build up this attitude is best summed up by a woman of 41, who had her five children all in ten years and stopped at the age of 29:

'I wouldn't want no more at my time of life. There's one or two round here, sons grown up and they're having another baby. I reckon those don't know when to stop. I think it's disgusting. I don't fancy the idea at all.'

From an L.C.C. Emergency Maternity Home in the country, where London mothers are evacuated to have their babies, comes a report of an East London mother who was so teased by the other expectant mothers for having another child at over forty, that she broke down and had to be moved:

'She explained that Matron had had her over from the hostel because she was so depressed—the other young girls were so unkind to her and said her husband ought to have his brain tested.'

She herself was quite content to have the baby, her eighth, although she hadn't expected it.

As well as the remarks of elder women, there are many comments from younger ones who have had two or three children in fairly rapid

succession and feel 'you want to get all that over while you're young'. They strengthen the general conclusion. An atmosphere of social disapproval exists on the subject of having children roughly after the age of 35–37. Taken in conjunction with the present trend towards spacing families, an average marriage age of 25, and the desire of many couples to have a year or two to themselves before they embark on a family, this means that for many the maximum number of spaced births may be only two or three before it becomes vaguely undignified or indecent to have more. Again, the whole social trend works towards the 2–3 family, and fashion will have to be changed before behaviour has the necessary scope to alter if it wants.

IX. Unwanted Children

There was little evidence in this survey of the existence of really unwanted and resented children, though there was ample evidence of numerous families which had accidentally exceeded the number originally desired by anything from one to seven children. In many of these cases the mother had not changed her mind about the number of children she would have *liked* to have, but the general attitude was 'you wouldn't be without them once you've got them'. Probably the majority of unwanted conceptions become more or less wanted children. The authors of *The Peckham Experiment*, story of the Peckham Pioneer Health Centre, found that 'most babies are wanted after a certain stage in the pregnancy.[1]

But this fact doesn't get us far. Unwanted *pregnancies* are the point, and will be more and more the point as knowledge of means of restricting families spreads and more efficient methods are devised. We can get no reliable clue to the extent of unwanted pregnancies from the present survey, since memory is certainly clouded by the change of the accidental conception to the wanted child. All we can say is that there are a great many; they may well account for as much as half of all the families of over three. At the Peckham Centre the possibility of following the mothers' mood from the beginning existed. 59 babies were conceived after their parents had joined the Centre. Of these conceptions:

6 were actively resented
26 were accidental but more or less readily accepted
30 were deliberate

That is to say, more than half would presumably not have been conceived then had the parents been able to prevent it. Furthermore,

[1] *The Peckham Experiment*, Innes H. Pearce and Lucy H. Crocker, Allen & Unwin, 1943.

these children were those of parents belonging to a family club, and of the wished-for babies:

10 were born of parents who had previously determined to have no, or no more, children, or not to have children until after some looked for but uncertain improvement in their financial position

3 were born of parents whose marriage had not been consummated when they joined the Centre.

6 were born of parents who were previously infertile and who responded to treatment.

The authors thus attribute the birth of 19 of the 30 wanted children directly to the Centre. It looks as if only about one in ten of the 59 babies would have been born, at any rate until some time later, if these parents could have prevented them and if they had not had the advice and atmosphere of the Centre. There is a long way to go yet, under present social conditions, before all children are wanted before they are born.

X. The Size of the Family Wanted

An investigation has been made by the British Institute of Public Opinion into what people consider to be the ideal size for a family (results published in *News Chronicle* 21.2.44). A National cross-section was questioned, both sexes, married and unmarried.[1] The results show that if families were distributed throughout the country in the sizes which the cross section consider ideal, the average family size would be exactly three children.

This 'ideal' is a little above replacement level, though only a little. But there are numerous factors which indicate that these figures give an over-optimistic idea of what would happen if everyone today were to feel they could have their ideal family. First of all, we know that many are not able through sterility or sub-fertility to have as many children as they want. Secondly, a national cross-section would include a number of people belonging to a generation where family-sizes were much bigger and who, though past having families themselves, would consider a larger family ideal than would the parents of today.

Thirdly, and most important of all, we know from our own investigation that those who already have big families tend to say they want the number of children they have got, although many have not planned to have that number. It is exceedingly likely the same thing would happen if women were asked about the ideal family size. It is difficult for a woman who has herself had five or six children, who may well be running round the investigators' feet as she puts the question, to say that she considers two or three the ideal size for a family. This

[1] We understand that this question was used for comparison with a previous investigation. It was not intended to provide an absolute value for the number of children wanted.

factor almost certainly raises the proportion who say they consider families of over three children ideal and may have raised it very considerably.

In the B.I.P.O. investigation nearly one in three people said they considered a family of four or more children ideal. *In our investigation in no group did more than one woman in ten say they would like to have more than three children unless they had already got more than three* (*vide* Tables, Appendix II).

Despite these factors, we did not consider it of great value to repeat the B.I.P.O investigation for the present sample. The B.I.P.O. results show clearly enough that even if people are questioned on the ideal family-size, unrelated to current difficulties, even if last generation parents are included in the sample, and even if we assume that everyone who says they think a large family is ideal, says so because they really think it and not because they have got one—still the average family wanted is only three children.

Two alternative approaches were possible. One was to ask women how many children they would like to have if all their present difficulties were solved. The other was simply to ask them how many they would like to have, without qualifications. We considered the former presented too hypothetical a situation for meaningful results; if it showed that women wanted more children than the ideal family-size of the B.I.P.O. investigation it would simply mean that they were thinking in terms of Utopia; otherwise it would simply give for a selected group the same sort of results as the B.I.P.O. figures gave for a national sample. We therefore asked women how many children they would like to have:

The results showed that:

48% of those married over ten years

45% of those married 5–10 years

16% of those married less than five years

and 54% of those with three or more children

said they would like to have the number of children they had already.

Reliable results indicating the size of family people would really like to have cannot be obtained if those who say they want the number they have got are included. We know that many children are still accidental, and we have also shown that most 'unwanted' conceptions become 'wanted' children. So, on *a priori* grounds, we can say that many of the mothers of larger families probably would not have had families that size if they had had their way, although they are not averse to having a large family now they have got it.

Further, the verbatim replies show that many who specify the size of family they already have, simply indicate a reinforced decision not to make any more mistakes—'Three's enough'; 'Four's enough'; 'I don't want any more now,' etc.

If this is not sufficient indication, the conclusion is reinforced by the fact that *no fewer than* 15%, *or nearly one sixth, of those married over ten years, when asked how many children they would like to have, said they would like fewer than they had already got. And one in twenty of those married* 5–10 *years said the same.* This is just a partial reflexion of the number of unplanned-for children.

If we consider only those married over ten years, ignore the replies of those who say they want the number of children they have got and take only those who specify a number greater or smaller than their present family, we shall probably obtain an underestimate of the number of children these women would have liked. For many of those with large families may have wanted them. Against this, many of those with *very* large families who say they would like fewer may well have revised their ideal number in an upwards direction, and so bring the total up from where it would have been if unplanned-for children did not arrive.

If, on the other hand, we take the newly-married (five years and under) couples and ignore those who say they want the number they have got, we shall probably obtain a slight over-estimate, because they have only got one or two children and we shall be eliminating women who want very small families. However, since the proportion in this group who say they want the number they have got is small, the under-estimate will not be large.

In replying to this question, women either:

1. Specified a definite number.
2. Said they would like a definite number *or one more.*
3. Said they would like the number they had got.
4. Gave vague replies such as that they'd like not to have many, or that they didn't know how many they'd like.
5. Said they wanted a child of another sex.

The procedure adopted in working out the average family-size wanted was as follows. Those in groups 3 and 4 were ignored and proportions in the various groups recalculated without them. Those in group 1 were given the number they said they'd like. Those in group 5 were given their child of another sex. Half of those in group 2 were assumed to decide on the higher number rather than the lower. And all those who said they would like over three children were assumed to have five.

On these assumptions:

There is no difference between the number of children women with small and large families would like.

There is no difference between the number of children women with Secondary and Elementary Education would like.

The average family-size wanted in each of these four cases is 2·7, which is below replacement level. On all counts this is a *very* optimistic estimate of what would actually happen if all families today were efficiently planned and controlled. The key group for the future is those married less than five years, and we have already shown that discounting those in this group who say they have already had as many children as they want, leads to an under-estimate. Further, if some new method of contraception enabled everyone to keep their families within the limits they desired, there would still be sterile and sub-fertile women who would not be able to have as many as they wanted. Even if everybody felt able to have the number they would *like*, the average would probably not exceed 2·5 among any group, and might well be considerably lower throughout.

These results show that except for older and younger women there is no appreciable difference in the number of children women would *like* corresponding to the actual difference in the number the various groups *have* today. The differences are mainly due to the efficiency with which they limit their families to the number desired. It would, however, in our view, be a mistake to put the differential birth-rate almost entirely down to differences in knowledge of contraception. While the working class would like to average about the same number of children as the middle class, there is considerable evidence that they do not care as much about keeping within these limits. This probably accounts for a large number of the 'accidental' conceptions among the less educated.

The Family of Two

Childless families are not wanted on any appreciable scale, except by those who have already had a lot of children and wish they hadn't. Only about one woman in fifteen would like to have a one-child family.

By far the most popular family-size is two children, which is the number three out of five of the newly-married couples would like. The proportion who would like more than three children declines rapidly down the scale of length of marriage, and only 8% of those married less than five years want as many as this.

The newly-married are the least decided. Though they incline to want very small families more than those who have been married longer, they often say they would like 'two *or* three'. But even if we assume that half of them eventually decide on the higher number, the difference remains.

The fact that those who have been married a long time want families of over three much more often than the recently married, no doubt partly reflects a change in fashionable family-size. But it is also partly a reflexion of the fact that those who already have a lot of children tend to say they want a lot, even though they specify a smaller number

than they have. Thus, a slight decrease in the *desire* for families of over three children in the past 12–15 years or so has probably accompanied increasing knowledge of contraceptive-technique—affecting the downward trend of the birth-rate.

Tables showing the actual responses of the various groups to this question are included in Appendix II. Re-arranged and expressed as percentages of those giving a definite reply, results were as follows:

No. of children these women would like to have:	*Percentage of women who give a definite reply, other than the number of children they already have, who say they would like this number among these groups:*						
	Married			*Children*		*Education*	
	Over 10 yrs.	*5–10 years*	*5 and under*	*Under 3*	*3 or more*	*Secondary*	*Elementary*
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
None	4	1	0	0	11	1	2
One..	6	6	7	7	4	5	7
Two	48	49	61	57	44	58	53
Three	16	30	24	24	16	22	24
Over three ..	26	14	8	12	25	14	14
	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Or one more ..	16	17	26	24	9	20	23
Average no. of children women in this group would like ..	2.9	2.7	2.5	2.7	2.7	2.7	2.7

Current Trends Reflected in this Material

The constitution of the sample of women with Elementary and with Secondary Education by length of marriage is very similar, and the average age of each group is the same, 32. A comparison of the average number of children per family so far is therefore valid and will reflect the likely differences between completed families.[1] Among the whole sample:

The average number of living children in the families of those with Secondary Education is .. .. 1·2

The average number of living children in the families of those with Elementary Education is .. .. .. 1·9

[1] The fact that there are likely to be a greater proportion of women with no children and Secondary Education working outside their homes, and so not adequately represented in this sample, only accentuates the differences mentioned here.

X—THE SIZE OF THE FAMILY WANTED

Since we know from information on the spacing of children (Chapter XI) that women with Elementary Education tend to go on having children over a longer period than those with Secondary Education, the difference in family-size would probably be even more pronounced if we considered only completed families. The difference is also reflected in the relative size of the average family of these women's mothers:

The average number of children in the families of the mothers of women with Secondary Education was .. 3·6

The average number of children in the families of the mothers of women with Elementary Education was .. 5·5

The trends in high and low birth-rate areas are also reflected in a marked way in the last generation families, which average 6·0 children in the high birth-rate boroughs, 5·0 in the low birth-rate boroughs. And twelve years decline in the birth-rate is reflected in the average family-size of the last generation among women of this generation married for various periods:

The average number of children in the families of the mothers of women married over ten years was .. .. 5·5

The average number of children in the families of the mothers of women married 5–10 years was .. .. .. 5·0

The average number of children in the families of the mothers of those married five years or less was .. .. 4·5

The average age of women in the first group is 38—the third, 26—a twelve years difference which would, on average, be the same as the difference for their mothers.

General Conclusions

1. Whether the problem is looked at from the point of view of ideal family-size or from the more personal one of the number of children married women would like to have, there is no evidence that parents today *want* enough children to replace the population.
2. There is a considerable difference between the number of children in the families of comparable samples of more and less educated women, and there is a difference of nearly two children in the average family-sizes of these women's mothers. But there is no difference in the number of children the women would like to have.
3. At first sight this seems to lead to the conclusion that the differences in family-size between more and less educated women are almost entirely due to the latter knowing less about contraceptives. But from the verbatim comments it seems probable that an important reason is that the less educated *care* less about having an extra child.
4. We conclude that, although the popular assumption of a 'revolt' against large families concentrated among the more educated

part of the population is not entirely without foundation, it is a very misleading one. The most that can be said is that the more educated hold their ideas more firmly. Generally speaking, there is no evidence that the *desire* for small families is more frequent among one group than the other; only that the conviction is somewhat stronger.

5. Even if every married woman felt able to go ahead and have the number of children she would like, if no marriages proved infertile and if half of those who now want two *or* three children were to have three, the population would still not replace itself.

6. Assuming that contraceptives become progressively more simple to use, cheaper, more widely known and available, and more efficient, the *only* way of preventing the population from declining is to change *desires*. The figures we have given are high, because we asked women how many children they'd *like*, not how many they thought they'd be able to have. In our estimation making it easier to have large families will not by itself bring the birth-rate permanently up to replacement level, even in conjunction with an almost complete elimination of wastage through infertility, miscarriages, infantile mortality, etc. The whole tone of replies suggests that, at present women would be quite satisfied to have an average family of around 2·5 children. We do not believe, from the general attitudes expressed, that this level is likely to be greatly affected by increased conveniences alone. Making it convenient to have children might *temporarily* raise the birth-rate above replacement level. It would encourage those who don't feel able to have as many children as they would like to have them; and at the same time leave those who do not effectively control the size of their family with more children than they want. But a rise in the birth-rate to replacement level by these means would mean that the population was relying on 'accidental' conceptions to keep going. As accidental conceptions become fewer, it would fall again below replacement.

7. We therefore conclude that any permanent solution to the problem will involve changing people's outlooks rather than the facilities for having children. But improvement of facilities alone may have an appreciable effect in the immediate future, and might even provide a temporary solution. The rest of this report is devoted to discussing, firstly, the problems involved in making it easier to have large families, and secondly, possible means of making people *want more children than they do now*. A little of the latter problem is solved by each of the former. But in our view big programmes for simplifying the business of having large families are unlikely to provide any permanent solution, unless they are initiated in conjunction with a programme for changing people's minds.

XI. Spacing and Fecundity

Although this investigation was not planned to give information on the spacing of children, it became evident after analysis of results that this information was of considerable importance in interpreting other trends.[1] Results were therefore obtained from available data, which gave reliable *comparative* but approximate absolute figures. Since it is the comparative trends in various groups with which we are mainly concerned in this study, these results serve the present purpose.

Birth of First Child

Spacing of births, and the time which elapses between marriage and the birth of the first child, has been considerably affected during wartime by special factors largely outside the parents' control. In the figures given below for differences between education and number-of-children-in-family groups, those married under five years are omitted.

Group	*Percentage in this group having their first child[2] after:*	
	Up to 1½ years	*1½ years and more*
	%	%
Those married over 10 years ..	59	41
„ „ 5–10 years ..	60	40
„ „ under 5 years ..	62	38
Those with 3 or more children ..	75	25
„ „ under 3 „ ..	47	53
Those with Secondary Education ..	45	55
„ „ Elementary Education	65	35

[1] The information available was the year of marriage of the mother and the age on last birthday of the children. This gives the interval between the births of two children to within a year by simply subtracting the age of the younger child from that of the elder.

But the interval between marriage and the birth of the elder child can only be determined within two years. The greater part of the investigation was completed between the beginning of May and the end of August 1944; for purposes of calculation it was assumed all interviews were made in June 1944. Then a mother married in 1940 having a first child two years old may have been married in January 1940 and not have have had a child until June 1942; or have been married in December 1940 and had a first child in July 1941. In the first case the interval is two-and-a-half years, in the second only six months.

It was assumed therefore that when an interval of n years was found by adding the age of the first child to the date of marriage and subtracting it from 1944, in half the cases this indicated an interval of between $n-1\frac{1}{2}$ years and $n-\frac{1}{2}$ years; and in half the cases an interval of between $n-\frac{1}{2}$ years and $n+\frac{1}{2}$ years.

This simple rule is complicated for the interval ½—1½ years by the fact that children are not normally born during the first nine months of marriage. A mathematical calculation shows however that for the particular case of an investigation done in June the rule can be applied also to this interval; for in this case there are nine possible months of marriage which could produce a child in this interval, and there are also nine months in which the child could possibly be born.

The rule assumes, of course, that it is equally likely for a marriage to take place and a child to be born in any month of the calendar year. Illegitimate children, and children born less than nine months after marriage were assumed not to exist, except when there could be no doubt as to the facts. The figures are therefore only approximate for the interval between marriage and birth of the first child; but the error should not be great.

[2] Including known illegitimate children.

From these results it can be concluded that:

1. There is no perceptible difference over the past twelve years or so in the length of time people wait before having their first baby.
2. Those who have small families tend to have their first baby considerably later than those with large families.
3. The more educated wait considerably longer than the less educated before they have their first baby.

So far as the last two points are concerned, this is very much what we might expect. The first point, however, suggests that the decline in fertility is probably not due, in recent years, to any tendency to wait longer than was previously the case before having a first child.

Wartime factors, which we know are encouraging some women to have their first child earlier than would otherwise have been the case—and which we suggest are partly responsible for the higher birth-rate recently—may blur over any difference there would have been in the married-under-five-years group. But on the whole one would expect this tendency to be cancelled out by the tendency, which we know also exists, to put off having children longer than would otherwise have been the case during the earlier period of the war, added to the separation of husbands and wives which makes it impossible for many war-brides to have their first children as soon as they want them. It seems *exceedingly improbable that a greater interval between marriage and the birth of the first child has been an important factor in lowering fertility over recent years.*

Intervals Between Children

When we consider the spacing of children, results are more surprising.

Group	*Percentage of gaps between children of women in this group falling within the following times:*	
	Up to 3 years %	*3 years and over* %
Those married over 10 years ..	46	54
„ „ 5–10 years ..	46	54
„ „ under 5 years ..	57	43
Those with 3 or more children ..	50	50
„ „ under 3 children ..	28	72
Those with Secondary Education ..	43	57
„ „ Elementary Education	46	54

The difference between the gaps favoured by those married under five years and those married more than five years is simply due to

the fact that it is impossible to be married less than five years and have two children with a gap of much over three years between them.

The children of smaller families have a very considerably larger age-gap between them than do the children of larger families. At first sight this would seem to indicate less family-planning among larger families. But when we consider the results by education this does not seem to be the case. *There is no significant difference in the gaps between children among those with elementary and secondary education.*

Since we know that family-planning is more frequent, and knowledge of contraceptives greater among those with secondary education, this result is most surprising. In order to find some clue to its implications, an analysis by education was made of all those who had been married over five years and had only two children. These sub-groups are small, (45 women with secondary education, 84 with elementary), but tentative conclusions can be drawn. Among the longer-married women with only two children:

38% of those with secondary education had a gap of less than three years between their children.

23% of those with elementary education had a gap of less than three years between their children.

A complete analysis of these 129 cases shows:

Space between first and second child	*Percentage of mothers of two children married more than five years who have this gap between their children among those with*	
	Secondary Education	*Elementary Education*
	%	%
1 year	9	8
2 years	29	14
3 years	29	17
4 years	13	20
5 years	9	9
6 years	9	17
7 years and over	2	15

This table shows a quite distinct pattern. Those with secondary education who have been married five years or more and only had two children have most usually had them quite close together. But among those with elementary education, age-gaps are scattered all over the scale, and as many as one third (compared with one tenth of those with secondary education) have left a gap of six years or more between first and second child.

Thus *among the two-child families which are not produced from marriage within the last five years, the educated are having their children more quickly than the less educated.*

In order to make sure that this trend was not found all through the two educational levels an analysis was made of those who had been married over five years and had *more* than two children. The age-gaps in this group were found to be almost equally distributed in elementary and secondary education.

The conclusion to be drawn from these facts is of considerable importance. *Where families are large, the age-gaps between children are very much the same among those with elementary education and those with secondary education. Where families are small, those with secondary education have their children closer together than those with elementary education.* This fact seems to indicate that contraception, used for the purposes of *spacing* children, is of considerably less importance than is usually supposed in affecting fertility. For those who know how to use contraceptives least space their children about equally with those who use them most where families are big, and leave considerably longer intervals where families are small.

This, however, does not get to the bottom of the problem. There are various possible explanations of the facts outlined, and we are not prepared to say from the available evidence which is correct, or most important. However, the likelihood is that all of these factors play some part:

1. Those with secondary education tend to space their children with gaps of between two and four years. This appears from general indications in the survey to be the normal 'planned' interval.
2. Spacing of more than four years is probably, and spacing of more than six years certainly, unusual as a deliberate planned interval.
3. It therefore seems exceedingly probable that children spaced with intervals as long as this are *not* planned. Either they are the result of the failure of contraceptives, and were not intended to be born at all; or they are children who have taken longer to put in an appearance than their parents meant them to take.
4. But we know that only a very small minority of parents *want* only a single child. Therefore the possibility of second children born a very long time after the first being due to mistakes in using contraceptives is remote.
5. One in three of the second children in marriages which have lasted over five years and where the mothers have had an elementary education, are born six or more years after the first, compared with one in ten of those where the mothers have a secondary education.

6. Ruling out the suggestion that these second children are *deliberately* not conceived for so long a time, then the following explanations, or a combination of them, are possible:

   A. There may be a lower fecundity among those with elementary education. If this were so, it would explain the difference, since the mothers with elementary education would have to wait longer for their second child.

   B. There may not be an absolute difference in the facility with which women in the two education groups conceive; but the more educated may be more inclined to take medical advice, and to take it early on, than the less educated.

   C. The difference may be accounted for by more frequent miscarriages and/or abortions among the less educated. But it is unlikely that abortion plays any important part where second children are concerned, since most people want a second.

We know from data already given in an earlier chapter that less educated women often look upon lack of children in a fatalistic way, and it seems probable that their comparative unwillingness to take medical advice if they are unable to have children when they want them, plus a greater tendency to miscarry, may largely account for the difference.

Contraception and Spacing

Whichever way we look at it, however, the fact remains that, on average, those who plan least are spacing their families in very much the same way as those who plan most. The non-planners go on having children longer, but that is all. If our interpretations are correct, this is what appears to be happening today. Those who know most about contraceptives and use them most are either more fecund, or more knowledgeable about the possibilities of encouraging conception where there are difficulties, than those who know less about contraceptives and use them less. They are also less liable to miscarry, or more knowledgeable about the ways of preventing miscarriage. For those reasons their 'planned' spacing of their family works out in very much the same way as the 'unplanned' spacing of the less educated and knowledgeable. It is only when the planners use contraceptives to stop more children, having decided that their family is complete, or to *put off* the birth of a first child, that the non-planners catch up on them.

As things stand today the use of contraceptives for *spacing* children does not appear to be an important factor influencing the smaller size of families among the more educated. Their families are smaller because they *prevent* children, both in the early years of marriage, and when the

family is complete. Figures for children born in the first eighteen months of marriage have already been given. Among those with secondary education, 25% of first children were born between three and a half and five and a half years after marriage, compared with 13% among those with elementary education. This seems pretty conclusive.

Fecundity

First children within the first eighteen months of marriage occur much more frequently among families which eventually turn out to be large than among those which are smaller, as has already been shown. The proportion of first children in large families which are born in the first eighteen months of marriage is larger (by 28%) than the proportion of first children in small families who were born then. There is no significant difference at all between the spacing arrangements of those married a long and a short time.

It seems unlikely from the verbatim material that this reflects simply use or non-use of contraceptives, although it is certainly part of the cause. Does it reflect greater fecundity among women who bear large families, cross-cutting knowledge of contraception? Other data suggest that it may.

If we take six years after the last baby as the time limit beyond which another baby is more likely to be an accident or a late-comer than a planned birth, we find accidental births and births occurring later than they are wanted concentrated among the small families.

24% of age-gaps between the children in families of two are more than six years.

9% of age-gaps in larger families are more than six years.

(This excludes war-marriages, where there has not been time for a six-year gap, but includes the children of different marriages where a large family with large gaps is likely.)

It must be remembered that many of the families of two are not completed, so that the proportion of long age-gaps is only a partial reflexion of real differences. If we had a sample of completed families of two to compare with larger completed families, the contrast would probably be greater.

We conclude from these facts that either fecundity is lower among the two-child families, or miscarriages more frequent. From the qualitative data available we are inclined to ascribe the preponderance of large age-gaps among two-child families mainly to less ability to conceive children. It was not found possible by interview methods to collect anything like complete data on miscarriages and stillbirths, but it is perhaps a pointer that they were mentioned about twice as often by mothers of large families as those of small.

XI—SPACING AND FECUNDITY

Is there a Decline in Fecundity?

'An hypothesis put forward by Herbert Spencer that "the ability to maintain individual life and the ability to multiply vary inversely" is certainly supported by the striking, not to say alarming, fall in the birth-rate. This theory suggests that the strain on the individual of increasing competition, of the hurly-burly of modern life, levy a toll on his power of reproduction. This theory, however, is still unsupported by reliable evidence. It remains a theory.' (I. Geikie-Cobb. *New Statesman and Nation.* 11/3/44.)

The question of whether there has been an absolute decline in women's capacity to conceive children over the past half century is frequently raised today. Various possible causes of this unproven decreased fecundity among modern parents are suggested, ranging from the association of the spermicidal qualities of soap with the modern tendency to bodily hygiene—to that between the sensitivity of the testicles to change of temperature with the modern tendency to work in stuffy offices and go out into the cold evening air.

We tried to answer this question, thought we had answered it, and now confess ourselves stumped. Unless a random sample of parents whose mothers and fathers did not use contraceptives can be found willing to breed children *ad lib* for the benefit of science, we are unable to see any way in which the question can be answered. Our method was to find out how many children are born into families of parents who do not use birth-control today and to compare this number with the number in *their* parents' families. If they had considerably fewer children than their parents, then, we thought, a decrease in fecundity would be indicated.

Since it is possible that a similar method may occur to others who try to investigate this problem, and since it would be exceedingly difficult to detect the flaw in the argument without access to verbatim comments, this abortive attempt to solve what now appears an insoluble problem may have served some purpose. We give the results partly for this reason, partly as an indication of the potential value of Mass-Observation methods as against the more usual methods of opinion polls. In the question which enabled us to detect the non-validity of these results we asked women to choose between three alternatives. If, instead of recording answers verbatim, we had simply had our investigators make a cross against the chosen alternative, we should probably have demonstrated a startling decrease in the ability of women to conceive children which might well have gone unchallenged.

This is the process of reasoning. It may amuse the reader, thus warned, to see how soon he can detect the anti-climax.

It will be remembered that women were asked whether they thought that people should plan in advance how many children they wanted to have, should work it out as they went along, or leave it to chance. In grouping the answers, those who said it was no *use* planning were placed in a separate category from those who said leave it to chance. It was assumed that those who then appeared in the 'leave it to chance'

group did not use modern methods of contraception, and if they used withdrawal or abstention, probably used it erratically. Careful examination of the verbatim answers does not cause us to revise this conclusion.

Considering only the answers of women married over ten years who say 'leave it to chance', we find:

Average size of family of present-day parents married for more than ten years who say that the number of children in family should be left to chance ..	3·3
Average size of family of these women's mothers ..	5·8

The average age of these women is 40, so that, although not all their families are completed, it is very unlikely that they will have as many as one more child each on average before their child-bearing days are over. Even if they did, the difference would still be outstanding. At present 78% have had fewer children than their mothers.

At first this looked like definite evidence of a decline in the capacity of women to produce as many children as they could a generation ago. Their families, as we would expect, were larger than those of the women who use birth-control. However, the fact that they were so little larger caused us to suspect the validity of the results. A detailed examination of each case was made, and it was found that:

(*a*) The women with very large families were certainly included among those who said family-size should be left to chance. They do not use contraceptives.

(*b*) BUT, also included were a large number of women who had never had any *need* to use contraceptives—i.e. those who left it to chance *because* of their lack of fecundity.

Thus, lack of fecundity is an important factor influencing women not to use contraceptives and no conclusion on fecundity can be drawn on the basis of family-size among those who do not use them.

So far as we are able to see, this snag will confront any effort to find out about the relative fecundity of women in this and other generations.

Absolute Fecundity

We are, however, left with the impression from other aspects of this investigation, that very many women do have difficulty in producing children when they want them. Whether this is more frequent than it was a generation or two ago, we cannot say; but it is probably more self-conscious than it used to be.

A frequent lack of ability to produce children is suggested by various remarks made about other people. Several of the women writing to the doctor mention that their friends as well as themselves are having difficulties. Some appear to look on this as a common-place,

and are annoyed that no great attention appears to be paid to their problem:

'Mr. Churchill and others want a high birth-rate, but there seems to be very little done about those people anxious to have a family. Take my own case. I can think of eight of my friends in a similar position. I have been married five years, was married at 21, and have had examinations, taken Vitamin E, thyroid, had injections, separate holidays, and my husband has been examined and tested—all to no purpose. Our cause of sterility is surely the most common of all, as so many people are similarly placed; yet there seems to be very little interest displayed in it, possibly because there are no obvious signs of pains and we are A1 healthy.'

A housewife on the National Panel of correspondents writes:

'There have been in this district mothers who have had babies this year after five years, twelve years, seventeen years, and all would gladly have had them sooner. This appears to be physical incapability, and that is the reason of most of the families I know of right age.'

If this were a general state of affairs, one would not expect many people to have noticed it, since inability to have children is not a subject which is usually discussed except between intimate friends. Even though only a few mention the difficulties of others, it is surprising that any have enough intimate acquaintances who are sterile to make generalizations.

Further, there were a considerable number of cases in the detailed reports of the National Panel in which married women mention having to wait for a very considerable period, either before having their first child, or in between children. Here are some examples, told by mothers:

1. 'We certainly intended to have children. We did plan to a certain extent, as we were in rooms for three months after we married, so decided not to start a family till we were in our home. But after the first child planning did not seem to come in at all. Our second child should have come two years after the first—in fact she did not come for nearly four. The youngest came at a time of very bad business when we did not really intend to enlarge our family any more. We never actually set out to have a fourth child, as we were getting on by then, having been in our late 'twenties when we married, but no further child arrived.' (Age 50.)

2. 'I began my married life with the firm intention of having children. I always wanted a boy and girl. The girl first. After three years of married life my little girl was born, and three years later a little boy. I don't know why three years lapsed before I had a baby. We never during that time tried to avoid having any.' (Age 40.)

3. 'I have no children and have been married twenty years. During the first three years I had two miscarriages. In my case, with good medical advice available, inquiry seemed to show that there was no reasonable explanation for this happening . . . I have come to regard "no family" as a situation not entirely uninteresting, though I never imagined this could be possible when I first married.'

4. 'About having children. We are both extremely fond of children, and would have liked a large family, but we have only managed two. We were married eight years before we had any. It was a great sorrow to me.'

5. 'I married at nineteen and did not have a child for three years. I was terribly worried and distressed and longing to have five or six children. I had two children during the last war with fourteen months between them, and never could achieve another though I had five miscarriages. It has always been a grief to me that I only have two children.'

These long periods of waiting appear to be quite common. The importance of low fecundity, whether or not it is much greater than a

generation ago, is very considerable. For where plans are made to space children at two or three years' interval, and the child arrives much later than it is wanted, the whole plan may be put awry, and the total number of children planned for may never be achieved. It is a common habit in planned families nowadays to put off the first child till a number of years after marriage. A frequent comment among younger women was: 'Oh, we want to be together for a bit first'. If a woman is married at the average marriage age of 25 and the couple decide to wait three years before having their first baby; and if then the baby does not arrive till two years after it is wanted, the woman will be thirty when it is born. If they are planning a family of three, spaced at three or two-and-a-half yearly intervals, and more delays occur, it is very likely either that the woman will consider herself too old for child-bearing before the time for the third child arrives, or may even have passed the child-bearing age. Social factors will help to accentuate this trend ; as we have shown, there is evidence of quite a strong feeling at various levels that it is disgusting or indecent for older women to bear children.[1]

Another factor which has to be taken into consideration with regard to fecundity, is the prevalent *attitude* to delays among those who plan their families. The possibility of preventing children for any desired period of time leads to the tacit assumption that children can be born at any desired time too. It seems exceedingly probable that the period in which many family-planners believe they have to allow after giving up birth-control and before conceiving is much shorter than the real average. The standard of fecundity demanded is not only supra-normal in this generation, but would have been in any other. Conception is expected immediately after contraceptives are discarded, and two or three months delay may cause real worry. Here, for instance, is a young wife who used a Dutch cap for the first eighteen months of her marriage. In January she gave it up, but until May she did not have sexual intercourse 'more than once or twice a month'. After that her forces husband and she were together 'fairly frequently'. By mid-August she is not pregnant and writes:

'Do you think it is desirable that I should be examined now or am I worrying too soon? This may sound childish, but so many friends have become pregnant immediately after discontinuing the use of contraceptives that one is apt to worry about the delay.'

Or again, a couple who have been married for four-and-a-half years, and have given up contraceptives only four months ago. The husband is in the army and 'we do not meet very often'; yet the wife is worried enough to write for advice after this short period of occasional meetings.

Finally, here is an example of a second child coming three months later than its mother wanted it, and causing real disappointment:

'Two years after I was married to the day war started. For a very short time I demurred about having children, but decided to risk it. My son was born in July

[1] Chapter VIII, *Social Attitudes to Large Families.*

1940. I always wanted at least two children, and when my little boy was two-and-a-half years old I thought about it again, but decided to wait a little as I felt unsettled because my husband was expecting to go in the army. When I definitely knew he would go in, I decided I would like another child but nothing happened till November 1943. I was very disappointed that it had not happened before as I had my first baby as soon as I wanted him and the second child did not come according to plan.'

These very tight time-schedules put a premium on fecundity. Even a few months delay may have the indirect affect of changing plans, reducing numbers.

The problems of fecundity and alleged sterility are practically inseparable in a field-study of this sort, though it is clear that many instances of believed sterility remain unproven, and many cases of adjudged fertility remain unable to conceive. There is some slight evidence that fecundity may be declining, but it is by no means conclusive and we are unable to suggest any way in which a decline could be proved, if it exists. If there were a decline in fecundity, then the answer would seem to lie in a change in our whole way of existence, a replacement of the 'hurly-burly of modern life' by the more leisurely tempos of a past age. This is so unlikely to happen that it is difficult to see what practical use could be made of the results if a decline in fecundity were proven.

Much more vital, in our opinion, is recognition of the increasing *importance* of fecundity as a possible factor influencing family-size. Everything should be done to publicize the simpler means of assuring conception, and factual information, directed especially to the least educated sections of the community, should stress both the possibility of cure and the frequency of the disease.

XII. Why so Few?

Six different sets of numerical results of investigations from different standpoints give a preliminary indication of the reasons why families are kept small. The investigations were:

(1) The National Panel of correspondents were asked what they considered the main factors determining the number of children people have.

(2) The same sample were asked what they believed deterred people most from having more children.

(3) An analysis was made of the postbag of the Radio Doctor, after two talks on birth-rate problems. These letters mainly come from women who discuss their own personal reasons for restricting their family, but also include a few who generalize about others.

(4) An analysis was made of the postbag of a birth-control clinic.

(5) In the interviews conducted for the present report married women were asked why they did not want more children than they had said they wanted.

(6) The same sample were asked if they could think of anything which might make them want more children.

In the table on page 98 the factors mentioned in each investigation are ranged in order of frequency, and all factors mentioned by 9% or more of any of the samples are included. Columns 5 and 6 consider the group of women married five years or less, who were most able to give some reply to the questions concerned.

The first two lists represent the generalized observations of a group of people who correspond with Mass-Observation largely because they are interested in observing the behaviour and motives of others. The third list represents a specialized sample, consisting of people who feel sufficiently interested in the subject of the declining birth-rate to write to the Radio Doctor about it. The majority are married women writing about their own personal problems, and most of these would like a larger family if these problems could be solved.

The clinic letters represent a quite different group. Many of them are not expressing reasons for limiting the size of their family, but only for delaying the birth of a first or later child. Others are mothers of large families who now want to stop having children.

The last two groups are a random sample of women married in the past five years. We thus have:

(1) and (2) Generalizations about other people.

(3) Personal motives of those who *want* more children for not having them.

(4) Reasons for delaying children and stopping having them.

(5) Spontaneous reasons, of those who have mostly not yet had as many children as they want, for not wanting more than they do.

(6) Factors which these women feel might make them change their minds about the number of children they would like to have.

Money

Money comes top of all the lists, except the clinic letters. The main reason why it comes lower on the clinic list is that many women are writing to the clinic on their doctor's advice, or feel that their health will not stand another child yet; while others do not want to have another child at present because their husband is in the Forces and away from home, or liable to be drafted overseas. Many of these cases are spaced births rather than small families, and not entirely relevant here. Generally speaking, the economic factor is by far the most important 'reason' for having few children. But, as we shall see when we

SIX ASPECTS OF THE REASONS FOR SMALL FAMILIES

(1) *Determining Number of Children*	(2) *Deterrents*	(3) *Doctors' Letters*	(4) *Clinic Letters*	(5) *Why not more?*	(6) *Encouraging to have more*
Money	Money	Money	Health	Money	Money
Children's chances	World security	Housing	Husband in Forces	Children's chances	Housing
Housing	Responsibility, tie, nuisance	Responsibility, tie, nuisance	Money	Work, responsibility, tie	—
Leisure interests of couple	Leisure interests of couple	Fear of childbirth	Voluntary spacing	—	—
Prevalent social attitude	Children's chances	Lack of domestic help	World security	—	—
Health	Personal security	Husband in Forces	Housing	—	—
Responsibility, tie, selfishness	Housing	Children's chances	Too many children already	—	—
Personal make-up of parents	Lack of domestic help	—	—	—	—
World security					
Personal security					
Failure of contraceptives					
Inability to conceive children					
Lack of domestic help					

[*For explanation of this table see page 97*]

discuss it in detail, the last conclusion we can draw from the stress laid on it here is that if everyone were richer babies would be correspondingly plentiful.

Housing

Housing is mentioned in all the lists, and is the only factor apart from money which as many as one in ten of the random sample of young wives spontaneously said might encourage them to want more children. This, in conjunction with its high place among the doctor's letters, indicates that difficulties of accommodation are one of the most important things actually *stopping* people from having children. By this we do not mean that very large numbers of women would have more babies if they had better accommodation. For reasons which we discuss later, we believe that only a minority of women actually refrain from having the babies they want because of external factors. But among this minority a great many are stopped because they cannot live in the sort of home they want.

The Chances of the Children

The chance in life of the children is largely involved in economic motives for small families. 'I can't afford another' so often means 'I can't give three as good an upbringing, education, etc., as I can two' that the relative stress in the various investigations probably reflects little more than the degree to which people felt it desirable to go into detail. It is thus particularly high in the first list, where people answered a written question in detail; and in the fifth list where women were asked to give a specific reason why they didn't want more children. But it was not greatly stressed in the doctor's letters, which are the best barometer to the cases in which women *want* more children but don't feel able to have them. Thus, ambition for the children is an important part of the set-up in which small families are conventional, but ambition is probably less important than various other factors deterring people from having more *if they really want them.*

Leisure Interests, Work, Responsibility

The nuisance-value of children, in creating work and responsibility, and tying the mother to the home is of all-through importance. Slightly different category-headings were used for this factor in the various investigations. Thus, when talking of other people, the first sample often described their attitude as selfish in the first investigation. When speaking of factors deterring other people from having *more* children, once the family was started, however, the stress became more on the tie and nuisance-value. Naturally few spoke of selfishness as

applied to themselves; but in the doctor's letters the stress was particularly on the way children tie the mother to the home, whereas in the random sample it was more on the work they create.

The experience of having been tied to the home by one or two children is perhaps the most important deterrent from increasing the family where the decision has not been made in advance. A preliminary indication is given by the high place it holds on lists 2 and 3, both indices of the factors which stop people having children they would have liked to have had before they experienced the snags.

Security

The insecurity of the world comes second among the factors which the National Panel believe to be deterring people from having children. It is mentioned by more than 10% of the same sample as a factor determining the size family people have—but it is low on their list (which is longer than the others because they go into the subject in much greater detail), and cannot be considered of great significance there. It is mentioned in less than 10% of the doctor's letters, and very rarely as a reason for not wanting more children by the general sample of wives.

These results give a preliminary indication of the conscious deterrent effect of the state of the world on more thoughtful, mainly middle-class, groups. It is at these levels that the whole future outlook is taken into account when deciding how many children to have; but there are many indications, which we discuss in detail later, that the future prospects of the whole country as well as the personal insecurities of the future have an important, though less conscious, effect at other levels too.

Other Reasons

All the other motives determining family size which are given in the first list occur in most of the others, though they are mentioned by less than 10%. The leisure interests of the couple, frequently mentioned by the National Panel, tend to become confused with home-ties and work when women are talking about *themselves;* the difference between these two categories is mainly a subjective one depending on whether it is the outsider judging others or the housewife judging her own motives which we are considering. The failure of contraceptives, judged by over 10% of the Panel to be an important factor determining the number of children in a family, is naturally not mentioned in the other investigations. But it is, of course, one of the reasons why the birth-rate is still as high as it is today.

Sterility and sub-fertility are not very widely mentioned in any of these investigations, but, as we shall see, they are far the most important reason given by older women for not having children at all. Sub-fertility is of major importance in determining the number of one-child families.

The social attitude towards large families is only widely mentioned in discussing other people's motives, but there are also some cases in which the woman herself feels very strongly about the attitude of others towards her if she has as many children as she wants. It is probably of more importance as a subconscious reason for restricting families, and only in a minority of cases does it put people off if they are really anxious for more children.

Lack of domestic help is again a minority reason, but a very vociferous and real reason for the almost entirely middle-class group who mention it.

Other motives expressed by a minority are discussed incidentally in the text.

The Interviews

It very quickly became clear in piloting interviews on the question of possible means of increasing the desire for larger families that simply asking women to say if there was anything which would make them want more was not going to get us very far. Even in the group most able to give some answer only 35% were able to specify *anything* which they felt might change their minds. Of those two-thirds specified money, a quarter housing improvements, and all other possibilities were spread between the remaining twelfth of the minority in tiny groups.

To the preliminary question 'Why don't you want more than that?' women had answered:

Reasons for not wanting more children	*Percentage giving these reasons among those married*		
	Over 10 *years*	5–10 *years*	5 *years and under*
	%	%	%
Money	17	29	23
Work, Responsibility	13	17	15
Children's Chances (specified)	10	12	22
Inability to have more	19	7	2
Health	5	7	2
Future Security	2	4	4
Housing	4	5	2
War Reasons	4	3	2
Fear of Childbirth	2	1	2
Husband trouble	1	3	0
Age	16	5	6
Other reasons	6	4	4
Vague	11	11	25

Although women were usually able to give some fairly definite reason for wanting a small family, spontaneous ideas about possible ways of

making them change their mind were few, and mainly concentrated on money and housing improvements. *The general picture given by this part of the survey was one of a readily acceptable norm of two or three children, and very little desire to depart from that norm. And this, in our judgement, is the broad background against which the whole of the present study stands. Parents have no difficulty in finding reasons for wanting a small family, but they have great difficulty in imagining circumstances in which they might want a bigger one. At present the great majority don't want more children than they are having, and anything which is done to raise the birth-rate permanently or appreciably will have to tackle fundamental desires and change them—not just simplify matters.*

Two Problems

There are two birth-rate problems, calling for quite different treatment One is the problem of the wanted-unborn; the other the problem of the unwanted-unborn. The first calls for direct and specific measures, and for this it is much more easy to suggest cut and dried solutions. It involves wastage[1] in its broadest sense. Not only incapacity of the mother for having children when she wants them, either through sterility, sub-fertility, operations making further child-bearing impossible, or collapse of health before the child-bearing period is over. These reasons were given by one in four of all women married over ten years; but they are not the only problems of wastage. Wastage includes the babies who are not born literally because there is not room for them; not very many perhaps, but the survey shows that sometimes the strongest desire does not overcome the impossibility of fitting in another baby to available accommodation. The fear of childbirth, which could be at least partly overcome if women knew that modern methods of reducing the pains of labour were always available, is partly a wastage problem. So is the problem of domestic help in some cases; though often where the work is hardest and the results least satisfying it is not a deterrent but only part of the background which makes small families the accepted, wanted, thing.

The problem of the unwanted-unborn is not so simple to present or to solve, but in our view it must be solved before any major change is likely to occur in birth-rate trends. Socially accepted ideas are not often examined by the majority who conform to them, and the question of 'why small families?' is much easier to answer than the more important question of 'why not large ones?' We cannot expect to clarify the major question solely by direct verbal evidence from the people concerned, because they cannot be expected to know exactly *why* they do not fail to conform with a pattern of behaviour which it has not occurred to them to question.

The method of approach adopted was to take the broad spontaneous reasons for conformity as a basis, to study the *meaning* of these reasons.

[1] Infant mortality is, of course, the main wastage problem, but this is outside the scope of a field study.

and to attempt to arrive at some assessment of the extent to which the removal of the reasons *against* might help produce reasons *for* large families. In the questionnaire a series of semi-leading questions were included, *after* spontaneous reasons had been given, which referred to various possible means of changing people's minds on the question of family size, and asked women whether they thought these things would make a difference to the number of children they themselves wanted. These questions were leading in the sense that they often put an idea into women's heads which had not been there before. The absolute numerical results are no indication of the extent to which these are likely in fact to produce more babies. But a comparison of the numerical results gives a preliminary idea of their likely relative effects; and examination of the verbatim material goes a long way towards showing what are the main specific problems involved in the broader ones. These verbal replies from a random sample, however, only provide a yardstick against which to measure the extent to which the other, more detailed, evidence is significant. They do not provide the answer by themselves. In discussing the likely effects of removing the motives *against* large families we draw widely on other evidence which is not subject to numerical treatment to provide depth and detailed explanation.

The 'Leading' Questions

Women were asked whether:

(*a*) If they didn't have to go through so much in actually having a child;

(*b*) if the government gave money allowances for children;

(*c*) if they could have some help in the house;

(*d*) if they could live in the sort of house they liked;

(*e*) if they could be sure of the future;

that would make a difference to the number of children they would like to have.

To all these questions a majority of between 60% and 80% of those married over ten years answered that it wouldn't make a difference. Between 46% and 74% of those married 5–10 years answered in the same way. Among those with secondary education between 53% and 77% said no. To all the questions *except that on help in the house* an appreciably larger proportion of negative replies came from those with Secondary Education. And on all the questions *except help in the house* there was a very appreciable drop in the proportion of noes down the length-of-marriage scale. On all questions *except help in the house* there were considerably more noes from mothers of three or more children than from those with smaller families, and between 57% and 85% of mothers of three or more answered each question negatively.

XII—WHY SO FEW

Taken in conjunction with the fact that at least 60% of *every* group are unable to suggest spontaneously anything which might encourage them to have more children, these results again demonstrate the difficulties which are likely to be met by any endeavour to tackle the birth-rate problem by direct measures designed to lift the burden of parenthood. We take the two factors which are most frequently said by parents and others throughout this investigation to be at the back of decisions to restrict family-size—money and housing. We present people with what is on the surface a utopian situation—money allowances of an unspecified amount which they are asked to name; the sort of house they like. And two out of five of the most affected group—the newly-married—reject the first as a possible means of changing their minds, three out of ten the second.

A detailed analysis of all these questions is given in Appendix II. In the argument above we have grouped together those who say definitely that each suggestion would have no effect on them, and those who doubt whether it would. An index to the relative importance of each possibility is given by considering the proportions who give an unqualified 'yes' to each question. Here are the proportions giving this reply in answer to each question *in the most affected group.* In all other groups the proportion is lower, and often considerably lower:

Suggestion	*Most Affected Group*	*Percentage in this Group saying this suggestion would affect their ideas on the number of children they would like (Unqualified replies only)*
Living in sort of house wanted	Newly married ..	58%
Certainty of future	Newly married ..	43%
Money allowance ..	Newly married and High birth-rate areas	29%
Help in house ..	Secondary Education	27%
Not having to go through so much in having a child	High birth-rate areas	12%

We repeat that these figures are no sort of index to the *absolute* effects which would be likely if any of these facilities were available. But they give a preliminary indication of their relative importance, and the groups on which they are likely to have most effect.

Only 6% of those married within the last five years were living in a house of their own; the rest were in flats, rooms, or sharing houses, with friends and relatives. That accounts for the very high proportion of this key-group who feel better housing conditions might make them

change their mind. They are all war-marriages, and very many of their husbands have been away for a large part of their married life. This largely accounts for their particular interest in future security.

Money allowances were welcomed most by the poorest and the least secure, but even among these groups less than a third thought they would change their mind because of them.

Help in the house was welcomed notably by those with secondary education; it was also comparatively frequently welcomed by older women and mothers of large families, unlike the other measures.

In the high birth-rate areas more than one woman in ten said that her ideas on the number of children she would like to have would be likely to be changed if she didn't have to go through so much in having each child. Fear of childbirth is concentrated among poorer people, and although only a minority are affected, they are usually affected strongly.

With these general indications we go on to consider each possibility separately, starting with the wastage problems, working through the legislative possibilities and then showing through long case-observations how the deterrents and determinants we have discussed work out in practice. Finally, in the last two sections, which we consider to be the most important of this report, we discuss the inter-relations of attitude and behaviour beyond the direct conscious motives for family limitation.

XIII. The Unborn

Childless Couples

We have shown that the proportion of parents who think children are not important to married life is extremely small. Yet a considerable number of those who have been married for over five years have not had a child, and many have been married for ten years and only had one. It has been estimated that about 10% of the general population is infertile, but for practical purposes there seems little reason to draw a distinction between those who manage to achieve one or two children when they would have liked two or three, and those who do not conceive at all. The prevalence of irremediable sterility is impossible to assess except by clinical examination, but a field-study can give some indication of the extent to which children remain unborn through no desire of the parents. This problem of wastage is especially important to population policy, since it involves practical measures for bringing wanted children into the world. The highly contentious business of changing people's desires is not involved, and any solution there may be is not dependent for its effect on the interaction of innumerable other social factors. Certainly, prevention of wastage cannot by itself

go far towards solving the population problem; but it can go some way, which is more than can be guaranteed for more elaborate social measures.

The extent and nature of wastage through unborn wanted children can best be seen by considering separately the cases of all those who have been married five years or more and not had a child, and those who have had only one child.

There were in this sample 66 women who had not had a child after five or more years of marriage. Of these, only 17 appear deliberately not to have done so, and only 4 can be classified from their verbal attitude as not wanting children at all. Four others do not give any very definite indication of their reasons, while the remaining 9 all indicate that they would like children if external circumstances were different.

Of the 49 wives who would have liked children but have considered themselves unable to have them:

25 say they have been unable to have children through sterility. Eight of these spontaneously mention having taken medical advice. In 2 cases the doctor confirmed that they were unable to conceive, while in 6 cases either treatment was given without effect, or they were told that there was no reason why they should not bear children.

9 give health reasons which give every sign of being genuine, including operations, stillbirths, miscarriages, tuberculosis and a fractured pelvis.

4 say that their husband's health has not allowed them to have children (ulcerated stomach, perforated lung, 'something in my husband's family').

2 are widows, one of whom had a child that died when three months old.

1 is separated from her husband.

1 is unhappily married and doesn't want a child by her husband.

1 gives health reasons which may not be genuine.

1 conceived but had a miscarriage and has not tried again. (She differs from those who give health reasons in that she seems to have been merely discouraged not incapacitated by her miscarriage.)

44

Of the remaining 5, one is afraid of childbirth, but wants children. Another put off having them because she couldn't get anywhere to live, then her husband was out of work, and now she has passed the

child-bearing period. Three do not give enough information to ascertain why they have not had a child.

This sample is, of course, not large enough for any accurate statistical deductions. But it seems likely that something in the region of one in ten, possibly fewer, of childless marriages are childless because the parents do not like or want children at all. Another small fraction are childless because they do not feel justified in bearing children in the external circumstances in which they live. And about three-quarters have not had children for physical or psychological reasons unrelated to general social conditions. Half of these either are, or consider themselves to be, sterile.

Single-Child Marriages

Of 98 women married over five years with only a single child, 50 have apparently either deliberately only had one, or are glad they have only one despite having conceived another and miscarried. Of these 50, 23 say they would like to have two or more under different external circumstances. Several others, who say they only want one *now*, are not really in favour of an only child, but have been forced into the position of not wanting another comparatively recently. One complains of the state of her nerves; one has lost her home in air-raids; one has a child born deaf; one an excessively nervous child; two an invalid husband; two are afraid to go through the difficulties they had with their first child. Two married late in life and did not have their first child for some years, apparently through no deliberate measures on the couples' part.

Eighteen women, or one in five of all those married over five years with only one child, have had miscarriages, operations making childbirth difficult or impossible, Cæsarians, or have borne another child which has died in infancy. Twelve others say they have been unable to have more children through sub-fertility. Three were spacing their families, and have been separated from their husbands and unable to have a second child. One is widowed, one unhappily married, one divorced. The remainder want more children, and although it is several years since they had their last, may still have another.

At a rough estimate, not more than about one in four of these single-child marriages can be looked on as fulfilling the mother's conscious wishes, of what she would have liked to have. The real figure may be a good deal lower. With these, as with the childless marriages, we must bear in mind the fact that all the information we have comes from a stranger-interview. We do not know how much information these women may be disinclined to reveal to the interviewer. It may well be that, if the whole private history were known in each case, the proportion who really wanted childless or one-child marriages would be shown to be even smaller.

XIII—THE UNBORN

Sterility and Sub-fertility

It is clear from a variety of information collected from different sources that many women go through life believing themselves to be sterile or sub-fertile and do not consult a doctor. Many of those who do consult a doctor are told there is no reason why they should not bear children, but continue to have none. It is estimated that some 70% of cases of sterility which come for treatment at clinics are due to the husband, so in many of the present cases it is probably true that the fault does not lie in the woman. However, the indications are that husbands often do not submit themselves to examination at all, even if the wife has been pronounced fit. Further, it seems probable from descriptions that doctors do not always pay overmuch attention to complaints of sterility and that diagnosis may be inadequate. And, further still, there are a number of cases in which both parties have been examined and pronounced fit, and children still not appeared.

In the interviews, the most common response was the reverse side of that fatalistic 'what you've dotted out for you have' which we have already seen in relation to family planning. Typical remarks:

'Well, I only had one. If people have children they have 'em. I don't know if I've been fortunate or unfortunate.' (40D.)

'I think it's fine to have children, you like to do for them, what you haven't had yourself; you put yourself out for the children. I've only had one. It's just the way it's gone. I should have liked more. My girl keeps on saying when she marries she's going to have lots, because she was the only one. But there you are, you can't always help these things.' (44D.)

'It wasn't a question of wanting. I had my girl and I had one "miss" and that was all. I think that miss did something to me. Anyhow, I never had no more at all. I should have liked another myself but there you are, it never come along and it's not likely to now. I should say leave it chance, more or less. It's not you decides.' (44D.)

It seems unlikely that those who make this sort of remark have taken medical advice, though no specific question was asked on the subject in the interviews. 'Well, we only had the one, and that's all there was to it.' 'Well, you don't know what you're allotted out.' These are the typical responses, suggesting that to many working class women having too few children seems just as much an uncontrollable act of providence as having too many children seems to others.

Following the general indications of these results, a small number of mothers who had finished childbearing and had none or a single child were interviewed informally. The investigators were instructed to obtain as much information as possible from those who believed themselves infertile about what they had done to ascertain, or to remedy, their state. Results bear out the indications of the less elaborate questioning. It seems clear that the idea of their disability being curable simply had not occurred to many of these women. For instance:

'I don't know. I didn't have no more. I didn't interfere with nature. I expect I couldn't have more. It all depends on the person, if they have a lot or not. Not everyone I know can have children if they want to and that's all there is to it I reckon.' (52D.)

'Unfortunately I've only got the one. I say unfortunately because I should have liked more. I had another, a girl, I lost her through pneumonia when she was eighteen, that was fifteen years ago. She was a fine girl. I don't know why I didn't have more, because we love children, but I expect it was the will of the Lord.' (60D).

'I think it's just a matter of luck—I never was blessed with more. I should have liked to have had more as I think one child grows up selfish. I believe in a family of two or three, but if it's not your luck to have them you can't.' (46C.)

That is the most common attitude. Some, however, have had medical advice:

'I've never had the opportunity to find out how important they are. We're both very fond of children. I've been to the Duke End Hospital and the doctor there examined me and said I was perfectly healthy. I've done my job, but there you are.' (31C. Catholic, married 8 years.)

'I should have liked to have three, because I love children, but it's not worked out that way. I've been to the Chelsea hospital and had treatment, but it's made no difference.' (35C. Married 9 years.)

Numbers are far too small for generalization, but it seems quite probable that of those who consult hospitals or general practitioners, at least as many women are passed fit for childbirth as need treatment or operation. Whether this means that examination is not exhaustive enough, whether not enough advice is given of a positive sort—examination of husband, intercourse in period of increased fertility, etc.—or whether there is some undiscovered factor making for sterility it is impossible to say. It is certain that, at present, many wives are told that all is well, and find it isn't. In the interviews there was only one case in which it was definitely ascertained that both parties had been examined and passed by a doctor and the wife was still unable to conceive. But in the doctor's letters, naturally coming from a specialized sample of the more desperate, such cases were quite frequent. One in twelve of these letters came from women who were unable to bear a first or second child for reasons of apparent sterility, and in most cases one, and usually both partners, had taken medical advice.

In several cases the women have been operated on and told they can now have children, but have not been able to do so:

'It is not always a case of wanting or not wanting children. For myself and my husband I can only say that we are extremely fond of children and have wanted one for four years; in fact we would love a large family. We are quite young and fit, and have had medical advice, resulting in myself having had an operation some time ago, without success. I am told I am quite normal and there is no reason why I should not become pregnant.'

'Both myself and my husband are passionately fond of children and have craved for them. I like a good many other young married women whom I've met in different hospitals during the past three years, have undergone operations so I could have a baby. But I am still without. On three different occasions since my last operation I have asked my doctor for advice and with a smirk he has told me "there's plenty of time." . . . I am thirty-four years of age, I ask you—is there plenty of time?'

Some of these women who have done all in their power to have children, and have been told that there is no reason why they should not, are naturally exceedingly depressed about it. Here is one case:

'I have been married for over five years and am twenty-eight years old. My husband is thirty-four. We both love children very much and have wanted one since

we got married. We have tried without success, I have been to the hospital twice and the first time had a small operation. I was stretch (*sic*) each time; they told me there was no reason why I should not have a child. My husband was examined and was told he was perfectly all right. This was three years ago.... I get very low and unhappy, seeing all my friends have babies.... Nobody knows the feeling I get each month when nothing happens. We love children so much.'

Many women who are medically examined for sterility seem to receive simply advice to be patient, because there is no reason why they should not conceive, and to carry on with their married life as before. Only in one or two letters and nowhere else, is there any indication that advice has been given which will help to make conception more likely for those who have no apparent physical disability. Of course, this does not mean that such advice is not frequently given. Where it has been followed with success, we should probably not have obtained information through this survey. But there are certainly many women who *might* benefit from such advice who have not been given it, and are longing for children which may never be born.

The general indications from this part of the survey are thus:

(*a*) Among working class women complete sterility or the inability to conceive as many children as they want is most generally looked on in a fatalistic way, and no advice taken.

(*b*) Among those who have taken medical advice there seems to be a fairly high proportion who have been passed as fit by the doctors, and are still unable to conceive.

(*c*) This is probably partly due to inadequate advice, and it seems likely that in many cases examination of the husbands is not insisted upon—or at best not acted upon.

(*d*) But there are certainly many cases in which both parties have been examined and passed by the doctor, but still do not have a child. This suggests either that the doctor's knowledge of the subject is inadequate, or that general medical knowledge is incomplete.

XIV. Ill-health, Sub-health and Fear of Childbirth

The present survey suggests, though it does not prove, that there may be less ability to conceive children in the present generation than there has been before. Sub-fertility appears to be more frequent among the poorer and less educated sections of the community, despite the fact that they are producing more children. In *The Peckham Experiment*[1] the authors describe their experience of sub-fertility at the Centre:

'In the course of our work we have found what we believe to be a high percentage of infertility, of non-consummation of marriage and of rarity of connection, as well as of the deliberate avoidance of child-bearing by birth-control methods. From the

[1] James H. Pearce and Lucy H. Crocker (*Allen & Unwin*, 1943).

observations made, we feel bound to link this incidence of non-consummation of marriage and of relative infertility, with the question of devitalization. The nature of devitalization has been discussed by us elsewhere. The type described under the name "hypotonia" found in a much higher proportion of women of all ages—even among the very young—than in men, is a definite physical condition with definite physical signs. . . . In these people what is usually presumed to be the pressing urgency of sexual appetite appears to remain unstirred to a surprising extent. . . . It would seem as if there were in them a positive lowering of all appetites, a natural fasting—i.e. a raising of the threshold of the response to stimulus. Just as this type is work-shy because of relative incapacity, so they are sex-shy for the same reason. It is as though these people were insistently and continuously faced with some compulsion not to exceed ten miles an hour, and the disillusionment they suffer in crawling along at this pace in a machine designed to do 100 miles an hour is a cumulative depressant.'

The authors conclude that much *voluntary* infertility can be attributed to this condition rather than to selfishness or rationalization. 'Perhaps,' they say, 'the very attitude towards pregnancy—one anticipatory of sickness and danger—which the medical profession has assumed, is no more than a reflection of the type of patient so consistently encountered by the obstetrician!'

The *attitudes* of working-class women towards the condition which they assume to be one of sterility or sub-fertility, already described, fits this description. Their fatalistic attitude towards their state, their vague desire to have, or have had children, unaccompanied by any effort to *do* anything about it; these would appear to indicate very much the state of mind (and body) which is described in *The Peckham Experiment:*

'They possess no guarantee at all that if they set out on the shortest functional journey they will reach their destination, still less return home with achievement.'

In this survey only a small number of women *said* they were limiting their family for health reasons, and these mainly because of some definite traceable illness. But somewhere in the course of the interview tiredness, nerves, a sort of general fed-upness often appeared. Here is a woman of 33, with two children aged 11 and 8. Her work, apart from housework, consists of voluntary help in her sister's shop:

'I really don't know. I don't think I want any more now. I think it's the food or something. I've got no energy at all nowadays—just to get through the day, that's about all I can do. I don't think I've ever felt as tired in my life as I have this spring. Well, and when you feel like that you don't want to start thinking about having kids. No I can't think of anything that would make me want more, not except a nice long holiday by the sea, and the sort of food we used to get, and feeling stronger altogether. And even then I couldn't say. I'm just not in the state of mind nor health that wants to start thinking about babies. It takes me all my time as things are.'

And another, of 34, with two boys of 9 and 4:

'I don't know whether I'm looking forward to the next ten years or not. I've got a feeling the war's going on and on, so it's not much good looking forward to things. . . . I don't want more than two children. A couple's enough for people in my position. Jim's nine and Tony, he's four; they're both at the age when they're off my hands and I wouldn't want to start all over again. I haven't the patience any more. My nerves are bad and so's my husband's. . . . It's different if you've got patience with children, then you could have as many as you want, but if your nerves are bad, you only bring sick children into the world.'

These motives, half 'temperamental', half physical, do not often come out so explicitly, but this may be little index to the frequency with

which they underlie the more rational expressed motives. Nutritional deficiencies, sub-health, lack of communal aim and self-confidence, a broadly defeatist attitude to life which has a physical basis, may well be an important 'reason' behind the expressed reasons, which the present study does not penetrate deep enough to unearth fully.

Health and Pregnancies

The other side of the physical picture is given in a correlation of health with number of pregnancies taken from *Working Class Wives* (Margery Spring Rice, Pelican Books, 1939). 1,250 working wives were asked about the number of pregnancies they had had. Among the whole sample, the average number of pregnancies was 4·6. The group which was in apparently good health had averaged 3·6; while those who suffered from anaemia, carious teeth, constipation, gynæcological ailments, headaches, rheumatism, or bad legs had all averaged five or more pregnancies—except for those with headaches, who averaged 4·8.

Of these women, all of whom were under 40 and still in the child-bearing period, 191 had some sort of gynæcological ailment. That is 15%, or over one woman in seven. The largest group, and by far the largest group who had *not* had treatment, suffered from backache.

Fear of Childbirth

It is small wonder, then, that the fear of childbirth was notably stronger in our survey among the working class aggregates in the East End of London than in any other group. Here 12% of women said that they would want more children if they did not have to go through so much in actually having them, and another 17% said that they *might* change their minds. The corresponding figures for the low birth-rate districts were 4% and 5%, for those with secondary education 6% and 7%.

A few of these women speak of the times their friends had during and after childbirth, and are deterred from having a baby at all; but more frequently they are put off having a second or third baby by their own experiences with the first. Those who do say their decision would be altered probably really would change their minds more often than those who give similar replies to the other questions, because they are almost entirely women who have themselves had a really unpleasant experience or who are intimately acquainted with someone else who has:

'Yes, I nearly lost my life with the second.' (27D. Catholic.)

'Yes, in my case it would because I had a terrible time with him because I've got bad kidneys.' (30D.)

'Well, yes, it would me because I had a very bad time.' (26C.)

'Yes, it would. I couldn't bear the thought of going through all that pain. I've just lost a sister in confinement and she was only twenty-six, and fine healthy girl. She got buried with the baby, five weeks old. Well, it frightens me to death.' (30C.)

'I think it would make a great deal of difference. I had a sister who died through a confinement.' (35C.)

Sometimes it is the husband who refuses to let his wife have another baby after a difficult confinement:

'Well, that was one of the reasons I didn't have more. I had such a bad time with her, my husband said that's enough. I'm not having you suffer like that not for any child. He always said he didn't want me to have another.' (42C.)

Among the younger working wives especially this question aroused a good deal of protest about the lack of factilities for painless childbirth to those who have not the means to pay private nursing-home fees:

'Yes. The hospitals for poor people should be made as comfortable as the rich nursing homes are. Rich people don't suffer, why should we? And they should make more beds available *now*. It's a real scandal these poor women not being able to get in anywhere, it drives them out of their mind, almost. I know if *I* was in circumstances like that I'd jolly well badger my M.P. to do something for me.' (30C.)

'Yes, if you have money you can have the best anaesthetics and everything. That's not right is it?' (31C.)

'It's very important in my opinion. They should make the doctors do more for us.' (31C.)

The realization that it is *possible* today to reduce the pain of childbirth has an important effect on the outlook of those for whom it is not available. For instance:

'Yes it would—it's shocking what you have to go through; you bet the *men* would squeal if it was *them*; why don't these old goopers (doctors) do something about *that?*' (29D.)

'Yes, it would with me. I feel a bit inclined to be scared of it all. It would be a tremendous relief if you *knew* the nurses weren't going to let you suffer.' (20C.)

'Yes, I think science should do more for working people.' (32C.)

The importance of the dread of childbirth as a real turning point in women's decisions is indicated by its high place among subjects mentioned in the doctor's letters, where it was the fourth most frequently mentioned point. Though only a small minority are put off by this fear, those who are put off are put right off and feel strongly about it. The doctor's postbag, like the interviews, showed a strong feeling of resentment that the facilities available for those able to pay for them were not available universally. Some examples, the first two linked with difficult confinements:

1. 'I have just had a baby, so I know what I am talking about. I love children and intended to have three, but after having one I will stop at that, and I had an easy time compared with some.

'Why should some suffer and others can have something to help them if they have money to pay? I know this is true because there was a person in the same hospital as me and she had it.'

2. 'I have two children, two-and-a-half years and one year old. Though in some respects I do not object to increasing my family, frankly I do not feel that my nerves will stand the pain of another childbirth for a long while. I read in a *Reader's Digest* some months ago of a painless childbirth which had been successfully introduced in America. An injection into the spine I believe. Why cannot something of the kind be brought into this country and within the scope of all mothers?'

3. 'What is being done to make childbirth easier? Is anything being done? Or are all our brilliant doctors and specialists still content to tell us that childbirth is a "natural function"? I for one intend to see that woman gets her way this once. Drastic steps must be taken quickly, for I am of the opinion that our falling birth-rate

is a kind of strike from the wives of today to show that they will not have children till matters are improved.' (Unmarried woman.)

These feelings of resentment may well increase the more widely it becomes known that means exist for reducing the pains of labour. In conjunction with a normal tendency to think twice about further pregnancies after a difficult confinement, they may help to turn decisions against an addition to the family.

But the unhealthy mother of a large family and the lurid story of someone else's difficulties is in itself a deterrent, as can be seen from the frequency with which East End mothers feel that an easier time might make them change their minds. Here is what an unhealthy mother herself feels about it:

'Many young mothers are so badly injured by incompetent doctors in childbirth that they either never have another child, or if they do, produce a delicate baby and suffer years of misery with bad health. I contend that the sight of a thin white faced young mother dragging through life is a greater deterrent to potential mothers than all the lack of means, prams, gardens, rest hours etc. To say nothing of the loss of healthy children such a mother might have had. Many otherwise excellent doctors are either too busy, too disinterested, or too superior in their approach to a young mother to help her in a safe delivery. . . . At my first child's birth I was attended by a dirty old Frenchman. I was living in a strange place and did not know a soul. I was young and entirely unacquainted with the facts of birth, and my young husband was equally ignorant. I had a long and difficult confinement and was badly torn, and not stitched. The doctor did not call for forty-eight hours and I hæmorrhaged badly. This bleeding continued in a lesser way for eight weeks, till the discharge was green and foul-smelling. I was very weak and thin. The doctor did nothing to help me beyond saying that I suffered from vaginitis. I did the round of London hospitals, but was always told there was nothing very wrong with me. I suffered greatly at every period, and from a well-built girl of 9 stone 7 lb. I changed to a frail creature of 7 stone. When my boy was two-and-a-half years old I was told that if I had another child I should recover. When the child was coming I suffered very much, and on consulting the doctor, I was asked in a very supercilious manner if I thought I was the only woman who had ever produced a child? The baby was born in a nursing home, where I was attended by the young partner of this doctor, whose first case I was. I will draw a veil over this confinement and only say that I barely escaped with my life. . . . Two years later . . . I was operated on twice for the removal of the womb, ovaries, tumours and cysts.'

This is an extreme case, and in this instance the woman was not deterred by her experiences from having another child. But her story, retailed to other young prospective mothers of a more nervous disposition, her physical health after these experiences, might well be a major deterrent. The relationship among working-class women between sub-health and number of pregnancies does not go unnoticed.

Important too, both for their effect on the future plans of those who go through them and for their effect on others who hear about them, are the experiences of women who have their babies in public hospitals. Here is an account by a mother of such experiences in this and the last generation:

'After a lapse of six years we had another child. Owing to an accident due to a bus conductor's mistake I slipped as the bus started off and was dragged along. This last child was dead when born. This time I was in the Municipal Maternity Hospital. I went for ante-natal treatment and observation before the birth. The hospital was preferable to home conditions in many ways, but it had serious drawbacks which

many people do not realize. I was in a poor state of health and very nervous. We used to go for examination at various periods. We had to strip and wait about in the presence of a score of others and then a doctor or matron and probationer examined us in turn as we lay on a hard bed. They decided that I had a tumour and I decided to make an end of everything when I reached home. However, pondering on the matter I concluded that this was just a stage in the training of the probationer and that both were wrong—and so it turned out. . . .

'I liked the nursing home on account of the company of the other patients. On one occasion we were chatting with one of the nurses and she said that if ever she had a child she would not go into a hospital like that. "Not for me—I'm not having young probationers prodding and examining me:"

'A few months ago I visited a young friend who had just had a baby (her second) in the same hospital. She told me that when the time came, she was taken into the labour ward and the bed was already occupied by a woman who had just had a baby. The nurses had taken it away to be attended to, and, it being then about one a.m. the woman was waiting for the doctor to insert some stitches. The new patient was accommodated on a bed near a bell-push and told to ring for the nurses if required, but not before it was really necessary, as they were rushed. The first patient had to wait till 5.30 a.m. when the doctor would arrive to attend her. So they stayed all through the small hours. The newcomer was tough and declined to ring till the baby was born, the first one imploring her continually to bring the nurse as she could not bear to see her in such distress. When the baby was born, the mother gave the bell one violent push so hard that three nurses all rushed in. Such incidents due to the shortage of accommodation, etc., do not make the bearing of children any more attractive proposition to young mothers.'

'Tough' treatment of the nervous mother, though it may be of comparatively minor importance from the baby's point of view, has its effect on the mother's decisions. Here is a case in point:

'We were delighted when three months after our marriage our first baby was on the way. Then our troubles began—after about six weeks I began to vomit, not just morning sickness, but day and night. My doctors asked me all sorts of questions—were we happy.? Did I want a baby? etc. We were and are wonderfully happy, and of course, I wanted the baby. I certainly wasn't frightened. Things went from bad to worse. I was in and out of hospital, was told I was neurotic, even mental. However eventually our little daughter was born and we forgot our troubles.

'When she was fifteen months old I felt that a companion would be nice. I thought that my first experience couldn't possibly be repeated, but it was and this time far worse. Again I was labelled neurotic and even my husband was given to understand that there was no need for it and he must be firm with me. . . .

'I still had a longing to enjoy pregnancy, but my husband would not hear of me going through all that again. However, when Harold was three I won the battle, for I felt I had had time to get over my previous trouble—there seemed to be no reason for it. This time I was dreadfully ill and my husband had to get special leave to take the children away. . . . Now the doctor says I must not have any more babies. As far as I know they still don't know why I am as I am. . . .'

In the whole of this material there were only one or two cases in which it could definitely be said that a mother who badly wanted another baby had decided not to have it because of her experience of a *normal* labour. Here is one:

'I have a boy and would dearly love another baby. Since having my boy, I have suffered with neurasthenia (*sic*) and anxiety neurosis, and have been under a Harley Street specialist for treatment. I have never forgotten that agony of childbirth and even now am shaken by a wave of terror when I think of it. This has caused estrangement between my husband and myself who would dearly love another child. But ashamed though I am to say it, I am a rotten coward and cannot face the ordeal again. . . . I suppose my love for another baby should outweigh my fear but it doesn't.'

But here, as elsewhere, the *main* problem of the future is not likely to be that of overcoming the difficulties of those who badly want more children. For every one who *wants* another child and dare not have it because of the fear of pain, there are many who wouldn't *mind* another child and might have it if it weren't for the anticipation of pain, and complications. And others, whose desire for a larger family is slight, may have a weak decision changed by their own experiences and the stories of others. Population policy, until and unless it can get down to the fundamental problem of changing desires and motives, has to deal mainly with turning the weak decision babywards. In this sense the reduction of pain and the fear of pain seems likely to have an appreciable affect. For though, in most groups, only a small minority say they would be likely to change their ideas, they are usually very definite about it. Similarly, it is likely that a reduction in infant and maternal mortality will go further towards increasing the birth-rate than the simple addition of saved lives. It will reduce the fears of those whose friends have died or been seriously ill in childbirth, and encourage them to have children too.

XV. Selfishness?

When they are discussing the motives of others for not having large families, people frequently put it down to selfishness and the desire for a good time. If we state the facts instead of judging them, this boils down to a statement that today parents find other activities more attractive than those involved in having a lot of children. An increase in 'selfishness' related to a decrease in the birth-rate is even more difficult to establish than a decrease in fecundity. We have no back data. We cannot tell how many children our grandparents would have had if they had had the opportunity to decide; and even if we could, it would be impossible to decide how their minds might have been changed had the facilities for out-of-home activity been as they are today. The most we can do is to examine the reasons which look to others like selfishness. And, if we do this, we find, as we do with most of the reasons people give for having few children, that they look to *them* like common sense.

Here, for instance, is a mother who set out with the idea of having four children, and changed her mind to two for a combination of most of the reasons which others describe as selfish. This is how it looked to her:

'My husband and I certainly discussed children before marriage. We were both "only" children and frankly we didn't like being "onlies". We decided to have four children—two years approximately between the first two, and *four* years between the second and third, and two years again between the third and fourth if all went well with my health. (This arrangement would, we thought, give each child a companion its own age.)

XV—SELFISHNESS?

'Four years after our marriage our first son was born, and two years later our second son arrived. My health and that of our sons is perfect but there will be no more children! At least not under present social conditions. Reasons:

'The impossibility of my husband and I going anywhere *together* (without the children). Excluding our summer holidays of 1937, 1938 and 1939 we have only been out *once* together in eight and-a-half years. It is simply a case of one parent remaining at home in turn while the other goes to the cinema. In the same strain, I must mention the impossibility of attending evening classes or afternoon classes (Educational and handicrafts); Church is ruled out, too, for the mother, because services coincide with feeding baby, or cooking Sunday dinner; no more amateur dramatics because my husband is away from home weeks at a time; Women's Institute meetings have to be left half-time to get home at the same time as the children, and attending W.I. handicraft classes is an impossibility for that reason. Certain lecturers that visit this suburb from time to time cannot be heard; an afternoon at the cinema is out of the question, and as for a day in town!—well, that takes ages to plan. And as for a theatre—I've forgotten what that's like! (we haven't one here.)

'And lastly the question of summer holidays. These can be booked and anticipated but seldom enjoyed for the simple reason that the children usually catch "something" and the holiday has to be abandoned. Is this fair to the mother? Even if there had been no war, myself and family would have had no holidays because each summer so far one or other of the children has picked up an infectious disease from school.

'There is also the attitude of the women of the older generation which usually is "Well, I had to do it, so why shouldn't you?" Also letters in the press: "My mother brought up a large family and did all the work" etc. These women forget times change!

'Neither my husband or I *mind the work*, but we do mind these constant separations and have decided that there will be no more unless parking places are instituted for children to be left in safety for an afternoon now and again, and arrangements made for children to be cared for at hospitals and nursing homes so that the parents can have their holidays (I mean, of course, in straightforward illnesses like mumps, measles, whooping cough, etc.).

'This feeling of being "tied" is universal and universally resented by the mothers I know. It's not a case of being all out for a good time—only "all work and no play" for the mother.

'In the orange-queue last Monday I overheard a mother saying to her obviously newly-married daughter: "One is enough, or you'll be a drudge *all* your life" and this statement referred to children. It's true, isn't it? . . .

'Also, it has been mentioned in the press that women *ought* to take more interest in "local" affairs, get on the Council, etc. etc. How can they?—unless they have a resident maid. Or perhaps this does not refer to mothers?'

Middle-class women with small children quite often mention periods of *years* during which they say that they have not been able to get out alone for a day or an evening with their husbands. Among younger working and artisan-class wives typical comments included:

'Well, as soon as my hubby comes back, we want to catch up on some of the good times we've missed the last few years. Babies tie you; you and your hubby can never get together or anything. It's just staying at home washing nappies.' (22C. Doesn't want children 'for a long time anyway.')

'Well, I mean I don't want any more single-handed—there's nothing *to* it. You only get the hard side of marriage.' (26D. Two children.)

'Well, one or two perhaps, but not yet, after the war at any rate. There's so much to do, washing and cooking and all. When Jim comes home, we want to have a good time, see?' (20D.)

For the most part, however, the verbal comments concentrated on the amount of work *in* the house rather than the difficulty of getting *out:*

'Two's enough for the present, thanks. For one thing, I hardly get time to put my feet up from when I get up at six-thirty till after the kids are in bed at seven. It's just run, run, run—and the washing!' (25C.)

'I'd like two, a boy and a girl. Because I don't want to spend *all* the time when I'm young slaving indoors. A baby just makes work you know, you can't get away from that.' (26C.)

'None at all, leastways not for a long time. I want my hubby back first, and us to have a bit of fun together, see? Well, I might have two, but not a large family like ours. Work, work, work; that's all there is when they're little.' (20D.)

'I dunno. I think a large family is awfully hard work; you're just never off your feet all day long.' (26C.)

Well, kids are a tie—there's no getting away from it; and when my hubby comes back, we want to go out together sometimes see, and not have a houseful of kids to worry about.' (29D.)

'A large family, well they keep you at it, like my mum, always something to do, washing, mending, cooking. Ah, it makes you old before your time.' (19D.)

Does this indicate a change in the amount of sacrifice women are willing to make for children, or is it simply a reflexion of the fact that today women do not *have* to make these sacrifices? The question is unanswerable. Naturally some grandmothers feel proud or virtuous about the large families they managed to bring up, but if they had their time again would they have so many? Dotted about the material used in this survey are numerous examples of mothers advising their married daughters not to have many children. There are many large families still today, but of all the mothers married over ten years, irrespective of present family-size, more than one in six admitted that they would have liked fewer children. When they have worked to bring up their families successfully, and their sons and daughters marry, will they not become proud grand-parents, harking back to the tough old 1940s when women could take it, deploring the modern drive for selfish pleasures in one breath and advising their own children not to have too many in another, like so many parents today?[1]

Certainly modern parents seem little impressed by the hard work which past generations put into the upbringing of large families. Here is one:

'With the progression of education, nothing is being done to provide parents of limited means with any opportunities to pursue the intelligent interests which education fosters. A family means to a mother imprisonment within four walls and drudgery from morning till night if she has no help. If she sits down during the evening, it is to cope with piles of mending and making. Once upon a time that may have been sufficient for mothers; and fathers may not have valued the companionship of their wives. But I'm pretty sure that they only endured the heart-breaking and back-aching drudgery because it didn't occur to them that things might be otherwise.'

And a typical young working-class comment:

'You can't bring them up proper, not nowadays you can't. Course Mum's always saying how *she* managed; but what I say is, things was different then, weren't they?' (24D.)

Things are likely to go on being different: the countre-attractions to childbearing and rearing to increase, not decrease. This is a background which we have to assume. The alternatives to housework which exist

[1] C.f. Mrs. Smith in *Like My Mum* (Chap. XX).

today and will exist tomorrow must make the bearing of large families increasingly dependent on the strong desires of their parents. In our interpretation the 'selfish' motives can be reduced to one main factor. Women today find the continual routine involved in rearing children boring and limiting. This fact remains whatever valuation we place on the alternatives, and whatever the alternatives may be. If it's 'having a good time', going to the cinema, dancehall or cornerhouse, then the alternative may seem selfish. If it's evening classes, meetings, lectures, professional obligations, sitting on committees or performing civic duties, then, perhaps, selfishness may not seem the right word. But all are part and parcel of mass-education and mass-amenity, and the inclusion of women indiscriminately with men in the mass for whom these things are provided, or to whom the dependent tastes and obligations fall, makes the mother's choice a more difficult one than it has been before, even if she *wants* a large family.

In our view, these motives for small families can only be slightly weakened by providing women with the facilities for getting out and having more children at the same time. The factor we are up against, and whose importance we are really estimating, is *the desire to get out and have a social life away from home.* Undoubtedly the desire is strong, and undoubtedly in some cases it restricts the number of children in the family. But the fact that women today want a wider social horizon is in itself no indication of the way their family-planning would be affected if they had it. At one end of the scale the 'maternal' type, who doesn't mind staying at home; at the other, the highly social, the careerist, the pleasure lover. At neither of the extremes are creches, child-minders, etc. likely to make much difference; four children will always be more of a tie and a responsibility than two. In between are some for whom it is really a matter of touch and go whether or not to have the social life or the extra child. These would be affected. But we doubt very much whether there are many of them. The implication in the answers of the majority of those who say a large family would tie them down too much appears to us to be a generalization rather than a specific motive for keeping their own families small. Large families are a tie: women say this, in the main, not because they want another child but do not want the trouble; they say it because that seems a common-sense explanation of their own desire for a small family. And the proportion who say it is certainly very much larger than the proportion who would contemplate another child because children had become less of a tie.

XVI. Economic Paradox

Top everywhere of all the reasons people give for not having more children comes money. But those with most money have fewest children,

and those with least money today have more money than they would have had in an earlier generation, when the birth-rate was higher. The authors of the League of Nations Report on the future population of Europe[1] reach the following conclusion about the likely effect of economic programmes on birth-rates:

'If the whole population is moving toward the set of values held by the most prosperous classes, and that would appear to be the general hope and expectation, the motives for child-bearing may be weakened rather than strengthened. Programmes of economic security, rightly directed to the health of children and their preparation for useful citizenship, may serve to raise the aspirations more than they lighten the burden of parents. Unless carefully designed, they run the risk of becoming endeavours to reverse the trend of fertility by accentuating those same values that were initially responsible for the decline. So far as increasing fertility is concerned, pro-natalist policies based strictly on the relief of economic burdens of parenthood can at best be expected to influence cases near the margin of choice; at worst, to bring a strengthening of the trend toward lower fertility.'

Practically every legislative proposal for increasing fertility has as its object the lessening, directly or indirectly, of the money worries associated with parenthood. Yet an American writer, dealing with the problems of over-populated countries, can put forward in all seriousness the suggestion that the way of overcoming these difficulties is to *reduce* the rate of growth by improving the economic status of the people:

'The only hope of a solution, so far as the immediate post-war future is concerned, lies in the alteration of basic conditions. For example, one of the surest means of reducing the rate of growth of any people is to *improve* their economic status. This may seem paradoxical, but it is well known that well-to-do classes seldom reproduce sufficiently to replace themselves. The same is true of nations. . . .'

Not only do population policies envisage an acceleration of the economic trends which have accompanied population decline, but parents too think that more economic encouragement will increase their families. Here is an account of a discussion group on the subject in the army, written by the officer who initiated it:

'Recently I gave a lecture to the whole battery on population problems. I pointed out that the population was going down, and I tried to show them why this was a possible evil. Then I went into some of the suggested reasons for this: e.g. birth-control (this, I said, explains nothing: it is simply the means); lower fertility; insecurity of surroundings; lack of money; women wanting a good time; women wanting independence.

'And I suggested various remedies: prevention of sale of contraceptives; greater security; special offers to the newly married; family allowances.

'After this the battery split up into groups and held discussions. At every one of these, apparently, the almost unanimous opinion was that only one thing ever stopped people having children, and that was MONEY. I tried to argue with them to see if anything else came out, but hardly anybody changed from his original opinion. Let the business of having children not involve a family in financial difficulty, and there would be no population problem.

'The unmarried among the audience argued that they couldn't even get married before they were sure of a steady wage. But those who were already married often admitted that they got married before they could "really afford it".

'The problem of children had obviously been rather carefully considered by nearly everybody, and I have since been told that the lecture caused more to-do

[1] *The Future Population of Europe and the Soviet Union* (League of Nations, Geneva, 1944).

than anything else for a long time. For instance, a bombardier (30C) says that after the war he and his wife are going to have two children. Two and no more. We asked him what sex. He said he hoped for one boy and one girl. We asked him in various ways what if they were both boys or both girls, etc. etc. But he stuck to his guns. Two children, that was decided.

'Another (40D) said that his wife had had two children and was too old to have any more. He was quite as definite and determined as the first.

'A third (25D) had no children and intended to have none until he could afford it. And he saw no hope of that.

'The number of men who had obviously thought seriously was extraordinary. But whether money was really at the root of the trouble, or whether it was simply their excuse to themselves, I wouldn't like to say. I fancy personally that quite a lot is due to such an escape-mechanism. But I wouldn't like to prove it.'

When women were asked why they didn't want more children 23% of the more recently married, 20% of those with families of two or less, 20% of those with elementary education, said it was because of money. No other factor was mentioned by as many as 10% of any group. When they were asked if they could suggest anything which might make them want more children, money was top again. When the middle-class National Panel were asked why they thought other people were not having more children, economic reasons was by far the most frequently mentioned. In the letters to the doctor, three out of ten people put either the small size of their own family or the general decline in the birth-rate down to money. Women applying for advice to the birth-control clinic say they want to restrict their families for money reasons more often than anything else except health and doctor's advice, and special wartime motives.

Does this mean that a paternal Treasury can buy babies by the thousand if it is willing to pay the price? For numerous reasons which will appear later, this seems unlikely. But one thing seems definite. The chances of buying babies at cost price, assessed according to a minimum standard of food and clothing, are very slender indeed, Only below the poverty line does 'I can't afford another' mean 'I haven't the money to keep it alive'. Governments hitherto have attempted to buy babies below cost, on family allowances not family subsistences. It is rather like attempting to encourage people to patronize opera by reducing the price of the seats. Only those whose ambition is to listen to opera are likely to consider the proposition. If the desire for larger families was strong, then 'allowances' might turn the scales. But all the evidence suggests that the desire is not strong, and if this is so then even 'subsistences', covering the real cost of essentials, seem unlikely to get far. If opera seats were free audiences would still consist mainly of opera lovers.

The real cost of a child, as distinct from the cost of keeping it alive, is the factor which is at the back of people's minds when they say they can't 'afford' another. Real costs rise steeply up the social scale. Money difficulties are the most frequent reason given for wanting to keep their family small among those with secondary education as well as those with elementary, and the middle-class, for whom the real costs of a

Bermondsey baby could be met out of income tax rebate and economy on smokes, are little nearer being able to 'afford' in their sense than Bermondsey mothers are in theirs.

In our interpretation the fundamental question which has to be asked before embarking on any scheme for economic assistance to parents is this. Is the scheme to be aimed at helping those who want more children to realize their ambition; or is it to be aimed at encouraging those who have no particular desire for a larger family to change their minds? If it is to be aimed at the latter—and in our opinion a scheme aimed at the former can only produce a thin trickle of babies while outlooks remain as they are—then allowances or subsistences are unlikely to be adequate. This is almost self-evident. Payment of part-costs is only likely to make people do a thing if they *want* to do it. Habits are not changed just because it costs less than it did to behave differently, unless people want to behave differently. If it costs nothing to change, some may change experimentally. But it is only when it becomes positively advantageous to change that those who are contented with their old ways will do so. Pay people half-a-crown to come to opera and audiences will swell—though not with opera lovers.

In our judgement, whilst it is true enough that very many parents cannot afford to bring a larger family up in the way they want, few would contemplate larger families unless they *could* bring them up in that way. If they could, many might have more, though even then a host of subsidiary motives against large families remain. Nothing can make it 'just as easy' for the parents to have four children as it is to have three, while family life as we know it continues.

Being unable to afford another child certainly means not enough money. But the scale ascends rapidly from the extra 15s. or so a week which would enable a working-class family to add one to its numbers without reducing the parents' or the other children's standards, to the £2,000 odd additional capital which would be necessary to do the same thing, apart from ordinary day-to-day expenses, where the standard includes a private school and university education. A flat-rate 'allowance' anywhere near the size so far involved in such schemes can at best provide equal opportunity for an extra child where standards are lowest. It can reasonably be expected to produce extra children among poorer people, but as standards rise up the social scale it will become increasingly more of a drop in the ocean of prestige and chance in life. Financial inducements by themselves may well accentuate present trends, by encouraging those with lowest standards to increase their families while leaving more ambitious parents unaffected. If the scale is increased, then it will become a positive economic advantage for those with low standards to have an extra child. While those with greater ambitions may be encouraged by a larger allowance, the pattern may still remain the same because of the additional inducement to those with less ambition.

Eugenics and politics apart, neither the extinction of the middle class nor the multiplication of the less ambitious at the expense of the more ambitious seems desirable. However successful financial inducements may be in producing *numbers*, we cannot see that they are likely to alter the general existing tendency towards highest birth-rates among lowest paid in worst environments. And they may well accentuate it.

Let us examine the evidence.

Inability to Afford Essentials

There are, of course, many below the poverty-line who literally cannot afford the bare essentials for another child, or for whom an addition to the family would mean a depression of standards which even a strong desire could hardly overcome. The Poplar mother, living in two rented rooms with her husband and two children, in a district which 'gives her the creeps' but where she has to stay because they could not afford the fare to her husband's workplace from outside; who married for 'A home and children. I've always wanted children of my own'; who thinks that children 'make married life worthwhile. Most marriages would be a perfect flop without children'; and who says:

'If I'd have money for them I'd have them willingly'

no doubt means that she would change her plans if she could be sure of a few shillings extra.

Similarly those working-class women who say they've not enough money to keep more sometimes mean that they would be unable to provide the necessities for another child. These are the ones who would be likely to take quick advantage of subsistence allowances if they come. But they are mainly confined to one social strata. As soon as we get outside the area of real poverty, it is not the cost of food and clothes which acts as a deterrent, but the cost of a 'chance in life', not only for the child, but for its parents as well.

Memories

Motives intermingle, and it is natural that the verbal stress should be laid more on the child's chances than on the parents'. But some are quite frank in their assertion that they are unwilling to sacrifice more than a certain amount of their own time and standard of living to children. Two examples from opposite ends of the economic scale illustrate this. The first is from a married man, now working in munitions, who has known unemployment and real poverty; the second from a middle-class housewife:

(1) 'We began married life with the intention of having no children. That was nine years ago. For me work was poor three or four days a week, also to get a passable house to live in we had to buy one in a housing scheme through a building society. That also made it necessary that we had no family or we would have been in poverty for the rest of our lives. We both had seen people with families struggling for an existence on the dole or worse four days a week and no dole.

'We still could have a family, but neither of us want them now, if we ever did. We want to enjoy a decent standard of living without having more encumbrances to drag us down.

'I should say neither of us regret our decision and would do the same again.

'I would say we want more out of life than just to spend all our life rearing children, then to die and never know we had lived for working and rearing children.'

(2) 'After our third child was born we took precautions so that no other children were born. This was done entirely from a "social status" point of view. Though we had sufficient means, we liked to live at a certain standard. We intended to educate the boys according to that social status and we felt that we couldn't afford to have more children. We were willing slaves of custom and habit. I am sure that if domestic complications (staff attitudes, uncertainties, responsibilities) had been less we should have *enjoyed* family life more, but despite love for sons, and desire to bring them up well, there was a large body of anxiety and frustration which told against desire to have more children. I should say, therefore, that though *circumstances*, viewed theoretically, were propitious, social conditions, household worries and social distractions (personal way of living with, entertaining, etc., one's social equals) were, in practice, limiting agents.'

This husband and wife are saying very much the same thing from their different economic standpoints. An allowance might relieve the former from the fear of being 'dragged down' by the encumbrance of a family; but no allowance of a size ever contemplated would keep the 'social status' of the middle-class housewife at its former level were she to have another child.

The experience of themselves being brought up in a large family under difficult economic circumstances mingles with desire to give their children a better chance in deciding mothers to limit numbers drastically. Here, in a letter to the doctor, is the viewpoint of one of a family of eight:

'I feel it my duty, after such a bitter childhood, which unfortunately can never be forgotten, to do what little I can to urge the need for social security as a vital step towards solving the birth-rate problem. Of course, I agree, we must have more babies, but first let us decide they must be fed and housed and decently clothed. Not that I can contribute towards having more babies in this respect. I am a parasite, although I am only in my early thirties. I have had the ovaries removed.

'Maybe this is part of the price of being next to the eldest of eight, a father who never worked, being an invalid. He never earned a penny. We kept a man and family on the earnings of mother, who not only had eight children, but worked as a charwoman for two and six a day, the sole income twelve and six for all of us to live on. I should say exist. We never knew what it was to have more than one meal a day, which was a kipper at teatime. It is small wonder that three of us are unfit for war-service. When one has worked, as we have, from the age of eleven and known such starvation and poverty, one feels one must do all one can towards the realization that children cannot sleep six in a single bed, suffer and work and starve as we did, and grow into strong, healthy citizens. It is high time social security was a real thing.

Among younger women, whose memories of their own childhood are fresh, the desire for their own children not to undergo the same difficulties is particularly pronounced. Three recently-married factory-workers:

'I'd like to give my children a good education and a happier time than I had, and if you've four or five you can't do it.'

'Coming as I do from a large family is one reason why I wouldn't want more than the two I've spoken about. I know what it's been to keep going without, to have to make do, and I definitely want my children to have a better chance.'

'Well, I come of a very large family myself, and I've seen what a struggle it is to bring them up. My mother's always been short herself, so that we can have it.

If there's not much money coming in it's not much fun bringing up a large family. You don't get married just to have one child after another.'

But it is not only memories of positive hardship which makes mothers want fewer children. They think, too, how much better their own chances would have been if the family income had not been spread over so many brothers and sisters. One of a family of six said:

'I don't want more because if you have a large family you can't give them the same attention. I know my mother was good to us and we didn't go short, but she'd have liked to have given us a better education, but she just couldn't afford, and several of us won scholarships to higher schools yet we couldn't go because we couldn't afford it.'

This is the crux of the 'can't-afford another' situation. Parents want to be able to do as well for each member of a larger family as they can do for a small one before they contemplate having another child. It is not simply a question of being fairly comfortable and having a little money to spare; it is a question of keeping up the total standard. Except at the lowest income levels an allowance measured in shillings can only cover a fraction of the cost of realizing parental ambitions. At the same time social standards are rising steeply among those most likely to be influenced by allowances scaled to the cost of necessities. As two working-class women said:

'I think you can *bring* two up and you *drag* the rest up.' (24.)

'It's not like the old days. People are more particular now, aren't they? They don't want their kiddies just dragged up in the gutter.' (28.)

Can't Afford—Upbringing and Education

Parents today, except sometimes among the social levels where a good chance in life seems least possible, want to give their children the best they can possibly manage. Here are some typical comments from recently married women, some of whom have not yet started their families. They all left school at 14:

'I'd like two or three, and if I can afford to give them a good chance in life I wouldn't mind having four. I'd like to give them the best I could afford. I don't want to bring them up just anyhow. I'd rather have just one or two if I couldn't afford more, than seven or eight and share it.' (26, no children.)

'One's enough. You've got to bring them up decent, haven't you?' (32, 1 child.)

'I'd like to keep at two because I like to keep them tidy. Money doesn't run to more than two.' (29, 2 children.)

'Two. I'd want to give them the best chance I could, and so the money wouldn't run to it.' (23, no children.)

'Two. I can't see that it's clever to have a lot of children. You can't give them any comfort or security with things as they are at present.' (34, no children.)

'One. Because you can give the one a better chance in life.' (27, No children.)

'Three. Because I'd like to give them all I possibly could, and I don't think I could afford more.' (20, No children.)

Several women mention that the Queen only had two children almost in the same breath as they say *they* can't afford more—a striking illustration of the socio-economic sanction for small families.

The cost of education is an important part of the outlay on giving children the best possible chance. Here again standards are rising; working-class women are not content with giving their children as good a chance as they had themselves:

'Two boys I've got. I've not wanted more, because I've not been in a position to keep more. I've given them both a good education and I'm proud of them. They're both in good jobs now, only the war's interfered—still, the education's theirs.' (44. Elementary education.)

'It's not fair to have children if you can't afford them. I was born in a poor family and never had the chance of an education, which I always wanted to have.' (29. Elementary education.)

'Two. It's the terrible cost of keeping them. You can't do your best for them, not if you've got a large family. Everything's so expensive and you want to give them a good education, else they're not anywhere.' (30. Elementary education.)

'Another one and no more. For one thing I haven't got the money to give them as good an education as I'd like to.' (30. Elementary education.)

The extension of free education, raising the school leaving age, the opportunity for talent to make its way up the educational ladder without fee-paying; these things rather than family allowances seem likely to meet the costs of parental ambitions. However, it is just at the economic level where educational reform will have the profoundest effects on social chances that least enthusiasm is felt for the raising of the school leaving age. A sample were asked what they felt about the school leaving age being raised (March 1944). Unqualified approval was strongest among the artisan class, weakest among the unskilled working class, only half of whom were entirely favourable to the idea. An extra year's schooling means an extra year's outlay on food and clothes. More important still, at the lower income levels particularly, it means a year's loss of a wage-earner to the family. Several suggested some sort of compensation for this loss:

'I think it's a very good thing, except I don't know how it will work out. If you haven't got a lot of money, you want your kids to be earning. There were seven of us in my family, and we all went to work at fourteen. I think the Government should compensate, or it will be very hard on poorer people.' (F25D.)

'It should be sixteen, with the proviso made that poor people should receive aid to feed them.' (M30C.)

'In some cases it's a good thing. If they had children's allowances it would be all right, otherwise it would come very hard on poor parents. But it would be a very good thing.' (M50D.)

Family allowances are a most desirable subsidiary to educational reform, but it is the reforms, not the allowances, which are likely to raise the birth-rate.

Educational reforms are likely to differ in their effect upon the birth-rate from most social measures, in that the artisan class rather than the unskilled working class will derive most benefit. Changes in the educational system, already envisaged in official policy, may have quite considerable effects among the more ambitious section of the working class. Family allowances may turn the scale where incomes are low. But here again the effects on the middle class

may be slight, and the net result be to accentuate present trends. Here are two cases of middle-class families, relating number of children to cost of education:

'I have been married twelve years. I wanted about six children before I was married, having been brought up partly with young cousins (thirteen to twenty years younger than I) and liking children as a result. I knew even then the cost of having them and giving them the kind of education and upbringing I wanted them to have, which I put down then at a thousand pounds each (my revised estimate today is two thousand five hundred pounds each). Both my wife and I were at boarding schools and I was at University, and I wanted them to have as good a chance as we had, and appreciated the advantages of these institutions. I never therefore expected to be able to afford six children, but when we married we felt we would have as many as we could afford if all went well. We had two children according to plan, also a third which we might have planned to have, but had not planned to have at that time.' (Father.)

'We had two children spaced at an interval of about three years. Had we had sufficient means we should have had four children on the ground that four is most convenient, or rather optimum, number, not too great a strain on the strength of a healthy woman, and the best social group for the emotional development of the children themselves. We did not have more than two since financial circumstances did not permit. We did not propose to have children we could not educate up to University standard if they were intelligent enough. Nor did we propose to reduce ourselves to beggary to pay for children or education.

'I am quite clear that the only reason for two instead of four, in our case, was economic. We did not have the means. If family allowances, or high salary, or free education up to the graduate University level had been assured, we should have elected to have the larger family.' (Father.)

Changes in the educational system of the sort officially suggested so far are unlikely to have an appreciable effect in cases of this kind. A family allowance of a few shillings will have even less. In order to keep the class which is used to private education up to the age of eighteen or later from extinction, it may well be necessary to go much further and practically to eliminate fee-paying schools and universities. If *all* education were free and subsistence allowances were paid for children till the end of their education, then 'can't afford another' would begin to mean the same thing to rich and poor alike. But legislation which increases the *opportunities* of the less well-off for an extended free education and leaves the possibilities of an extended fee-paying education untouched will, if anything, encourage the not-very-well-off to have larger families and leave the rich in much the same position as before. The curious situation may eventually be reached where the well-off can only maintain themselves numerically by giving themselves equal chances with the poor. The doors of Eton may finally be opened to all not in the interests of democracy, but in order to preserve Old Etonians from extinction.

Insecurity

Underlying these economic motives for family limitation is the desire of parents to be sure of providing for their children in the future. Whatever their present economic situation, future difficulties can be more easily overcome if the family is small than if it is large. Lack of

certainty rather than lack of immediate funds may delay and restrict. Here is a housewife who has put off starting a family for so long that she is no more able to start:

'I have been married for thirteen years, and to my regret have no children although we have only ourselves to blame for that. We began married life with the intention of not having children until we could afford them, with the result that we have never felt we could afford them. During the latter years before the war I wanted to take the plunge, but by that time my husband had become used to receiving my undivided attention and so he decided that we should not then make such a change in our life. Now he is abroad, and would like to begin a family on his return. He has yet to learn that it is quite out of the question, as we have left it too late.'

And here is a father who planned the economics of the first child in detail, but fell ill shortly after it was born:

'We began married life with a strong desire for children—that is as soon as it was economically practicable. We decided to save sufficient to cover the costs of pregnancy, confinement and the first six months of our infant's life. We agreed to use contraceptives for this period and consulted a gynaecologist for advice. We had estimated for a year before our savings would be sufficient, but after four months we discontinued the use of contraceptives in view of the fact that conception might take that time anyway. Within that month our infant was on the way. Despite the fact that I retired to bed for a six months' illness within a week of our daughter's birth, we have never regretted our decision. We are now using contraceptives again and shall probably continue for a year, although we intend to have more children if we can.

'We should feel a great deal happier if we could be sure of a future which involved adequate family allowances, unemployment and sick benefits—six months' watching savings fall to nothing is no fun, and eighteen shillings is quite inadequate.'

Either security of employment, or the certainty of adequate benefits should the father be out of work, would, in many cases, go farther than any increase in current income towards making parents decide to have a child. This commission salesman expresses most clearly the feelings of those who are not deterred by lack of present money, but by uncertainty of adequate money in the future:

'I have been married for over five years. I think I am right in saying that we always meant to have children. Our first son was born three months ago. It is rather difficult to say why we didn't start earlier and give all the reasons. One was "insecurity". I do not mean that we would not have had enough money; in fact we have not got enough now, but the uncertainty as to earning facilities. We would have had a child on very little money, but the uncertainty whether we could make any living, or in fact work, certainly delayed things. It may well be asked whether the feeling of greater certainty of making a living in the future exists for me now. The answer is no. The reason for having our son—and we both hope to have one or two more children—is just that we didn't want to wait any longer.'

Among working class wives it is often the fear that their husbands won't have a *steady* job rather than the fear that they will not be adequately paid which helps to keep families small. This fear of unemployment after the war turns up continually. It is probably at the back of the minds of many more of the women who say they can't afford more children than actually specify it in this context.

Family Allowances

Women were asked whether it would make any difference to the number of children they would like to have if the Government paid

money allowances for them. Results classified by education were as follows:

Attitude to Family Allowances:	*Percentage having this attitude among those with:*	
	Secondary Education	*Elementary Education*
	%	%
Would make a difference ..	29	52
Would not make a difference ..	66	45
Vague, and no opinion	5	3

Only 13% of those with secondary education gave an *unqualified* 'yes' to this question, only 12% of those with families of three or more. On the other hand, 29% of East End women, the same proportion of all the newly-married, and half of the newly-married factory girls with elementary education gave an unqualified affirmative reply.

The qualifications of those who think allowances might change their plans and the reasons why others reject the idea, give an indication of the difficulties which any family allowance scheme may have to face.

One of the most frequent comments in reply to this question was simply to say that present army allowances for children were not nearly large enough. Some young wives:

'Well it might. I don't know. It's very little as it is—it's not near enough.' (21D.)

'Well, he's a bottle baby, and sometimes it costs me two tins of food a week—that's 11s., and they only give me 9s. 6d.' (23D.)

'It might. They don't give enough.' (22D.)

'No. But 15s. a week wouldn't be too much for the Government to allow a child I bought a bottle of magnesia for the baby this morning. 3s. 6d. out of 8s. 6d.—that doesn't leave you much, does it?' (25D.)

'Well, it might make it easier. But you get 11s. and I get an extra 1s. 9d., and then they take off 6s. £2 3s. 3d. a week won't keep me and the kiddie and buy him clothes. You pay 10s. a week rent and 2s. 6d. insurance—you can't do it.' (34D.)

'Well, you can't have more than two under the circumstances. You can't get a flat. And on army allowance you can't keep children, especially with everything so dear.' (26D.)

Those who were favourable to the idea of family allowances and seemed to think that they might make some difference to their plans were asked how much they thought the allowance should be. The average amount suggested to the nearest shilling was as follows:

Secondary Education	18/- per week
Elementary Education	15/- „ „
More than 3 children	14/- „ „
Less than 3 children	16/- „ „
High birth-rate areas	14/- „ „
Low birth-rate areas	17/- „ „

Those who have fewest children put the price highest, as we should expect. But it is abundantly clear that in all groups those who feel allowances might affect their ideas on family-size are thinking, not of a few shillings to supplement an inadequate income, but of a sum which will really pay the whole basic costs of the child. The Beveridge plan suggested an allowance only half as big as the average amount suggested by mothers of small families; the Government Social Security Plan proposes a flat rate for everyone of not much over a third of the amount East End mothers think would be necessary to make them change their minds.

Unless a full-scale subsidy for children comes into operation, there seems little chance of cash allowances having any appreciable effect on the birth-rate *on their own*. In our view their eventual function is not likely to be a direct stimulus to the birth-rate at all, but rather a subsidiary part of a total scheme for economic security, coupled with an effective allowance in kind and in services far beyond any sum which could reasonably be standardized as a cash payment. Before going into more detail, let us examine the objections of housewives to the idea of family allowances.

Many women who reject the idea of cash payments say that a fair wage or a steady job for their husbands would be more likely to change their plans. Sometimes an objection to the principle of being paid to have children is implicit, sometimes the woman simply thinks that this would reduce her economic anxieties more effectively:

'I don't think it's allowances so much as if the men got bigger wages.' (29C.)

'Not for me. They should give them a fair wage.' (29C.)

'Not allowances, but if my husband was in a regular job, and his wages didn't drop after the war, that would induce me to have children, because I wouldn't worry then. It's the financial part more than anything, and the housing conditions.' (22C.)

'No. They should give the men a fair wage.' (30C.)

'No. They should pay a man well for doing his daily job. We don't want anything given to us; we will work for it. Bring up the standard of living, that's what they want to do.' (25C.)

'Maybe. But your man wants a decent job at decent wages, that's the main thing.' (30D.)

Some find the idea of cash payments unpleasant, and any scheme explicitly designed to increase the birth-rate would meet a strong body of resistance on the ground that it was 'charity' or bribery.

'I suppose it would in a way, although some people wouldn't like it. They'd regard it as charity, like the Government's taken pity on the children and given them an extra allowance to feed them for the children's sake.' (32C.)

'Oh no, that's a nasty thing. Not a nice idea. Children's allowances in wartime are different, of course.' (26D.)

Others feel either that they wouldn't like to think *they* were having children for money, or that family allowances would encourage other

people to do this, or that the money often wouldn't go to the children at all:

'I couldn't say, but I think it might help, although it sounds mercenary as if you'd have another child for the money. I don't think it would make much difference.' (25D.)

'No. Because people would have a lot to get the money.' (27D.)

'No. I shouldn't like that. I shouldn't like to have more for the sake of getting the money.' (27D.)

'No, because the children wouldn't get the money. Some parents will have their drink and their pleasure and let the children go hang. You can see a lot of that round here.' (32D.)

None of these objections apply to allowances *in kind.* They would not be open to abuse. As a Poplar mother put it:

'Yes, providing they gave you vouchers say for clothes and shoes—not exactly in money. Some mothers would drink the money and not give it to the children. I've seen it done, with women selling their coupons.' (26D.)

Like the orange juice and cod-liver oil distributed at a nominal price in wartime and the extended free-meal service proposed by the Government, a system of vouchers might well succeed in giving a sense of security where money allowances would fail. It is difficult to see how cash payments can be made on a large enough scale to provide security without running a strong risk of widespread abuse. Fifteen shillings a week might produce the children, but it might well produce children no more healthy and well cared for than before. Large families might be encouraged most among the most irresponsible elements.

But even if an allowance of 15s. or so were paid, it would not in itself go far towards producing a sense of security. If a man loses his job —and we know that this is the major insecurity today—his income may well fall to a level where the 15s. cannot comfortably be spent entirely on the child, as it could before. The subsistence costs of his children are of no great value to a man whose total income is drastically reduced by unemployment, so far as security for the children is concerned. In practice, if his income is reduced by only £1 a week and his basic commitments remain the same he will either have to spread the 15s. allowance over a number of different things or run into debt. The whole family will benefit in that standards will not be so depressed as they would have been without the 15s. but the security and chances of the child are in no way guaranteed. The allowance is simply unearned income, and rationally there is no more encouragement for the working-class to have children because of generous family allowances than there is for the investing class to have one for every £35 annual dividend they draw from gilt-edged securities. Earned income, its size and its stability is the important thing.

Within a framework of job-security and a wage-scale related to the reasonable living standards of the parents, child allowances make sense. A relatively small allowance under these circumstances would mean more than a large one without job-security for the simple reason that it

could then be permanently related to the needs of the child and not transferred at intervals to meeting part of the needs of the whole family.

Many women who say lack of money is their reason for not wanting a larger family neverthless reject the idea of family allowances, which confirms these impressions. On the basis of all the evidence we suggest:

(*a*) That cash allowances are only likely to encourage people to have children if they operate within a framework of economic security.

(*b*) Without economic security allowances are most likely to have effect where there is real poverty, and there is no guarantee that children encouraged by allowances *alone* would be any better cared for than those produced without allowances.

(*c*) Given economic security, allowances will operate in direct relationship to the future of the children—among families who care to budget their expenditure that way.

(*d*) But even within this framework cash allowances face the following difficulties:

1. While economic security will give the parents the *opportunity* to spend the whole allowance on the child, and to budget ahead—which they cannot do without the most generous allowance if their own earnings are subject to major variations—budgeting is still dependent on the parents, and there is still no guarantee that the children will benefit.
2. There is some objection to the idea of allowances on the grounds that they will seem like charity. This may be overcome by the *fait accompli*, but the more general objection to being 'paid to have children' may persist, especially when it becomes widely known that a main object of allowances is to maintain the birth-rate. Although those who feel they might be influenced by allowances are thinking of sums adequate for subsistence, a cash subsistence allowance is liable to look like bribery and 'buying children'. This may produce an unfavourable attitude among more thoughtful people, or even a hostile social atmosphere towards those with large families.

(*e*) The best solution to these difficulties would appear to be to keep cash payments below the level at which they can reasonably encourage people to have children for the sake of the money alone and to augment them with extensive 'payments' in kind and in service which, while minimizing the economic problems of the parents, can only be *used* for the children.

(*f*) Allowances in kind should include free meals, milk, etc., as already proposed by the Government. But if cash payments are to

be as low as 5s. a week, it will probably be necessary to augment these provisions considerably before larger families are encouraged by them. Even the mothers of the East End suggest an average sum of 14s. a week to encourage them to have another child. Allowances of clothes—especially of boots and shoes, which are frequently mentioned as an expense to which present army allowances bear no relation—are suggested.

(g) Allowances in services will help, not with the subsistence costs, but with the costs of parental ambition. No money allowance will meet these costs. In order to ensure that the ambitious and the relatively small well-off are encouraged to have children as much as the less ambitious and less well-off, the general aim of 'services' must be to provide real equality of opportunity. In our opinion it will be necessary not only to provide the poor with the opportunities now available to the better-off, but also to deprive the better-off of some of the opportunities they now have to spend their money on services. It may prove necessary to make *all* education free, to abolish the private medical practitioner, and so on, in order to protect the well-to-do from the consequences of their social ambitions. This may be the only way of ironing out the social differences in the birth-rate and enabling the middle-class to reproduce itself.

Differential Allowances

For many years now there has been a marriage allowance and a family allowance for those whose income is large enough to be subject to tax. Both work effectively on a sliding scale, and the maximum 'allowance' today for any couple, the last fifty pounds of whose income is taxable at the rate of 10s. in the pound, is £25 per annum per child, including the first. Thus for the first two children nearly £1 a week is added to the husband's pay packet, compared with the 5s. a week which would be the sole direct financial supplement for a couple with an income not subject to taxation, under the present family-allowance scheme. Although recent lowering of the level at which incomes are subject to taxation has blurred over the distinction, there has been an effective differential allowance graduated down to nothing for those who earn least. And, in the present survey, corresponding with working-class complaints about the inadequacy of army allowances for children, were middle-class complaints about the inadequacy of the income-tax allowance.

From the middle class case-histories and interviews consulted there is little sign that a differential allowance on this scale has any very important effect on family size. Eminently desirable as social measures though they may be, neither a 5s. cash payment nor a 10s. deduction

from income tax is likely in itself to make people decide to have another baby.

The general conclusions of this chapter were drafted before the Government's Social Security Plan was published. The evidence, we felt, did not point to family allowances as a direct inducement to larger families. Certainly not allowances on the part-cost scale which has distinguished such schemes in other countries. While a subsistence allowance might lead to a substantial increase in the birth-rate, there were many snags about providing cash payments on a subsistence scale, not the least of which was the possible social atmosphere which 'having children for money' might create. We concluded that cash allowances were essentially a subsidiary part of population policy, and that their potentialities were doubtful outside a framework of security, plus effective allowances in goods and services.

The social security plan runs very much along these lines. We are inclined to think that the 5s. allowance will prove inadequate unless parents are provided with considerably more benefits in kind than the plan proposes. However, in our opinion, those who criticize the scale of the allowances on the grounds that it 'would scarcely induce mothers to have more children' (London Women's Parliament) are barking up the wrong tree. Cash allowances will not encourage women to have more children unless they are so large that the irresponsible will be able to make money out of them. Even in reference to the 5s. allowance, Dr. Edith Summerskill, speaking as President of the Married Women's Association, is reported as saying that the Association feels 'emphatically that the family allowance should be paid to the mother. . . . A mean husband could, if he chose, withhold it and spend it on himself.' But even mothers are not all goddesses, and where they are their less prolific neighbours may believe that they are not, and speak accordingly. In our view it is desirable to keep cash payments below subsistence level—though probably not as low as 5s., and to supply the balance of encouragement in goods and services which cannot be diverted from the children to the parents. Quite apart from reasons of social atmosphere, concentration on goods and services seems desirable on eugenic grounds—for they can be standardized and mean the same for everyone's child, whereas money will always encourage most those who have least.

Maternity Benefits

There was practically no mention of the costs of confinement among working class mothers as a reason for restricting their families. Grumbles—not very frequent—were concentrated round the difficulty of getting help with the house or someone to look after the children during this period. Much of this was accentuated by wartime circumstances—fathers away and neighbours at work—and it does not appear to be a

vital factor so far as family size is concerned. There were, however, several complaints about the quality of treatment during confinement from working class mothers. Where incomes can possibly stretch to it, considerable economic sacrifices will still be made to obtain private treatment, and here we have an entirely different picture. While a maternity benefit of £1 a week for four weeks, plus a £4 maternity grant, will be a very real help to those who use municipal maternity services, it will scarcely touch the problems of those who have private treatment. Here again flat-rate money payments necessarily accentuate the difference between the problems of the fairly poor and the moderately well-off, going far towards solving those of the former while leaving those of the latter practically the same. When there is a reasonably efficient cheap or free service available and some people prefer to pay for private attention, it is in a sense their own lookout. But can we dismiss it as their own lookout if the middle classes fail to reproduce themselves because they insist on expensive private attention for themselves and their children from doctors and school teachers? This is likely to be a major problem of the future, a problem which may cause many headaches among the middle class committees and commissions which will perhaps shortly sit to discuss ways and means of preserving the middle class when the working class have got around to preserving themselves.

XVII. Housing

If the houses erected by local authorities and private enterprise between the two wars had continued to be the same size, and the standard of overcrowding had continued to be more exacting, a position might soon have been reached where the maintenance of the population at its current level would have been illegal.

A similar observation has, we believe, been made elsewhere, but it is worth repeating now, when we are on the threshold of a new period of post-war rehousing. Among the queries addressed to Lord Portal by the Women's Guild of Empire on the subject of the model prefabricated house exhibited in the grounds of the Tate Gallery was the following:

'The design of the house indicates that it is for a family of parents and two children. What steps are being taken to ensure that the children are of one sex?'

In this investigation, the size of houses and flats was remarked on infrequently compared with the inconveniences and lack of amenities in existing accommodation. This is not surprising. When the existing social pattern favours small families the provision of housing suitable only for small families is unlikely to cause much comment. For every woman who says, like a recently married factory girl:

'You've got to arrange your children to suit the house'

there are no doubt many more who have made the necessary arrangements in their stride, taking the size of their house or flat as one of many factors dictating a family of one or two children. To wait for the demand before building houses which will accommodate larger families is tantamount to waiting for the demand before putting a new labour-saving device on the market. The device and the house may be used once people are aware they are available; but in the meantime they can get along quite well without. If houses are built for families of one or two we may expect families of one or two to be planned increasingly. The housing problem may be solved at the expense of the population problem, for there will be a steadily decreasing number of people to accommodate as the years go by.

As things stand now, the Portal house is so far superior to the accommodation many working-class wives have and expect that its small size is a very minor consideration. An East End mother of 33 with three children, bombed out of their own house and living with relatives, said:

'I should like one of those houses everybody's mentioning. If the Government gave us all one of those, we'd be very happy. If they want to know what people want, I can tell them. You want a nice little house with a bathroom and a bit of garden, and a house you can have all to yourself, not the sort you have to take lodgers in to make the rent.'

Again, witness this scene in a factory at the end of a working day. A girl of 26, married in 1940, her husband at present in North Africa. They have had no children yet. She says:

'It's every woman's ambition to have a nice home and a garden for her children. I'm always harping on that. I've got an idea it's going to be hard after the war, for a few years anyway. There's thousands want homes building, and yet they don't get any headway; all we hear is this planning business. They should do something now, and let people see they really mean to do something.'

After the girls have left and the interview is concluded, she calls the investigator over to her bench. On it the girls have put a sheet of paper, a screwdriver and a measuring slide. And on the paper is written:

'To help you build your Portal House'.

A reasonably comfortable and convenient home after the war is more than many wives and mothers expect. A Portal house, or its equivalent in size and amenity, is dream enough for most working-class wives, for the time being at least. If there is only room for three or four, then the couples who set up house after the war are likely to arrange things accordingly and not feel particularly aggrieved because they have to do so.

The Importance of Housing

Despite the fact that dissatisfaction with the number of rooms available forms only a fraction of people's family-housing grumbles, on every count housing must be considered second only to economic problems as a conscious factor in restricting families. We have already shown that money difficulties cover a multitude of separate problems, from

education and social prestige to simple inability to afford the necessities for a large family. Compared with economics, housing presents a fairly compact set of questions for solution. Its conscious importance in restricting family size can be gauged from the following facts:

(*a*) It was more often mentioned *spontaneously* than any factor except money when women were asked if they could think of anything that might make them want more children.

(*b*) It was second on the list of factors thought to be influencing the size of families by the National Panel.

(*c*) More letters to the doctor, from women who felt unable to have as many children as they would like, mentioned housing than any other subject except money. About one in five mention it.

(*d*) About one in ten of the letters to a birth-control clinic mention difficulties of accommodation as a reason for wanting to practice birth-control.

(*e*) When women were asked whether having the sort of home they liked would make them want more children than they did at present, three-fifths of those with less than three children gave an affirmative reply.

Group Differences

The question asked in the interviews was:

Do you think if you could live in the sort of home you like that would make a difference to the number of children you would like to have?

Like the other four questions in this series, this is a leading one, and leads to an affirmative answer.[1] But we already know that housing is the second most frequently mentioned factor in spontaneous replies to an open question, and the response of women to the suggestion of a different home can be compared with their response to the other four factors suggested. Such a comparison suggests that a change in housing conditions is more likely to affect the attitude of women in the more important groups than any of the other suggestions.

The tables in Appendix II give a detailed analysis of replies to this question. Here we consider answers in three main categories: those who give a definitely or mainly affirmative reply; those who give a definitely or mainly negative one; and those who give other answers—vague, don't know, or answers in terms of other people, not themselves.

[1]This is an unorthodox use of the phrase 'leading question' which should be briefly explained. The question is not leading in the usual sense that it suggests the answer which the questioner wishes to obtain. But we know from experience that it is an effective lead, like all questions which present a pleasant hypothetical situation remote from everyday experience. In other words if people are asked if they would act and think differently if their environment were altered for the better, they tend to think they would. Replies to this type of question give an indication of the usefulness of the stimulus in predisposing people to make the desired change, but they do *not* show the absolute amount of change likely. In opinion research it is wise to call them 'leading questions', for they are just as effective a lead as many questions which are technically biassed in form.

The differences between the high and low birth-rate districts are as might have been expected:

63% of women in the high birth-rate districts say that having the sort of home they want might make a difference to the number of children they would like to have.

45% of women in the low birth-rate districts say this.

The housing conditions in the high birth-rate districts selected are, on the whole, very much worse than in the low birth-rate districts, and the difference has been accentuated by the war. Not only the space available, but the general amenities in the East End boroughs are much worse. Though the difference between replies from the two areas work in the direction we would expect, they are not nearly so marked as might be expected. The proportion answering the question with an *unqualified* 'yes' is only slightly larger in high than in low birth-rate areas. On the whole these results suggest that housing improvements in districts where conditions are already not too bad might well have a bigger immediate effect on women's attitudes than comparable improvements in districts where they are very bad. Certainly there does not appear to be any direct relationship between the badness of the housing and the extent to which women feel an improvement might affect their attitude on family-size.

This conclusion is borne out by an analysis of replies by education:

Q. Do you think if you could live in the sort of home you like that would make a difference to the number of children you would like to have?

	Percentage expressing this attitude among those with	
Attitude	*Elementary Education*	*Secondary Education*
	%	%
Would make a difference ..	60	41
Would not make a difference	37	57
Other replies	3	2

The less educated are more inclined to think that different housing conditions would make a difference to their attitude. This is not surprising, since the better educated are likely to be the better housed already. But the proportion with elementary education was much higher in the bad-housing high birth-rate areas than in the good-housing low birth-rate areas; yet in the bad-housing areas slightly fewer women felt that better housing would affect their attitude than among those with elementary education as a whole. It seems that district has a fairly strong effect on attitude, and that slum-clearance, in its initial stages at least, might have no more effect on family size than improvements in rather better districts.

There was a considerable difference between the attitude of those with three or more children and those with less than three:

Attitude	*Percentage expressing this attitude among those with*	
	Less than 3 *children*	3 *or more children*
	%	%
Would make a difference ..	59	39
Would not make a difference	39	57
Other replies	2	4

The interesting point here is that as many as two-fifths of those with three or more children say they think housing might make a difference to their attitude. From the verbatim replies to this question, it is clear that housing problems tend to become much more of a conscious burden when the number of children exceeds two. That is a natural effect of housing conditions which allow fairly adequate amenities for a small family but hopelessly inadequate ones for larger numbers. The high proportion of mothers of large families who think better housing would make them want still more children is a reflection of the exasperation which current conditions produce. It is, of course, doubtful how far improved conditions would actually affect family size. Certainly not to the extent these verbal attitudes suggest. But, even among those with quite big families it would go a considerable way towards creating a predisposition to add to the number of children.

It is the newly-married couples more than any other group who think their ideas might change if they could get the sort of home they want:

40% of those married over ten years say that living in the sort of home they like would make a difference to the number of children they would like to have.

52% of those married between five and ten years say this.

69% of those married less than five years say this.

The big difference between the attitude of war-brides and those who set up house before the war reflects the great difficulties in getting adequate accommodation experienced by those who have married in the last four or five years. Many of them are living under conditions where it is virtually *impossible* for them to contemplate another baby. As one young factory worker, married in 1942, put it:

'I've nearly walked my feet off looking for a decent flat, but just can't get any. I hope I'll have a home of my own. I've only a few things, and they're stored at the furniture firm where we bought them, because we've nowhere to put them. First my husband was in the Army, and then he was discharged, and now he's in the mines. And my in-laws are terrified of me having another baby and thrusting more work on them. It's awful. I eat at mother's and sleep at my in-laws because mother's got no room; she's only got a small place. *The housing is terrible. If I'd have a child just now I'd be properly sunk.*'

Seven out of ten of these war-brides think that a decent home might make them change their minds about the number of children they want. We have already shown that if all these recently-married couples have the number of children they now say they'd like to have, they will not produce nearly enough to replace the population. They are the key group. The fact that women on the threshold of their married lives feel so often that post-war homes will influence their decision emphasizes the fundamental importance of immediate post-war housing plans. It is vital that there should not only *be* homes available for these couples, but that the homes provided *should be of a size compatible with a family of more than two children.* The quarter million Portal houses which it is proposed to build immediately will probably please the quarter million couples who manage to obtain one quite considerably. *They* won't worry unduly if there is only room for one or two children, for that is the family size they are already contemplating. The housing experts will have done their job, which is only to provide for the living population. But the unborn will remain unborn for want of a third-best bedroom.

Congestion

A Poplar woman, Roman Catholic, married seventeen years, with five live children between the ages of 14 and 2, one died young; living in a tenement with two bedrooms and a living room, says:

'If they was to give the working classes decent homes it wouldn't be so bad, instead of these tenement houses. There's not much room to move about with children. The children are all around you. You've got them under your feet, you get no rest from them. If we had those homes we're supposed to have it would make a difference. Children want plenty of room. The ladies and gentlemen, they don't have them under their feet all the time; they've got rooms for the children. When you're tired, you don't want the children all around you. Sometimes I'm working all the week and get no chance of a rest, and then I wish they were miles off.'

Congestion in the living room is more often commented on by mothers than insufficient bedroom space. The incessant day-to-day irritations come from this source: children under the feet; washing indoors; nowhere but the living room for children to play in except the street; children continually rushing in and out of the place. This survey confirms for the specific problem of the birth-rate the more general findings of Mass-Observation's housing survey—the innumerable inconveniences arising from flats and tenements where children are concerned. Although women were not asked what sort of home they would like, many ruled out flats spontaneously:

'Yes, it would make a difference if it was houses not flats, because you're still closed in with flats. You've only got the bit of balcony.' (Age 37, 4 children, 3-room flat.)

'Yes, and houses more than flats. Where there'd be no restrictions and you could be on your own.' (Age 44, 3 children, 3 rooms.)

'If you got decent homes, not flats. Because for one thing a flat isn't yours.' (Age 33, 2 children, 3 rooms.)

The same snags of nagging neighbours and lack of privacy were commented on here as in the broader survey:

'I think if they built little houses where a woman could put two or three children with somewhere to play, not living in flats where they're nagged at if they make too much noise, I think it would make a lot of difference.' (Age 45, 1 child, 5-room house.)

'Yes, I do think it would make a difference. If there's a good many children and you're living in flats, life's a proper misery. Some people living in the same house don't understand children, and they're always after them, and if you've no garden they catch all the illnesses going because they don't get enough fresh air.' (Age 28, 2 children under 5, flat with 2 bedrooms.)

Apart from the relative privacy, these women want houses because the garden gives the children somewhere to play; and keeps them from under their mother's feet:

'If I had a nice place, I'd prefer that more than anything you've mentioned. If you've got a place to put everything in you don't need help in the house. The children can play in the garden while you do your work.' (Age 41, 4 girls, flat, 2 bedrooms, 1 living room.)

'Ah, that makes a difference. These flats! If you 'ave a garden it'd make a big difference. I certainly say if you 'ad your own garden the children would be 'ealthier. Give people cottages with gardens. I wouldn't mind moving further down the line for it, would you?' (Age 34, 3 children, 2-room flat.)

'Yes, it's very trying bringing up children in flats. If you had a garden you'd have more peace of mind.' (Age 33, 4 children, 5-room flat.)

Another nuisance of flat-life, so far as babies are concerned, is the necessity in many places for hanging the washing up indoors. Here is the comment from a mother of two with a quite capacious, but upstairs flat, in a converted house. She has four rooms, kitchen and use of bathroom, and only two children:

'I don't know what the next ten years will be like, but I hope they'll be happy ones. I've only been married five years and I've lived in an upstairs flat. Well, I'm hoping I'll have a place of my own. I wouldn't mind a little house, or one of those self-contained flats like they've got in Neasden. My brother has one. There's just two flats to each house, with separate entrances. One flat has the front garden and the other the back. They're ever so nice and bright, with your own front door and bathroom you don't have to bother the other person. . . . I wouldn't mind having more children if I had more conveniences. In an upstairs flat you've nowhere to dry the clothes, and in winter it's taking one lot of washing down and hanging another up. It drives a man dotty to come from work and find the place littered up with napkins and other baby's washing, even though he's fond of children. I have to take the children out to get some air. Yes, if I lived under more or less ideal conditions I wouldn't mind having a big family.'

(Investigator intervenes to ask what she means by ideal conditions.)

'Well, I'm thinking of a flat similar to my brother's, or even a small house where the children can play in safety without pushing them on the streets, or leaving your work to take them to play in the parks.'

Many more build up a similar picture. Here are two other comments, the first from a mother of one living in rooms, the second from a mother of two living in a small flat:

'Yes, it would make a difference if they build respectable houses with playgrounds for the kiddles to play in. What can anyone do in two rooms? You can't go and hang

your washing outside; it's hanging around inside or else you've got to give it out and pay big laundry bills. In rooms everyone rules you.'

'As soon as Tom gets back I want to get out of here. It's not right for the kids. I'd like a house to myself and a bit of garden. It's a proper nightmare when they're tiny. Run, run, run—and the washing! Oh, it's cruel. A house would make a big difference. You could leave 'em to play in the garden, without the everlasting worry of what they'd get up to.'

Congestion, lack of privacy and amenity, nowhere to hang the children's washing and nowhere for the children to go and play on their own; these are the main disadvantages of flat life commented on by mothers. The most definite and uncompromising attitudes come from those who took the trouble to write about their difficulties to the doctor —naturally extreme cases, but illustrative of the potential decisive effects of housing on family size. One mother writes:

'I have one daughter, fifteen months old; the idea of having another baby is monopolized by the lack of accommodation. I live in a modern flat of two rooms without access to any of the lawns surrounding the building. *It is definitely impossible to produce more babies without a new housing plan forthcoming at once.*'

Another:

'I have only one son, aged 19 months, and as long as I have to live as I am now I never think of having another. As much as I would love a little brother or sister. My husband has a steady job and I could manage to keep another, but we have to live in an upstairs flat which is most inconvenient. We have no main water, no sink, and I have to do the washing in the hand-basin in the bathroom. Also I have to go through the people's place downstairs to hang the washing in the garden. The gas-stove is in the kitchen, and apart from being unhealthy, you can imagine what a time I have keeping the baby away from the oven when it is in use and away from gas taps. Please don't think we haven't tried to move—we have tried everywhere.'

These letters are typical of those coming from mothers who definitely *want* more children, definitely feel that housing conditions are stopping them. There are others, among the one in five who mention housing, which are concerned with purely wartime conditions—wives following their soldier husbands round the countryside, etc. And some, like the following, present a problem which will still be there for a long time after the war—the problem of living with mothers and mothers-in-law:

'My sister and I are both living with my mother; my sister has one baby sixteen months old, but she never intends having another (much as she would like one) until she can find a home of her own to bring her family up in.'

Among the present sample 56% of all those married under five years, 37% of all those with less than three children, were living with relatives. In Gloucester 46% *of the whole sample* were living with relatives or sharing. This compares with only 10% of those married over 10 years, and the same proportion of those with larger families. All classes are affected—there was no significant difference between the proportions with elementary or secondary education. Over half the factory workers were sharing or living with relatives, and nearly all the rest in flats.

As we have said, actual bedroom accommodation is not so often mentioned as the daytime inconveniences of wrong or inadequate

housing. But here is an example of what can happen in a two-room flat where two adults and two young children have to sleep:

'I have two fine baby girls, one three and the other eleven months old, and although I am thirty-eight, I am quite willing to have at least one more baby. But how can I possibly have one while we have to live in a two-roomed flat? My husband and I and the two children have to sleep in the one bedroom and none of us ever gets a really good night's sleep. My husband suffers from pulmonary fibrosis and needs a good rest every night. As it is, one of the children usually wakes the other at least once and very often more during the night. The result is that we are all often tired and bad tempered. During the day the older child's natural high spirits have to be curbed in order to avoid being a nuisance to the occupants of the other flats. There is no garden for her to run about it. While these conditions prevail I refuse to have another baby. We have tried to find a house—even a reconditioned blitzed house in a not too desirable neighbourhood—but we are unlucky.'

Because women only comparatively rarely mention bedroom difficulties spontaneously, that does not mean that inadequate bedroom space is an unimportant factor. It only suggests that this is not the most *immediate* factor. All along it must be remembered that improvements in one direction are likely to unmask defects in other directions. When cramped living rooms, lack of privacy and outdoor facilities for the children to play are no longer an hourly daytime inconvenience, it is reasonable to expect that parents will become more conscious of the night-time snags of larger families. It would be most unwise to assume that if all those mothers who dream of a little house with a garden had one the birth-rate would rise appreciably.

Indications

Housing programmes aim, or should aim, at supplying a demand. We know pretty well what sort of house will satisfy that demand, and it is not very elaborate. The conditions which will satisfy her demands are relatively easy for the housewife to state. She knows what she wants to make life tolerable. But attempts at raising the birth-rate are not aimed at supplying a demand. They aim at creating a supply, of that essential commodity, human beings. At present most mothers do not *want* to produce many babies. It is much more difficult for them to say what might make them do so than it is for them to say what housing conditions might make them happier. If she is asked, the most natural thing for the mother to do is to pick on the points which cause her most trouble in her present domestic life. She feels if these are removed life will be different all round, and her whole attitude will be changed. In some cases it may. But if you are undamming a river, removal of the top few blocks of the dam only causes a flow of water if the river is in flood. Removal of conscious dissatisfactions with housing may get the birth-rate nowhere. The river of desire for more children is at low ebb. It is not a healthy torrent pressing against a wall of obstructions, but a little summer stream bubbling up against a dam built to withstand the spring flow.

So long as population policy aims only at breaking down the dam, a laborious and lengthy process can only eventually release a little stream of babies. Contemporary housing conditions are a vital part of the dam, a corner-stone perhaps. But even if the removal of the stone sent the whole structure falling, that in itself would only help to solve the problem of wastage; to release a little stream of children who are wanted now, but haven't room to be born.

To enable people to do what they want, it is necessary to provide the conditions they think they need. The dam must be destroyed before the little stream can flow. But nothing much will result until the stream grows bigger, desires change. With housing, as with other subjects we have discussed, to fulfil the demand is only a first, and may be a very small step. The main and major step is to create the conditions in which people will *want* more children than they do now. So far as housing conditions are concerned this will mean going beyond the circumstances people actively, consciously want now. When housing conditions exist in which three, four, five children are natural, convenient, positively encouraged, then only can a really appreciable change be expected. For there are no signs that the basic urges of motherhood are consciously thwarted by having few children. There is now, and there are no signs that there will be, a spontaneous urge to have more children. If we were dealing with something which women wanted, but felt they could not achieve under present conditions, then the fact that so many feel better housing would change their desires might be as encouraging as it looks at first sight. As it is, all we can say is that better housing conditions are an essential condition precedent to larger families in very many cases. But if adequate rehousing were to be achieved, and its effect on the birth-rate were slight, that would be no legitimate cause for disappointment. For people would have been given the conditions they want for a reasonably smooth way of living, not necessarily the conditions for wanting more children. To achieve that, so far as housing alone can achieve it at all, it may be necessary to go well beyond anything the majority of mothers visualize today. All the results of this survey prove is the great desirability of housing reform in initiating a change in *attitude*.

Nothing that can be achieved in the next ten years or so may go far in actually reversing present trends in family size, but that fact should be no discouragement. It will be a start on the road which leads to bigger families, a breach in the dam and a drop in the stream.

Social Attitudes: Landlords

There is another important aspect to the present housing situation which presents a frequent source of discouragement to mothers. The common attitude of landlords to families with young children means in effect that childless couples get preferential treatment when houses are

scarce. One woman of 42, with an only child, now adult, dates her decision to have no more children from the time she was snubbed by a landlord:

'When I went after a decent place when he was still in his pram I had the door slammed in my face when the landlord of the house heard I had a toddler. That's the bottom of it all. I said I wouldn't have any more at any price. That's where everything comes from, the housing. If you bring children up properly, the rest can take care of itself. It's the houses people want. If they give people that, there'll be plenty more babies born. I've got a sister-in-law living in Harrow and we went down there on Easter Monday. I've never seen so many prams in my life. Which just goes to prove it's the housing!'

There were many cynical remarks on this subject:

'I couldn't have more children as I'm fixed now. My parents are getting on, and it's no place to bring up babies. Old places aren't meant to bring up children in. You've only got to knock at the door of a decent flat, and when they see the pram at the door that's enough. They'd prefer to let it to couples without children, or those with dogs.'

'Any decent place you're refused because of the children. If you succeed in finding a decent flat you can't have it because the owner says children pull the place to pieces. Yes, if you could get a place to live in that would make a difference.'

It is very difficult to see the way out of this situation, in a post-war world where housing shortage is certain to exist for many years. Legislation compelling landlords to give preferential treatment to families does not seem likely to get far—there are too many loopholes. A change of heart among landlords is hardly likely in the immediate future. But undoubtedly present attitudes help to build a sense of social inferiority among parents of young children, even where they do not actually affect numbers. This may have an important formative influence on future fashion. If the childless get the best homes, it is likely that the childless will become increasingly respected, for they will not only have the best home but the higher standard of living as well. That is the sort of vicious circle, frequent among birth-rate problems, which must be broken. Clearly, the more disadvantageous it becomes to have children the more the parents of large families will be pitied. Those who are willing to make the sacrifice in comfort and economic standard may still give in, in face of public opinion. The pitying and reproachful glances of neighbours may be more difficult to face than the prospect of life-confinement with three children in a 2-3 room flat.

Post-war Prospect

Local authorities built about a million dwellings between the two wars. Of these the great majority were of the three-bedroom type, 'providing', as the report of the Dudley Committee on Housing puts it, 'accommodation for five persons'.

Let us take this standard at its face value for a moment. In 1931 the census shows that the average size of a *household* in that year was 3·72 persons. But over a quarter of these households consisted of one or two persons only. The average size of households of over two was about 4·5.

Household, in the census sense, is simply the number of people living in the house and bears no definite relation to family-size. If we allow for the fact that there were some eight million homes built before 1914, a very high proportion of which had only two bedrooms; and that although private enterprise and local authorities built a few houses with four or five bedrooms to cater for large families, they only formed a very small proportion indeed of the total housing pool; then it seems likely that 4·5 may be an underestimate of the household-size catered for by the three-bedroom houses. Households of one and two were separately provided for by municipal housing to some extent, and in any case the preference given by local authorities to families with children tended to force small households into the older housing.

Even if all the households which settled in the municipal houses were exactly the average size, there would only have been comfortable room for an extra baby, a new lodger, or a relative, in one in every two. In fact, of course, some were filled to comfortable capacity or beyond it when the household arrived, and some had a spare room. The actual distribution is not important; the fact remains that, roughly speaking, in every second house an addition to the household would have meant the beginnings of inconvenience.

Still accepting the suggestion that a three-bedroom house 'provides accommodation for five persons', what would be the position if every couple had such a house? If no one had a lodger, or a relative living with them, everyone could have three children in comfort. That is to say, if everyone had a house considerably more spacious than has yet been possible to achieve for everyone, if no one lived in anyone else's house, if everyone had as many children as their house would comfortably accommodate, then it would be possible to keep the population from declining.

The standard which we have taken from the Dudley Report is a high one. Two or three children in a bedroom is still so much of a commonplace that it is not much of a conscious discomfort, yet. But if general standards rise, bedroom standards are likely to rise with them. The attitude of the middle class today may well be the working class's attitude tomorrow. The outlook which causes the members of the Dudley Committee to say that the three-bedroom house provides accommodation for five persons may become the outlook of the occupants of those houses, and then family-size can be expected to shrink still further.

The Dudley Committee recommends 'for the present' that local authorities should 'concentrate on the provision of the three-bedroom house, interspersed with a proportion of other types'. If that were the general prospect in the next ten years or so, and if private enterprise followed a similar programme, the position would not be ideal. But it might well be some time before housing conditions started making people have fewer children rather than helping keep families small.

In fact the position which will develop in the near future from present rehousing plans is unlikely to be so favourable. While the building programme which faces the country as soon as the war is over is so tremendous that we cannot hope for houses to be *plentiful* for a considerable time, it would be more reasonable to hope that those houses which are built would cater for families large enough to replace themselves. Even this seems doubtful. The present concentration is on two-bedroom houses, and the immediate post-war 'shelter' programme envisages this size as typical.

Taking all the indications together, it seems exceedingly unlikely that housing conditions in the next decade or so will encourage any increase in family-size, and very probable that they will accelerate present trends. At the best current housing plans are designed to fill the demand, whereas the standards necessary to encourage people to have larger families than they now want must necessarily go beyond the demand—which does not include provision for children not at present desired. There seems little immediate hope of housing playing an important part in raising the birth-rate, and all that can be done at present is to emphasize its great importance in long-term population planning.

Note 1. Many other housing grumbles were raised besides those mentioned in this chapter. We have dealt here simply with those which seem most relevant to our subject. Readers who would like further information should refer to our report *People's Homes* (No. 4 in this 'Change' series. John Murray, for the Advertising Service Guild. 10s.). Lack of *baths* is a particularly frequent grumble in reference to children, as well as in the more general context.

Note 2. The recommendations of the Dudley Committee (*Design of Dwellings*, Report of the Design of Dwellings Sub-Committee of the Central Housing Advisory Committee appointed by the Minister of Health, etc. H.M.S.O. 1944. 1s.) follow closely the lines suggested by Mass-Observation's Housing Survey, and so far as human desires go, many of the recommendations hit the nail right on the head, particularly in regard to flats *v.* houses, maisonettes, privacy, scullery congestion and many other points. But their recommendations, like ours, are aimed at housing the living adequately. The programme we need is one which will aim at housing the unborn—so that they shall not remain unborn.

XVIII. Household Helps

Housekeeper ..	£20–45 p.a.	*Upper housemaid*	£12–20 p.a.
Maid	£12–25 „	*Maid-of-all-work*	£ 9–14 „
Head Nurse ..	£15–30 „	*Kitchen Maid* ..	£ 9–14 „
Cook	£14–30 „	*Scullery Maid* ..	£ 5– 9 „

Grandmothers of today's middle and upper class parents were setting up house when these rates of pay applied. For £1 a week they could hire a housemaid, a cook and a nurse for the children; and a kitchenmaid and a scullery-maid could be added to the staff for 6s. a week the two.

XVIII—HOUSEHOLD HELPS

By 1906, when the mothers of today's middle-aged parents were setting up house:

'In the last ten years wages of domestic servants have risen. In London, where there are so many flats, there is a demand for superior general servants, who ask and obtain from £18–24 a year.' (Mrs. C. S. Peel: *How to Keep House*. 1906.)

Mrs. Beeton's wage-scale for housekeepers had risen to £30–60, Head nurses were not obtainable under 10s. a week.

In the 1930s and today, the middle class situation, and the middle class attitude is well exemplified in the following passage:

'Among the moderately well-off before the war a not uncommon establishment was the three- or four-bedroom house with one domestic. This 'general' received about £1 to 25s. a week in wages, and her room and board. For this she usually did most of the housework and most of the routine cooking; she had one half-day a week and every other Sunday. She was, with good reason, regarded as doing an exacting full-time job for a very modest wage, and a good deal was heard about improving the conditions of the domestic servant. If her employers had expected her, in addition to her regular duties, to look after a couple of children, nurse them when ill, do all the shopping, all the household mending and keep the household accounts, she would rightly have given notice at once. . . . Some change will have to be made in our way of life if every wife is not to be reduced to the status of the pre-war domestic servant, and the one-child family to become even more common than it is already.' ('Birth-rate and Housework': D. E. Estcourt, *Spectator*. 18.8.44.)

Things have changed very rapidly for the middle classes in the past half century. Only forty years ago the latest edition of Mrs. Beeton's cookery book, kitchen bible of thousands of middle-class housewives, was urging the mother that 'she should devote *some* part of her time to the children at any rate', and that 'she will not find an hour wasted in this way, even if it be one hard to spare'.

The problem of the last generation of middle- and upper-class parents was how to find time to be with their children for an hour a day. In this generation the problem is how to get away from them for an hour or two a week. As one country housewife of 31 puts it:

'I have not left the house more than once or twice for the last eighteen months, as living rather far out in the country I can't even take the baby out shopping, the distances being too great.'

And another middle-class mother:

'Our first child was born in April 1941. Our second was born in March 1943—according to plan. We hope to have a third child, and perhaps a fourth, but *not* until the war is over and domestic help available. No help—no babies if possible. We feel that a family of 3 or 4 or even 5 is more interesting than 1 or 2, but in the early years life with a family is not worth living without adequate help. It is not even that you never get out for *pleasure*, but there is more work to be done than one person can do in the time (or even a mother and part-time father).'

With so radical a change taking place over so short a period, it is not surprising that lack of domestic help appears to many relatively well-to-do mothers as one of the key points in keeping families small. Among the mainly middle class National Panel, one woman in six mentions the non-availability of domestic help as a factor determining the number of children people have, and it comes third on the same women's list of factors deterring people from having more children.

XVIII—HOUSEHOLD HELPS

Spontaneously, the provision of domestic help is infrequently mentioned by mothers as a possible means of changing their ideas on family-size. But even here there are signs of a distinct class cleavage. While 5% of those with secondary education suggest of their own accord that a reduction of work in the house might change their ideas about the number of children they want, less than 1% of those with elementary education suggest it.

When we come to the direct question, this difference in outlook becomes even more marked. Women were asked whether it would make any difference to the number of children they wanted if they could have some help in the house. Results were as follows:

Q. Do you think that if you had some help in the house that would make a difference to the number of children you would like to have?

Attitude	*Percentage expressing this attitude among those with*	
	Secondary Education	*Elementary Education*
	%	%
Would make a difference ..	37	23
Would not make a difference	61	74
Other replies	2	3

Considerably more women with secondary education think that help in the house might make a difference to their attitude than those with elementary education. The quality of the verbatim replies emphasizes this difference. It is chiefly one of socio-economic grouping, and is only partially reflected in these education figures. Among the middle-class mothers who accept the idea of help in the house, many are emphatic in their statement that this is the key factor; but among working-class mothers even those who accept the idea often do so without much enthusiasm. Working-class women are often most emphatically opposed to the prospect of help in the house under any circumstances, whereas the middle class scarcely show this tendency at all.

Typical middle-class comment show the various motives and emphatic enthusiasm often expressed:

'Yes, because I get frightfully irritable doing all the menial work day after day. If I had more children to look after in addition to all the domestic work I feel I'd crack under the strain. You can't possibly pay the children the same attention if you've got everything else to do. Help in the house is very important.' (25B. 1 baby, 7 months.)

'Yes, I'd like to have sufficient to be able to have a full-time nurse, and then I'd have lots, because I'm fond of children. I've often felt it would be nice to have lots of healthy children about the house. I think the extra help is very important; it's just that little extra comfort.' (25B. 1 baby, 14 months.)

'Definitely. You don't get much out of life working from morn till night, and children need such a lot of attention.' (27B. 1 baby, 9 months.)

'Definitely. I'd have more time to myself. I think it's very important when you have children to keep your interest and outlook on life up to date. You can be of such a help in their growing stage when you're able to answer their questions intelligently. Otherwise, if you're constantly with children, your outlook is so narrow.' (30B. 1 child.)

'Yes, because one could go out more.' (30B. 1 child.)

'Oh, yes. A wonderful difference.' (30B. 1 child.)

Housework and looking after children, even with a small house and one or two children, seems a very big strain to many middle-class mothers. They have not been brought up to expect to have to stay indoors most of the day; they have varied external interests, and they want to get out as their mothers did for recreation and pleasure. But working-class mothers expect to be confined to the house for a great deal of their time, as their mothers were before them. They have never had domestic help, and for the most part the idea has never occurred to them as a possibility. With this quite different background tradition goes an entirely different attitude to the prospect. For every one who sees the romantic possibilities, like this East End mother:

'Well, we'd be like the Royalty then; we wouldn't mind how many children we had.' (40D.)

there are a dozen and more who view the idea of another woman in the house with considerable misgiving. Many say that they would rather do their own work:

'No. I'd like to do it all myself.' (28C.)

'Well, I don't know. I'm quite capable of doing my own.' (25D.)

'No, I'm used to doing things myself. I shouldn't like that.' (24D.)

'Not with me. I'd sooner do my own. '(26D.)

Many feel that they would resent having another woman 'interfering' in *their* house:

'No, I wouldn't want another woman messing round in my home.' (21D.)

'No, I'd sooner look after my house my own way. I don't like other people interfering.' (25D.)

'I wouldn't like anyone nosing in my business.' (28D.)

'I wouldn't like another woman in *my* house.' (35D.)

Much the same sentiments were often expressed about the desirability of leaving the children with a stranger:

'No, I wouldn't rest if I went out and left the children with others.' (26C.)

'No, somehow I wouldn't fancy a stranger with *my* kiddies.' (23C.)

'It's all according. My meaning is I wouldn't leave them with anybody. I wouldn't leave my children with strangers.' (40D.)

The English mother's home is her castle; long usage has sanctioned the introduction of domestic help into the middle-class home, but for the working-class mother the prospect of another woman coming to help her out with a job she considers her own has little appeal:

'No. I don't like somebody in the house. It makes me irritable.' (42D.)

'No, I like to have the place to myself.' (27D.)

'Well, I've always been a one that likes to look after her *own* house.' (45D.)

Those working-class mothers who did accept the idea of help in the house often wanted it only on special occasions—when they were ill, to take the children off their hands during confinements, just for the washing, on occasional evenings so that they could get out. A few commented spontaneously on wartime nurseries and felt it would be a good thing if they continued after the war. But, as one woman working in a factory put it:

'I reckon these nurseries are a good thing for the kiddies. Mine's ever so happy—though I do wish I didn't have to take her so early. You miss all her pretty ways.' (27D.)

Class Problem

Lightening the burden of housework thus presents two quite different problems for different social strata. For the upper and middle classes, where the habit of generations has been almost totally broken down in less than half a century, the provision of some sort of domestic assistance seems likely to make a real difference to the size of many families. But below the upper fifth of the population, there is little present desire for help and much resentment of the novel idea of providing it.

There is one common factor, however, in the desire for some form of assistance during and after pregnancy and during illness. This need has been greatly accentuated by war; with husbands away, wives are left entirely on their own, and the possibility of leaving children in the care of neighbours and relatives is much reduced by industrial mobilization. However, the evidence suggests that some such service might turn the scales in some cases even without the wartime difficulties. Here is one letter outlining such a case:

'There is the very big problem of what to do with the existing family while one is recovering from another birth. In my own case I have a daughter of 3½. Last February I had another baby. I was absolutely unable, for various very good reasons, to have any relations come to look after me, do the baby's washing and keep an eye on my little daughter. In the end I managed, after complete failure to obtain any domestic help, to enlist the sympathy of a family who invaded my house for a fortnight, did very little and fed at my expense, and expected payment as well. However anxious I was for a third baby I could not possibly have it under similar circumstances. The general worry kept me back, and it was eight weeks before I got over the second birth.'

Or again, this *cri de cœur* from the father of seven children, whose wife is expecting an eighth:

'We know full well the cost in labour, toil and sweat, lack of riches and many other desirabilities of a large family. These could be made easier for such as us to do our duty, but my wife has no domestic assistance. At the moment I am her only domestic helper, and when the last baby arrived had to take a week of my holiday to carry on the housework, cooking, etc., for her.'

The provision of free domestic help at these times was sometimes urged:

'Have just experienced two weeks' illness and was forced to leave the children alone in the house, and the shops are a considerable way away. That is a problem

and anxiety to mothers. Also what happens if the mother is ill? Difficulty of having children looked after during confinement. I am facing this problem now. Also necessary home help after leaving hospital. . . . Fortunately I am healthy and strong and have no real dread of bearing a child. I do think, however, that it would be a human thing to give assistance to every mother at the critical time. This privilege should not be reserved for the wealthy.'

'My husband was called up when my baby was born. I was left with a new baby, a house 1¼ miles from the nearest shop, with no domestic help whatever. I'd had a very serious confinement, and I was eight months before I felt anything like fit again. I couldn't get any help whatever. Yet in the wealthier parts of the city childless couples were paying £1 a day for domestic help and getting it. Domestic help for mothers should be regardless of income.'

This sort of difficulty may well continue after the war for the middle classes; to a lesser or greater degree it has always been with the working class mother, who has had to rely on neighbours and relatives to help her over confinements. Various suggestions for overcoming it have already found their way into popular print. A letter in the *Sunday Times*, for instance:

'A system of domestic help should be devised to bring the greatest help to those in greatest need. This problem is certainly not easy of solution. We suggest something on the lines of the wartime Land Army, with recognized training, standardized rates of pay, fixed hours of work and a smart uniform.'

The writer of the article in the *Spectator*, already quoted, suggests a municipal vacuum cleaning service, cheaper laundries to eliminate the home wash, and a babies' napkin service.

The difficulties are only crucial, conscious, to any wide extent among the middle class. But unless the attitude to domestic service which was developing before the war changes, and unless the many more remunerative and less restricted opportunities which have opened for women close, it is likely that domestic help will remain scarce and expensive. In order to give the necessary security to those women for whom help during and after pregnancy is an important factor in deciding how many children to have, some system of priority will almost certainly be needed. That will solve many family problems. But it will not solve the problem of the one-woman four-bedroom house. To do this, more domestic workers will be needed than are likely to be available, and a mere planned distribution of labour will not go far. The problem of raising the social status of paid domestic work is a vital one for the economic strata where family limitation has gone farthest. It is complicated by the fact that, even if help were available, many of those who feel it a crucial necessity would be unable to afford it. Some form of subsidy may be desirable. It may be desirable to give domestic workers the status of local government servant. Whatever the solution, it is difficult to see one capable of relieving the burdens of the middle class which will not put domestic help within the reach of the working class as well. At present the majority do not want it. But if it comes within their easy, visible reach, they may well begin to do so. In order to satisfy the middle class need it may be necessary to produce conditions which will create a working

class demand where none existed before. As with other social amenities and services, personal standards are likely to rise as the general standard rises, and a solution of the current problem may well incubate a new problem in the next generation.

XIX. Middle Class Routine—The Future Pattern?

There are many factors which make the single-handed running of a house and family a far greater burden for the middle class mother than it is for the working mother. This middle class routine is likely to become increasingly the normal pattern as housing improves, social services expand, and the mother-magazines and baby-books work their effects on the social conscience of housewives. In order to see these factors at work, let us spend a day with the households of Mrs. A. and Mrs. B., housewives of two contrasting but frequent types. Both have risen into a slightly higher social sphere than that of their parents and are now on the fringes of the middle class. Both have their own rented homes, and both have young children. Mrs. A. is a muddler and a rather lethargic person; Mrs. B. is efficient and energetic. Mrs. A. takes no care over her appearance; Mrs. B. takes a lot. But, as we shall see, many of their household problems are very similar.

Mr. and Mrs. A

Mrs. A is 35, a rather negative, ineffectual sort of woman. Average looks, but always untidy and in a muddle. She has straight hair which seldom appears to get combed. She puts on a bit of lipstick in the morning and doesn't look at herself for the rest of the day. She wears old jumpers and skirts always, no overalls, the skirts seldom meeting round the waist or else without hooks. She usually has several safety pins where buttons or fasteners should be.

She was married at twenty-three, 11½ years ago, to Mr. A who works in a nearby munitions factory, checking materials in and out.

They have four children: Robin, aged 10½, Madeleine 8½, John 2½, and Diana 6 months.

The House

They rent a small modern house into which they moved about eight years ago from a flat. Rent and rates work out at about £1 a week. Accommodation consists of two sitting rooms downstairs, kitchenette and bathroom; two bedrooms upstairs and a third just big enough for a bed and a chest of drawers at a squash. Electric light and cooker; Ideal boiler for hot water; coal fires in the sitting rooms.

XIX—MIDDLE CLASS ROUTINE

Husband and wife share the front bedroom. John is at present sleeping there with them as he has been going through a phase of waking up and yelling in the night. Madeleine sleeps in the tiny box-bedroom, and Robin in the larger back bedroom. This looks like a junk room—clothes, boxes, playthings and general rubbish strewn about.

Downstairs the back room is sometimes used as a dining room, but since Diana was born she has slept there in her cradle. Mrs. A says: 'I just leave her there all night and she never makes a sound'. The front room is a dining-cum-sitting room, and when John had bronchitis last week, he and his mother slept down there and kept the fire in all night for warmth. In this room there is a table in the window where Mrs. A, Madeleine and John have lunch, and Mr. and Mrs. A have supper. Other meals are eaten in the kitchenette.

In the kitchen is a small food cupboard, two small deal tables, an electric washing machine, a drying rack for clothes made by the husband, a small airing cupboard, and, on the wall, a piece of furniture resembling the top half of a dresser. There is no larder.

The kitchenette is usually extremely untidy, strewn with boots, dirty washing, mending, old clothes, etc. The bedrooms also are usually untidy, though the front room and hall are occasionally cleared up and cleaned.

At the back of the house there is a patch of rough unkempt grass in a triangular shape, and in front more unkempt grass with a couple of rows of vegetables and a few annuals in summer. About ¼ acre in all. The A's also have an allotment close by.

Daily Routine

Mrs. A gets up between 7.15 and 7.45:

'Edward' (her husband) 'always gets his own breakfast just after 7. I know I'm very bad at getting up, but baby doesn't wake till between 7 and 8, so I wait to feed her till then.'

She gets Robin his breakfast of porridge or cereals about 7.30, though some mornings the husband does it with his own. Then Robin goes off to school by himself.

By about 8 the baby is fed, and Mrs. A goes upstairs to dress John. She brings him down into the kitchen, sits him on a chair, clears a fraction of table just in front of him so that he can get at the enamel bowl of porridge which she dishes out from a saucepan on the stove. Meanwhile Madeleine comes downstairs and stands around drinking milk and eating porridge and bread and marmalade. Mrs. A has a pot of tea going and drinks several cups in the intervals of handing out food, plaiting and twisting Madeleine's hair and getting her off to school at 9 o'clock looking clean and tidy.

Next John gets put on the pot, and Mrs. A cleans out and lights the sitting room fire, and then baths and feeds the baby. When that is done

the baby goes out in the garden in its pram, she is left with John roaming round after her, and the time is about 10.30 or 11.

She rinses a dirty saucepan from the stove, prepares a few vegetables for the children's dinner, and puts them on to cook. Then she collects more dirty washing from various rooms and dumps it on the floor in the bathroom. She spends about twenty minutes in there washing a few coloured clothes in the basin and throwing them into the bath to rinse. Then she goes back to see to the dinner, leaving a bath full of half rinsed clothes, the floor covered with more dirty ones, sheets, etc. (there is no linen basket) and three dirty pots.

She adds some more milk to some already in the saucepan and boils it up to make a thick custard. Puts sausage meat in an enamel dish and lets it heat on the hot plate along with the vegetables and milk.

Madeleine comes home from school just after 12 and is told to keep an eye on John in the front room, but John insists on coming out to the kitchen and she follows him. He potters around the kitchen, occasionally hugging Madeleine round the legs. She picks him up and makes a fuss of him. Then Mrs. A picks him up and plays with him for a minute before going to the sink to wash up a few plates for dinner. The sink is full of dirty plates, mugs, cutlery and pie dishes, and the sink basket is overflowing with tea-leaves and potato peelings, etc. She rinses three mugs and six plates and some knives and spoons under the tap. She just finds space for them on the draining board among dirty bottles, more mugs, empty tins, etc. She dries them on a piece of cotton material: 'It looks odd, but it's clean ' and finds space on one of the tables to pile them along with half-eaten pots of jam, chops for dinner at night, bread, clothes and more dirty dishes:

'I hate washing up. It's always there, and you put it on the draining-board, and then it's all got to be dried. It's so depressing. . . . Madeleine, will you go and lay the table, please?'

Madeleine goes on playing with John. Mrs. A repeats the request and Madeleine gathers up some spoons and forks, etc., collects a table cloth from the chair and goes into the front room, followed by John. Comes back a moment later to say that John has pulled everything on to the floor. Mrs. A laughs and tells them to put it right again. Then she boils an egg for John, fishes a bit of carrot and potato out of a saucepan on the stove, and mashes it up for him in an enamel dish. She seats him at the sitting-room table, takes off the top of his egg, and he starts feeding himself. Then she brings in food for herself and Madeleine.

Afterwards she makes tea for herself: 'I don't know what I'd do without tea, it keeps me going'. She tells John he should have a rest, but he's too busy climbing over the furniture to take any notice and she leaves him alone. She dumps the things from the sitting room back in the kitchen, but doesn't wash up, comes back and sits down for two cups of tea. John meanwhile has wet his knickers. She says: 'You

are a bad boy' very mildly, but does nothing about it. 'He's very lazy about going on his pot', she explains.

Madeleine then goes and practises on the piano; John goes and interrupts her and clangs about on it himself. Nobody minds.

Mrs. A then gets the baby in from the pram outside, as it is now 2 o'clock. She carries in the mattress and all wrappings and puts the whole lot complete with baby down on the settee, goes out to prepare orange juice and heat its bottle, and comes back to feed it where it is lying. She is quite happy sitting beside the baby, talking to it occasionally and to the other two who clamber about the room.

When the baby is fed, Mrs. A says: 'I haven't any clean napkins ready' and uses a wad of cotton wool instead. Actually there haven't been any clean napkins for several days, nor will there be for several more. She wraps the baby up, puts it back in its pram, gets a dustpan and brush and starts to sweep the sitting room floor in a haphazard way.

'I must get this room looking a bit tidy for Edward to come home to. Somehow there isn't the time to do it in the mornings. I do try sometimes.'

Meanwhile John has gone upstairs, and comes back with some butter beans. Mrs. A keeps some stores in a box upstairs which he has found, and she tells him to put them back. He goes, but a few minutes later Madeleine comes down and says he has emptied lentils all over the bedroom floor. Mrs. A groans but is not at all annoyed, and gives them both spoons to clear them up. They get on quite well till John finds a kettle of water and pours that into the tin of salvaged lentils. Madeleine brings it down to show her mother. Mrs. A decides they will have to be used up quickly, and leaves the tin in the kitchen with a view to making lentil soup. (But four days later it is still there, in the same place, unused.) John goes about gurgling and very pleased with himself.

The sitting room looks more presentable now that the floor is swept and any odd books are piled up. It is now 4.30 and tea time. Mrs. A washes some mugs, makes tea, and cuts bread and marge. Robin comes home from school and eats the remains of the sausage-meat, lukewarm and still on the stove along with the saucepans of milk, stock and veg. He then finishes off the custard, standing up in the kitchen. Mrs. A: 'These children do eat—they're always hungry'.

Madeleine has a music lesson in a few moments, and Mrs. A plaits her hair again, removes a safety pin from her frock, sees that her hands are clean and gets her off to it. Then she sits John down for his tea, still in wet pants, and gives him a paper bag of biscuits: 'He loves eating things out of bags'. She drinks more tea and eats some bread and jam. Robin goes off on his bike. 'He and Madeleine will eat some more when they get in' she says.

John does a bit more clambering around and crawls over his mother. Then she gets his wet and smelly pyjamas from his cot and a couple

of equally wet and smelly blankets and hangs them round the fireguard to air. She brings the baby in, still complete with mattress and puts her in the cot in the next room. By now it is 5.30 and she takes John into the bathroom, wipes his face and hands with a flannel, and then undresses him, puts him on the pot in front of the sitting-room fire, pins a piece of cotton-wool into his pyjama trousers, and pins them round his waist as there is no elasticity left in them. 'He wets and wets in the night, but this soaks most of it up.' She leaves him in front of the fire while she goes up to make his cot, taking the dried blankets with her. Then, seeing the mess of lentils still on the floor, she takes a dustpan and brush and sweeps that up, quite uncomplainingly, before taking John and dumping him in bed with many hugs.

Robin and Madeleine come back and find milk, and bread and jam in the kitchen, while Mrs. A feeds the baby again and lets it kick around. Madeleine comes and talks to the baby too, then it is put to bed and Mrs. A heats up the dinner vegetables and puts on chops to grill for herself and her husband. As it is an easy meal this evening, they get it quickly while Robin and Madeleine talk to them. Then Mr. A clears away while she makes the beds and sees them tucked in. They wash themselves, as the bath is still full of dirty clothes. On other evenings, however, Mr. A comes in and peels potatoes for dinner, while Mrs. A gets the older children to bed.

Finally, about 8.30 p.m., leaving the dinner things unwashed, husband and wife sit down in front of the fire with a pot of tea, till baby's ten o'clock feed. Mrs. A.:

'This is the moment I long for, when they're all safely in bed and I can breathe for an hour. I'm so tired I just like to sit.'

Mrs. A's Attitude Towards the Children

Mrs. A is the youngest of a family of twelve herself:

'My father never earned very much, but they managed. By the time I was born the eldest were grown up, and they looked after me quite a lot. It's nice being one of a big family. You get more fun really.'

Of her own children:

'I started Robin about three months after we were married. I did try to get rid of him—isn't it awful of me. I've tried to get rid all of my children when they started. I thought we couldn't afford any. I took some kind of pill, great big things that are so hard to swallow and make you feel awful. It's only worked once—between Madeleine and John. This last time it made me feel so awful I thought it would be easier to have the baby. With Robin we were really terribly pleased it didn't work, once we'd got used to the idea. We were very excited about having him.'

Asked how she feels about having four of them she replies:

'I adore my children. Of course there are days when I get terribly depressed and go on at them, but I wouldn't be without them really. I said definitely after Madeleine we wouldn't have any more, but it just couldn't be avoided.

'It's the housework I hate. I'm always in a muddle, and that depresses me, and then I feel worse and can't do anything. Edward tells me not to worry about it. He's very good. I know this mess is awful, but I never get straight.'

XIX—MIDDLE CLASS ROUTINE

Mrs. A. is always very apologetic about the mess in the house. Last time the doctor came she tried to keep him out of the bathroom:

'It looked awful, just like it does today. But he would go in and wash his hands. I said I was sorry about the mess, but he just said "Humph!" and didn't seem to notice. I felt very bad though.'

Until this last couple of years she hasn't been able to afford any help, but since then, at intervals, has managed to get a woman for odd mornings to clean up:

'They always let me down though, and now I can't get anyone at all. I expect they get put off by all the mess when they come in. I've given up hope now.'

'I like cooking and I love looking after the children. What I'd really like is someone to do all the housework and the washing and leave me free to look after the children. I'd like to have time to go out with them and play with them more. Now I'm never done and I find myself getting so irritable.'

'You can see what it's like all day. By the time I've finished Diana in the mornings there's only time to do the fire in here and sweep it or start a bit of washing and then I've got to start the children's dinner. By after dinner, when I sit down for a cup of tea, I'm tired out. The beds never get made till we go to bed. I just throw the clothes on then. Sometimes I can save enough food from lunchtime for Edward at night, but often I have to start all over again for him. Some nights he starts it when he gets in. It does seem a bit hard on him. The worst thing is the washing. There's never time for that. It just gets left and left. All the children's clothes and then the sheets and towels piling so I never get to the bottom of it to start clean.

'Shopping's awful, too. Robin used to do it on Saturday mornings, but now he's at school then, so Madeleine does it mostly and Edward often does some Saturday afternoons.'

Madeleine: 'I hate doing the shopping, especially the butcher. You have to wait ages.'

Mrs. A.: 'Some mornings I take Diana in the pram and John can walk that far, but that always puts me behind farther than ever. Oh, I do get so depressed. Always washing up and muddles. I can't sew. I'm no good at that, and there's never time to mend. When the children just haven't got any socks to wear, I darn a pair for them to go out in. I haven't any stockings without holes, but it doesn't show with these little boots.'

When the last baby was born, Mrs. A. said to her husband and various friends she'd definitely never have another, but she said to the investigator when asked about this:

'If I had a larger house and someone to do all the housework and washing I wouldn't mind one or two more. We'll have to have a larger house later on; there isn't room here when John and Diana get bigger, but I don't know how we'll ever get one. You don't know what it'll be like after the war. I don't know about Edward's job or anything. He can go back to the old firm, but he hated it so much.'

Asked what she thought about post-war housing, Beveridge plan, etc., she said:

'I don't know. Do you think we'll ever get any of that?'

Her attitude to all state improvements is very negative. She lives mainly from day to day and has no thought of any changes affecting her personally for the better.

Mrs. A. says she adores her children, and she certainly does appear to be very fond of them. They are a very happy devoted family, in spite of the untidy and often dirty state of the house and the constant muddle.

Apart from the shopping, she doesn't ask the children to do anything in the house, except that Madeleine occasionally has to mind John. Mrs. A. says apropos of this:

'I had to do washing up and that sort of thing when I was young and I hated it, so I don't ask my children to help.'

Apropos of her muddlingness:

'Mrs. D. (a retired nurse who helped when Diana was born) said to me "You may not be a good manager, but you must be a good mother because your children are always so happy". I expect she felt she had to say something because the house looked so dreadful.'

'I used to be terribly particular when Madeleine and John were babies about keeping feeding times and all that sort of thing, but now I don't bother nearly so much. I'm too tired and muddled. I did say something to the doctor and he laughed and said that other people's children thrived under much worse conditions than this, so I suppose its all right.'

Neither of the elder children went to school till they were nearly seven. They were going to start at the local council school, but the parents wanted to avoid that if they could possibly afford it. Mrs. A. says:

'This is such a terribly rough school. It's got a bad headmaster and the children are a specially rough and nasty lot. I think they'd have been too much for Robin.'

Both children started at a local private school which is cheap and takes the children of the tradespeople, etc., who do not want their children to go to the elementary school, but cannot afford the fees of the more classy preparatory school nearby. Robin now goes to a secondary school, and they hope that Madeleine will go there later, with the help of an aunt.

Attitude to Pregnancy

Mrs. A. says she felt rotten with her second two children, especially with Diana: 'It was awful. I felt so tired and ill'. She had Diana at home. A retired nurse who lives up the road came in daily to deal with the baby for twelve days. Mrs. A. managed on her own till the child was born and again after twelve days:

'I did feel terribly tired at first, but I'm really feeling better now the summer's coming. I wouldn't mind having more children at all, I'd like it if I could give all my time to them and not be always thinking of washing and housework. Children do take it out of you, but its all right when you haven't got so many other things to think of as well. I love being with them.'

Attitude to Her Husband

Mrs. A says of her husband:

'Edward is an only child and his home was always perfectly tidy. I think this mess must be terribly hard for him. Sometimes he goes back for a weekend and stays with his mother, but he always seems glad to get home again. I did ask him a little while ago if he'd rather go back and live there for a month or so to get a bit of peace, but he said he'd rather be here with us. I was terribly pleased about it. He's very good to me, and we never quarrel, but I often wonder what he can see in me after all this

time. It does cheer me up when I'm depressed that he should be so fond of us all.'

'I do wish we could go out together sometimes—it would be wonderful. We had one evening about two years ago. A neighbour came in and sat with the children. We did enjoy it so much, but I don't know when that'll happen again. . . . I long to go out sometimes and have a meal that I've had nothing to do with and feel free of everything. I feel I am getting so old, and when they're all grown up I'll be past it, just old and ugly.'

And a final remark, summing up Mrs. A's whole attitude:

'I do get so depressed always going on at the jobs on my own. It used not to be so bad. When the children had a bit of something wrong I could deal with it myself—just getting something from the chemist. But now I want support somehow. I just don't feel equal to managing on my own, so I go and ring up the doctor. I know it's expensive and we can't afford it. Chemists' bills are always bad in the winter anyway. But I feel I must have backing.'

'I want support somehow'; 'I feel I must have backing'. That, in a nutshell, is Mrs. A's outlook in the midst of bringing up her fourth baby. They are a happy enough couple; the children are happy and contented. Yet at the back of it all, the domestic situation seems too much for her to tackle on her own. It is a small house—two bedrooms and a minute third—the sort of house which working class families think themselves lucky to get on a municipal housing estate, and where mothers bring up families without thought of domestic 'support' and 'backing'. But Mrs. A. has many intangible worries which do not bother her working class counterpart. She is worried about what visitors will think, what the doctor will think, what her own charwoman thinks on the rare occasions when she gets one. She is worried about her household not being kept quite as tidy as her husband has been used to in his youth. She is not content with having a happy and healthy family. She tries hard to get everything done and the place in order herself, but it is too much for her; she only gets more muddled.

Mrs. A. needs support. Clearly her need is genuine enough. It isn't only domestic support she needs, but psychological support as well. One would perhaps help provide the other. She has been the sole worker for years now in a job whose responsibility she feels is too much for her. She practically never gets out with her husband, or, for that matter, to take the children for a walk. And her family? She adores them, but if things had gone to plan none of them would have been born. Their conception was accidental, and she tried unsuccessfully to get rid of each of them in turn by taking one of the many pills on the market euphemistically labelled 'for female irregularities'. She has had one successful abortion, which accounts for the six year gap between her second and third children.

Still, if she had the support she wants, she feels she would like one or two more in her family. She is worried by money—not the money to keep the children alive and healthy but the money to keep up appearances, to send the children to a private instead of an elementary school, and so on. Until she has them, she thinks each time she can't afford an addition to her family.

XIX—MIDDLE CLASS ROUTINE

Summarizing Mrs. A, what would happen to her under her own ideal conditions—a rather larger house, domestic help, and a certainty of the future security of her husband's job and income. So far as one can tell she would happily have five or six children.

And what would happen under present conditions if a simple straightforward method of assuring that families are the size their parents want them existed? Mr. and Mrs. A might never have decided that they could afford a child at all. Apparently they never did make up their minds; but they weren't sure enough to trouble with all the necessary precautions, and they are pleased enough now that they have a family of four. Their children aren't unwanted now; but they weren't wanted when they started and only chance and necessity brought them into the world.

Mrs. A is admittedly a bad organizer. But the problems of Mrs. B, who takes a pride in her own appearance, in the appearance of the house, in keeping her children clean and tidy, are very similar. Here then, is Mrs. B.

Mrs. B

Mrs. B is 28, very attractive, slim, vivacious and energetic. She wears old but good suits in a good state of repair around the house, but no overalls. She was married six years ago to the only son of a local tradesman, now in the Forces. They have two children, Robert, nearly 5; and Jimmy nearly 4.

The House

They rent a detached bungalow which they took for a year when they first married, intending to find a house which they could buy on a mortgage, but the war interfered with their plans and they have been there six years now. Rent is 24/- a week, plus rates.

Accommodation consists of a sitting room, a good size modern kitchen and two bedrooms and bathroom.

The two boys have cots in the parents' room and the 'spare' bedroom is used as a general dump and playroom on wet days, as it is rather damp for sleeping.

The sitting room is furnished simply—two armchairs, small round table, plain pile carpet—but everything is of good quality and very well kept. The kitchen is pleasant and well kept. The draining board and window sills are clear of all clutter, the enamel topped kitchen table kept spotlessly clean, and a cloth put on it for meals. They have an Ideal boiler and an electric cooker and kettle.

Mrs. B's Routine

Mrs. B gets up about 8, dresses in the kitchen where it is warm from the boiler, makes herself a pot of tea and hot drinks for the two boys,

which she takes them in bed. Then she puts their porridge on, lays the kitchen table for their breakfast and brings them in and dresses them in the warm room. She washes their faces and hands with a flannel from the bathroom next door and sits them down to eat.

After breakfast they roam around after her until it's warm enough for them to go into the garden. Then she puts their coats, shoes and woolly hats on, and sends them out. They play mostly round the back door on a slab of concrete. The kitchen door is open on to the garden, so that they can talk to their mother. One or other keeps coming in for something. She interrupts her work very good-temperdly to deal with them, and they are not a lot of trouble.

Mrs. B washes up the breakfast things and cleans table and draining board, runs the carpet sweeper and duster over the hall, sitting room and bedroom, and lights a fire in the sitting room. Then she starts preparing the dinner, which she likes to have ready by 12.30.

Some days they eat in the kitchen but often 'picnic' in front of the sitting room fire. 'Do you think we're awful? We often picnic in front of the fire like this.'

Robert and Jimmy are called in; she takes their shoes and coats off, takes each child to the bathroom and washes their filthy hands and faces. 'I do wish my children didn't get quite so dirty. I'd like them to be a bit cleaner'. She sits them each in an armchair on a large cushion, brings the telephone table in out of the hall for them to eat from, and gets out a table cloth from the kitchen. 'Oh, dear, it's filthy, and I wash it every other day. Still it'll have to do for now'. She makes the gravy, brings in a spoon and fork for each of the children, then dishes the dinner out in the kitchen and brings the plates through. She eats from a plate on her knee in front of the fire, and keeps an eye on the boys, making them use their spoons instead of their fingers. They are both quite clean eaters, but she puts an old tray cloth across their middles, as she has no more bibs.

After the first course, she collects the plates and washes and dries them to use for pudding: 'We've broken so much china that I'm reduced to this.' The boys clamber out of their chairs and sit on the floor until Mrs. B calls them and they each fetch their own pudding.

When lunch is over, Mrs. B washes the children's faces and puts Jimmy in his cot for a rest, and Robert on the bed in the sitting room where their grandfather is staying for a while. Tea is then made in the kitchen. Mrs. B. says:

'This is where I always feel dead tired. It's an awful effort to pull myself together and get along in the afternoon.'

She fetches in some washing from the bathroom and starts ironing it and a few tea towels. Then it is time to get the boys up:

'I always leave everything in the afternoon and take them out. I think it's necessary for them.'

This afternoon, as they frequently do, they go across to the woods up the lane with the pram and fetch in some kindling and small logs, which Mr. B saws up on his days at home. Some afternoons they go shopping and sometimes to visit the grandparents.

At about 4.30—5.0 Mrs. B gets the children their tea-supper—bread, butter and jam, fruit or a raw salad, cake or biscuits—and starts bathing soon after, as she reckons to have them in bed by 6. Usually Robert is left splashing in the bath while Jimmy is tucked in. Mrs. B blacks out their room and leaves the door just ajar. She tidies and washes up in the kitchen, collects some knitting and a basket of mending from the spare room and goes into the sitting room. At present, as her father is staying, they have supper together about 8; but usually she is on her own since her husband was called up.

One day during the week of this investigation Mr. B had been home and left, as he usually must, at 5.30 a.m. The investigator arrived at 10 o'clock to find the children were only just up. Mrs. B's attitude is illuminating:

'Isn't it awful. Walter went off this morning and we've all been sound asleep again and just woken up. I'm terribly disorganized. Still, it's nice to lose the routine for once. I'm going to feel really free and enjoy the change today.'

Attitude to Home

Mrs. B takes a pride in the house and keeps it well, but doesn't grumble at the children coming in and out with muddy shoes, or the dog wandering in and out:

'Of course, we only meant to be in this house a year. We wanted to buy one for ourselves, larger than this. I do want a dining room. I think it's so important for children to learn to sit up and eat properly, don't you? When a place isn't your own, you haven't the same heart to make improvements. You keep thinking, oh well I won't bother, it's only for somebody else. Anyway I think paying rent is an awful waste of money, don't you?

'I'm afraid I don't keep my house as I should. I have to skimp the housework because there just isn't the time, and with children you can't always have things just so. My mother always keeps things so well. She's always grumbling at me when she comes here, and my father does too. They're both very interested in houses.'

Mrs. B. has no domestic help:

'I think it's one person's work cooking, don't you? I always seem to be on the run and I'm never finished. What with the housework and the washing and getting meals and looking after children—that's a whole-time job really—it all seems to get on top of me. Then there's mending, and I'm always knitting for the children. You can pick that up easily, but I don't have time to do any dressmaking. A mother can't start machining during the day because the children always need something doing for them and there always seem so many odd things to do in the evenings. You know that feeling of being in a muddle and having so many things to do you don't know where to start. That's what I hate. It gets you mentally and makes you so depressed. There's never a break or a chance to relax and pull up with children. They're very tiring to be with all the time.'

Attitude to Children

Asked whether her children were accidental or planned, Mrs. B said:

'We meant to have Robert. He started when we'd been married about seven months. Jimmy was unintentional. He came about fourteen months after Robert—but we were very pleased about him. Everybody seemed to think I'd just go on and on after starting like that, but I've been very lucky really. I couldn't bear to try and get rid of a child once it had started. I just couldn't do that somehow.'

'I love having children. It's so interesting watching them grow up don't you think?'

The children look healthy and are full of spirits. So far they have escaped any illness beyond a couple of colds a winter, and Robert has vitamin D deficiency, for which he is having sunray treatment.

Mrs. B seems to enjoy their company and is very keen on teaching them to sing.

Asked whether she wanted more children, she said:

'Oh, I should like more, but there's the question of money to consider. Children do cost a lot. There are so many things you must have for them. Then there's schooling. I don't see why they should go to the elementary school. When you think of the sort of children that go there, the parents have no ambition. I mean they can't help being poor but they don't want to live in any better way. When you try to bring children up well, with good manners, and dress them nicely, and then to have them mix with those sort of children, well it's not fair. I mean, we're working people, but we do want to give our children the best that we can. There's a very good private school near here. It's really an excellent school, and we're going to manage the fees somehow so that Robert can start in September, Jimmy's nearly up to Robert, so we want to send him when he's four. I do think good schooling's so important, don't you. I think it'll be the making of Robert. He'll really go ahead.

'I'd like to have two more anyway, but with these two I couldn't manage a baby now without any help. You see I'll have to take Robert to school and fetch him and then there's Jimmy, and where should I be with a baby as well?

'It would be very nice to have someone to help with the house and washing and just relieve me of the children occasionally. You do need a break from them sometimes because they draw on you so much mentally. You must always give them your attention—it's not like washing up, when you can think of other things. I hate cooking, but it's doing everything that gets you so depressed.

'Sometimes I think to myself it would be nice to be quite free and do a definite job, but otherwise have lots of children and really go in for a big family. But you must have help for that. It's the monotony and worry of always carrying on alone. I feel worn out with it sometimes and as if I'm losing all my freshness. That worries me terribly.'

Common Factors

If we compare Mrs. B, brisk and efficient, with Mrs. A, muddled and naturally lethargic, the differences appear to be very superficial. Mrs. A can't find time to be out with her children; Mrs. B uses her more efficient methods to make time—but that means that her time in the house is curtailed and she has to fit her housework into shorter hours. Mrs. A keeps her house in a perpetual muddle and worries about it; Mrs. B keeps hers clean and tidy, but still feels she has to skimp it, and her parents grumble about it, and she worries too.

XIX—MIDDLE CLASS ROUTINE

Mrs. A has four children; Mrs. B only two. Yet in the end, it boils down to much the same problem for each. Mrs. A says:

'I do get so depressed always going on at the jobs on my own. . . .'

And Mrs. B:

'It's the monotony and worry of always carrying on alone. . . .'

Mrs. A thinks that before she is able to have any leisure and relaxation she'll be 'past it, just old and ugly'. Mrs. B worries because she feels she is 'losing all her freshness'.

Both these mothers feel that they want to be able to do one job thoroughly and to their satisfaction, instead of going on as at present doing a whole series of jobs incompletely, feeling continually that they will never catch up with themselves. Neither wants to have any more children at least for some years under present domestic conditions, but both feel they would like more if domestic circumstances were different, or if keeping up standards were not so expensive.

These examples are chosen as giving a fairly typical picture of the troubles of two families on the borders of the middle class. It matters very little how 'real', how 'necessary', the worries of Mrs. A and Mrs.B may be. They *are* worries, and they are the sort of worry which modern self-consciousness about the duties of housewife and mother helps to accentuate and lack of domestic help to perpetuate. Compare the routine of these households with that of a 25-year old wife, living in a back-street in Chelsea. Her husband is a soldier; two children, one of three and one recently born baby; her little sister of 10 helps her with the house. A tiny living room, with a small semi-circular sink, too small to wash up at; a battered wooden washstand in one corner; windsor chairs, packing cases, stools, numerous bowls. Visiting the house at 5.30 p.m. we find the mother preparing for a visit to the local music hall. She is going to take the baby with her, leaving the three-year-old with her sister-help of 10. Just before she goes she breast-feeds and tidies up the baby:

'Oooh, she's made a mess—well, I shan't change her now—she'll have to go as she is. . . .'

And off they go, seen off at the door by little sister and small son. Feckless? Reprehensible? Anyway a pattern which it would be psychologically impossible for most middle class parents to follow, and one which the organs of housewife-mother publicity increasingly discourage.

For the eugenic future, the pattern which Mrs. A and Mrs. B try to follow is no doubt the better. For the birth-rate future it has run ahead of available amenities. Deflecting down the income-scale, as it well may if housing improves and education in mothercraft and housewifery becomes more widespread, the middle class standard of responsibility and conscientiousness towards children is likely to reduce family-size still more. The only solution would seem to be the provision of some means of acting up to the high aims which

baby-books,[1] mother-magazines and neighbour-standards impose. For it is of little value producing high-quality children in high-quality homes, if the children can only be produced in such small quantities that both they and the homes become fewer with each generation.

XX. Like my Mum

Spontaneous comments often mention memories of difficulties in bringing up a big family in the last generation as a reason for wanting a small one in this. 'I don't want to be like my mum' is a frequent motive among young wives for wanting few children. Typical comments:

'My mother's had a big family, and it hasn't given *her* much of a chance.'

'I've seen what my mother had to put up with in two or three rooms, and I'm determined not to put up with the same conditions solely to bring more children, not unless we get better houses.'

'You can't keep 'em right, not on what the railway pays: and I seen enough of ma's life not to want to do the same.'

So far we have discussed motives for family limitation separately or in groups. To see how they interlink in practice, let us look into the households of the daughters in a family of thirteen, none of whom have had more than four children in their generation. This material was collected entirely by indirect and observational methods. None of the women described knew that they were being 'observed'. Place names, Christian names, etc. are disguised, and one or two trivial incidents which would be easily recognizable are slightly altered.

Mrs. Smith

Mrs. Smith is the mother of thirteen children, of whom the oldest is now 43 and the youngest 18. She married a farm labourer at the age of 19, a heavily built, slow man, who recently retired from work and is now drawing the Old-Age Pension. They have lived all their life in a tiny village nor very far from London. During the early years of their marriage they lived in a three-roomed cottage, and there the first seven children were born—namely, Jill, Jack, George, Kay, Margery, Louise and James. When the family reached this size the vicar of that period helped them to get a larger cottage, half a mile or so outside the village; and there what Mrs. Smith describes as her 'second family' was born. There was a gap of six years before this second family started, and they arrived at about 18-month intervals, as follows: Hector, Pearl, May, Barry, Joy and Donald.

Mrs. Smith has had to work very hard to bring them up. During the years after the last war, when the 'second family' were all young, her husband was often out of work, and Mrs. Smith had to go out to work in the fields, dragging the three youngest babies with her, and getting

[1] For the impact of baby-books, *cf. Like my Mum* (Chap. XX).

home after a long day's work to cook and clean for the rest of the thirteen and for her husband. She does not describe this period of her life with any feeling of resentment or being ill-used:

'Oh well, I mucked 'em all along somehow. When you get half-a-dozen of 'em around your feet, well, you don't seem to worry somehow. You just give 'em what you can and let 'em go on with it.'

The children have all grown up well and strong on this system, and Mrs. Smith has 22 grandchildren.

Mrs. Smith and her husband are now alone—except for the 'lodger', an elderly silent man, who has lodged with them for 25 years and is considered one of the family. The cottage has a rather desolate appearance now. It was for so many years equipped to hold fifteen people—mattresses and shakedowns and miscellaneous bedding in every room—and they remain there still, but without occupants. From long habit Mrs. Smith and her husband still sleep in a corner of the kitchen, though they have now the pick of four or five empty rooms to use as a bedroom for themselves. But, as Mrs. Smith says, 'You never know who may be popping along', and she keeps the beds in readiness for them. And indeed, before the war there was nothing unusual in a family gathering of thirty, including children and in-laws, all packed in the house somehow and having meals in relays. These festivals usually occurred at bank-holidays, and Mrs. Smith was in her element, gaily cooking a dinner for thirty with a grandchild on each arm and several more around her feet. But this doesn't happen often now. The boys of the family are nearly all abroad, and general difficulties of travelling and rationing keep the others away.

Mrs. Smith does not like the present situation. She says she 'gets miserable all on her own with only her husband; she can't seem to get used to it'. She doesn't enjoy the new-found rest and leisure either. She says:

'I've always been on the go, I don't seem to be able to set down like, it don't seem natural.'

She goes out to work for a few hours each day, keeping house for an old gentleman who lives a few hundred yards away. She has no fixed hours, but just 'pops across' when she thinks she will, and cooks his dinner and cleans the house.

Mrs. Smith's Attitude to Children

Mrs. Smith's feelings about a large family seem to be mixed. She is tremendously proud of her own thirteen, of having reared them all and never having had a stillbirth or a miscarriage. She says:

'It's a lot of hard work, but I wouldn't be without 'em now I've got 'em.'

Asked how she felt about it when they were babies she replied:

'When I had seven of them, when James was a baby, if anyone had told me I'd have six more, I'd have fallen down dead, I would honest. But when they began to

come along—well, of course I wanted 'em then. Everyone as it came along, well, I didn't ask for it, but once it was coming along I wouldn't have lost it for anything. It's only natural isn't it? You say you don't want a kid, but you'd do all you can to keep it.'

Her feelings on the repeated experience of childbirth:

'Well, you know how it is, you don't trouble once it's over, no matter how bad you was. Well, I mean, sometimes it's bad and sometimes it's no trouble, no worse than a touch of the belly-ache. It was like that with young Pearl, I didn't hardly know I had her. I was doing the washing, bending over the tub like, and five minutes later, there she was. But then again with Joy, that was quite different. I was terrible bad with Joy, I'd never been so bad with any of them as I was with her. The doctor said I'd never have another after Joy. I couldn't help laughing when he said that. "What do you think I want?" I said, "Ain't twelve of 'em enough?" But doctors don't know everything. I had Donald the next year. But sometimes I think it would have been better if I'd never had him. He was a sickly sort of kid, right up till he left school. Still I don't know. I didn't want Donald, but I wouldn't be without him.'

Asked if she had her time again whether she would choose to have such a large family, she laughs unroariously:

'If I had my time over again I wouldn't get married! I always say you're better off single. Look at my sister, she's single, and she's in her own little house, nobody but herself to worry about. Do you think I wouldn't change with her?'

'Would you really?'

'No! I reckon she's miserable there all on her own, with all her savings and that, I reckon she cries sometimes when she thinks of me with all my lot and wishes she were the same, never mind all the work and worry.'

She often talks with great pride of her large family:

'It's not everybody has six boys, all in the army, is it?'

or, 'I'm only sixty-four and I've got twenty-two grandchildren. I reckon I'll live to see fifty of them before I pack up. I've often said that, I've said "I'm not going to pack up until I see fifty grandchildren round me." '

or, 'I reckon I've done a good job, don't you, bringing up the thirteen of them, and never lost one? It's not many women can say as much.'

But in spite of her feeling of pride in her own large family she always advises her daughters to have small families. She has been heard saying:

'Now, then, you don't want no more. You got a pigeon pair, a boy and a girl, and that's all *you* want.'

or, 'It's all right to have one or two, but you don't want no more.'

or 'I don't call it right to get married and then not have any kids. I don't call that a marriage. But one or two's all right. You don't want more.'

On hearing that Louise was expecting her fifth child she said:

'Poor Lou, I'm terribly sorry for her. I don't know what she'll do now. She'll be terribly upset.'

(in point of fact Louise was not upset at all, but very pleased.)

One gets the feeling that in these remarks to and about her daughters there is an element of self-satisfaction. In spite of her earnest advice to have one or two children, she often lets slip remarks that shows she feels herself superior to them:

'The girls now aren't what we were. They haven't the strength in them. Look at my girls, none of them with more than four, and the eldest over forty. When I was forty I had eleven.'

That is Mrs. Smith, taking her family of thirteen in her stride, bearing babies over the washtub, accepting things as they come and making the best of everything, bringing up children as best she can without much thought of the minor difficulties; very proud of her achievement yet unwilling to advise her own daughters to have large families.

What has happened in the next generation? Visits were made to the scattered households of all but one of the seven daughters. Marjory's husband has just died, and her youngest child is in hospital, so the time was unsuitable. She has three children.

Jill

Jill is the eldest of Mrs. Smith's children. She is 43, and married to a factory worker in a town some fifty miles from the village. They have never had any children—Jill knew before she married him that she would be unable to have children because of an injury he sustained during the last war. At the time she didn't mind. When her mother warned her against marrying him she said: 'Do you think I want a house full of kids like you got, Mum?' and Mrs. Smith replied: 'You wait my girl. You'll cry one of these days, when you see all your sisters with kids and you ain't got none'.

This is Mrs. Smith's version of what happened 25 years ago. Jill herself never speaks of it, and seems quite content with her childless state. She is a queer looking woman, very gaunt and haggard—she looks quite as old as her mother, and without any of her mother's vitality and cheerfulness. Jill dresses still in the styles of 1930—long skirts, low-waisted blouses and sloping shoulders. Her manner is more uneducated than any of her sisters. She works at an unskilled job in an engineering factory, and seems very tired and worn out with it:

'The doctor put me on half time a while back, just to do mornings, but I don't seem to feel no better. My head's terrible, and my back too. I never get no peace with it.'

It is difficult to get her to talk on children and families, and it seems unkind to press her. One gets the impression however, that her lack of communicativeness on the subject is due to genuine lack of interest rather than an excessive depth of feeling. Mrs. Smith, however, says that on one occasion Jill seemed very upset when she saw her sister May's baby, a very pretty little girl. Mrs. Smith says:

'She never troubled before, she'd seen all the kids and never minded a scrap, but when she saw little Helen, she sat down and cried. I got quite a shock. "Jill," I said, "But I thought you never wanted no kids?" "No, mum, I didn't" she said, "And I don't now, but she's such a pretty little thing, ain't she." She is too, the loveliest little kid I ever laid eyes on. Yes, proper upset Jill was when she saw May's Helen. I think it was she remembered how she'd had May when she was a baby—wonderful with the babies, Jill always was, a real help she was to me. It kind of came over her how May was growed up too like the rest, and had kids of her own. Well,

it's a bad job, ain't it. I told Jill, I told her don't you marry that young fellow. But she would do it and now she's sorry.'

'But Jill doesn't seem to want any children now?'

'No, she don't *now*. Well, I mean she's better off without, isn't she, her health being what it is. She's on the change you know, it's taken her early. It does with single women, and women that haven't had no children, you know. It takes 'em terrible early, and terrible bad. That's Jill's trouble. Well, she's got a good husband, she's not so bad off as some, is she? It's a lot if you've got a good husband.'

That is the first daughter, eldest of thirteen, childless and married to a man whom she knew could not give her children. She didn't want a houseful of kids like her mother, and having children was not important enough to her to persuade her not to marry into an necessarily childless state.

Next comes Kay.

Kay

Kay lives in a London suburb. She is married to a factory foreman, and her standard of living is far above that of her parents' home.

They have been married twelve years, but have only recently had a child, Roger, aged 11 months. Kay herself is a rather worn, nervy looking woman in her early thirties—almost unrecognizable as the plump, pretty girl she was ten years ago. She is now thin, haggard, takes little trouble with her appearance, and looks a good deal older than her age.

They live in a four-room flat on the first floor of a converted house. It is quite a convenient flat, large and roomy, and containing a bathroom with a geyser and well-equipped kitchen with a gas stove. They are allowed the use of the garden—in fact it more or less belongs to them, as none of the other tenants take any interest in it. Kay's husband works in it enthusiastically in the evenings and at weekends, and raises a good supply of vegetables.

Kay does a part-time job of a clerical nature from 8—12 every morning, leaving Roger with a neighbour during this period.

We arrive at the flat at 12.15 on a weekday morning, when Kay has just returned from work, fetched Roger home from the neighbour's, and is starting to cook his dinner. She is full of complaints about this part of the day's work:

'I do get fed up with it I don't mind telling you, rushing home like this directly after work and having to start cooking a dinner. It's not so bad today, he's being good. (*Roger is sitting placidly in the corner of the room, picking threads out of the torn arm of a rag doll.*) But sometimes when I get him home he's a proper terror—won't let me get on with a thing. It wasn't so bad when he just wanted a bottle, but now all this business, mashed vegetables and I don't know what, well, it's a lot, isn't it? I wish I could find someone to take him who'd give him his dinner, but there isn't anyone around here. I don't know what I'm going to do, I'm sure. I'll have to do something, that's certain. I can't go on like this. Roger! Put that down.'

Roger has got hold of the morning paper which was lying on a chair near him. His mother snatches it away. Roger begins to yell.

'You're a naughty boy. Why can't you play with your toys?'

She rushes back to the sink, and goes on washing greens, her whole body tense with hurry and annoyance:

'Oh, stop that noise, can't you?'

she cries desperately to the baby, who takes no notice but goes on yelling.

At last she gets the vegetables on and a milk pudding in the oven. By that time Roger has quietened down, and is sprawling on the floor picking at the fringes of the rug. 'Stop that, you dirty boy,' she cries, and snatches him up. There follows more yells and more reproaches. The investigator suggests that he wasn't hurting the rug, so why not leave him to it, for the sake of peace and quiet. 'He was getting himself all dirty' explains Kay. 'Look at him! Filthy! Now I suppose I'll have to wash him all over again'.

She takes him to the bathroom. More yells follow. Then she brings him back clean, puts him in the corner on the sofa with his toys, and sinks down on the other end herself.

'Now perhaps I'll get five minutes to myself while the dinner's cooking.'

she says, and picks up a piece of knitting, and starts working away at it furiously, sitting very tense and upright.

The inevitable happens. Roger crawls along the sofa and gets hold of her ball of wool with gurgles of joy. Recriminations. Yells. Roger dumped once more on the floor. Knitting resumed.

The vegetables are now cooked. Kay laboriously sieves the greens, enlarging as she does so on the exhausting nature of the job. The investigator asks why she doesn't just mash them with a fork. Apparently 'the Book' says that babies should have their greens sieved till they are a year old. She has been following 'the Book' conscientiously ever since he was born, and she tells of the awful time she used to have during the first three months when he woke up regularly at two every morning and cried solidly till six. 'The Book' said that he should not be fed during the night, so she and her husband put up with it night after night. At least *she* did—her husband, she says, kept on urging her to feed the child:

'But I wouldn't give in. If you give in once, then he'll learn he can master you.'

Mrs. Smith was horrified at this system. She said:

'Why don't she feed the poor mite? He's hungry, that's all, it's too long for him to go with nothing. I always fed all mine of a night-time, and never had no trouble. All this nonsense they get out of the books nowadays—it's wicked I call it. And a man needs his sleep, doesn't he; he can't get it with kids squawling all night.'

By the time dinner is ready Roger is of course dirty again with crawling about the floor. Exhausted, she goes off to wash him once more, and the meal starts.

Roger is placed on a low baby's chair, which he can very easily get out of. Between each spoonful he gets on to his feet and leans

perilously over the edge, and is put back on the seat by his exhausted mother. The investigator remarks that her baby did just the same thing at that age, and she found it easier to have him on her lap during meals. Kay says:

'Oh, I mustn't do that. The book says, if you start having them on your lap for meals they'll always want to be there, and they won't take their meals any other way.'

Fortunately Roger has a good appetite and eats with enthusiasm everything that 'the book' recommends. There is a battle, however, about drinking water with his dinner. 'The book' says that at his age he should drink plain water with his dinner; Roger refuses to touch a it unless it is sweetened. Neither he nor his mother give in, so after a lot of crying and spluttering it is given up, and he has no water at all.

After dinner is cleared away and Roger is cleaned up once more, his mother sits down with a magazine and her knitting, and he plays around the room. Every minute she has to put down book and knitting and go and get him out of some mischief. She gets very irritable over this, and is continually dropping stitches and losing her place in the magazine over it.

At half past two he is put to bed for an hour, and Kay gets on with some oddments of housework. She keeps glancing at the clock in a worried way, as she wants to catch a bus at 4.15 to go and see a friend, and she is afraid that Roger will not wake up in time. Every few minutes she goes and listens at his door to see if he is asleep yet, as the later he goes to sleep the later he will wake up. She gets more and more worried, for he is still awake—quite good, only talking to himself and obviously not going to sleep for some time.

'I don't know *what* to do. There isn't another bus till nearly five. I shall have to catch the quarter past four. I *know* he'll go to sleep just before I want to start, and then I'll have to wake him up after he's gone off, and he will be cross all the afternoon.'

The investigator talks to her about children, and tries to find out why she did not have any for so long:

'Well we couldn't afford it. We had to save for it.'

Kay and her husband between them are earning nearly £8 a week—nearly double the sum on which her sister Louise is bringing up four children in apparent health and comfort. Investigator asks:

'Do you find a baby costs so much?'

'Oh, yes. A terrible lot of money. Well, I mean, everything costs such a lot now doesn't it?'

Apparently she has spent nearly £40 on equipment for Roger, not counting hospital fees. Any attempt to find out what all the money was spent on met with a vague response: 'Everything was so difficult and expensive. And the coupons. It's a disgrace how few coupons you get for a baby'.

She is asked whether she means to have any more children:

'Oh, gracious, don't talk to me about more! One's enough to drive me scatty. Anyway, we couldn't afford another.'

Asked if she would have more if she had plenty of money:

'Well, not for a long time anyway. When he's six or seven, able to help himself a bit, then I might think about it. But now! My goodness, I'd be in my grave with two of them mucking about the place.'

At half-past three she begins to get ready to go out. Sure enough, Roger has fallen asleep about ten minutes before she has to wake him up to get him dressed. Consequently he is very cross and sleepy and difficult to dress. At last they are ready, and Kay rushes off to the bus-stop, cramming her magazine and knitting into her bag as she starts.

That is the second daughter. She has spent most of her adult life in an outside job, and finds it difficult after all these years to adjust herself to the kind of life and attitude necessary to bring up a child. She is just sufficiently educated and advanced to pin great faith on books and printed advice about children, but she lacks sufficient instinct or imagination to moderate these principles to suit her own child. She brings up her child according to set rules. Her years in business have trained her to expect to get things done according to fixed plans and at definite times. She is ill-adjusted to cope with the vagaries and disturbances of plans that are inseparable from the care of a baby.

Kay has developed the single woman's habit of being able to sit down with either a book or knitting or both, undisturbed. This leads to endless irritation when she is trying to take care of a baby as well. She finds a single child burdensome, and has no wish for another for some years. And, although her income is quite high, she feels the expense of a child to be burdensome too. Partly because she has standards to keep up, partly, again, because she works to rules. Kay is just the opposite of her mother in her approach to children. The whole process of bringing them up is an exacting, time-table job to her.

Next comes Margery, who, as we have said, has three children, but whose husband has just died, and who cannot therefore be included in this account. After that, Louise.

Louise

Louise is married to a farm labourer and lives in a council cottage not far outside the village. The cottage is one of a number built just before the war, and contains five rooms, a bathroom and indoor lavatory, and rent is 10/– a week. Her present quarters are far more commodious than anything she was used to previously. Until they moved in here they used to live with Mrs. Smith and had only one room for themselves and the children. They have four children: Harry

aged 12; Lucy, 9; Ruth, 3; Joe 14 months. Louise is expecting another baby this summer.

We arrived at the cottage on a cold windy afternoon. All the family except Harry and the father are gathered round the kitchen fire. The kitchen is their main living room, and is very warm and comfortable, though usually untidy. They have another sitting room, but this is kept for special occasions. It contains all the best furniture and is kept carefully dusted by Louise and the children are rarely allowed in it. The rest of the house is rather bare of furniture, but there is such a litter of toys everywhere that it can hardly look dreary. Indeed, Louise's children have a most surprising colleciton of good quality, expensive-looking toys considering the small amount of money that comes into the house. Lucy has a lovely china doll three feet long and a pram to put it in; the younger children have an amazing array of woolly animals, well-made trucks and engines, picture blocks and books. The investigator comments admiringly on this array and Louise says:

'It's their Dad, he's always spoilt 'em something terrible. He'd go without his dinner to get something for the kids. Specially Lucy. He'd do anything for Lucy.'

Louise is sitting by the stove in a low basket chair with Joe on her lap and Ruth leaning idly against her knee. Lucy is sitting in an old-fashioned rocking chair the other side of the fireplace, working with frowning concentration at a piece of dirty pink crochet. Every few minutes Joe wriggles off his mother's lap and staggers off across the room after something, and Ruth wriggles up instead. Louise seems quite undisturbed by the constant change in the occupant of her lap; she remains lying back in her chair, idly watching her children. The only time she moves is when Joe bashes his wheeled horse against her legs; then she simply says: 'Mind out, Joe,' and props her feet on a corner of the stove out of reach. The investigator was much struck by the difference in her attitude from that of her sister Kay. Both Joe and Ruth are black and sticky with jam and coal dust; the washing up is still lying in the sink waiting to be done; there is a ceaseless chatter and banging going on from the two small children. Yet she is able to sit completely contented and relaxed in the middle of it. Whereas Kay was always trying to read or knit when she sat down, Louise is doing nothing at all, and so can be quite undisturbed by the constant clawing of sticky hands round her knees.

Joe starts climbing into his sister Lucy's lap. Lucy puts down her crochet, and starts twisting the child's hair round her forefinger.

'Don't torment him, Lucy,' says her mother.

'I'm not Mum, I'm making his hair curl. I'm going to make him a pretty boy, ain't I Joe?'

Joe begins to whimper.

'See, you're hurting him. Leave him be, there's a good girl.'

'I'm not hurting him, am I Joe?'

She heaves him up into her lap and cuddles him. He gets tired of this very quickly, wriggles down and goes across to his mother, who picks him up absent-mindedly. He flops against her, and starts examining every feature of her face, running his jammy fingers along her eyebrows, down her nose, round her cheeks. Lucy meanwhile tries to clamber on to her lap as well, pulling and tugging at her dress. Louise remains completely quiescent in the midst of all this.

Later in the afternoon, while Louise is getting tea for the children and supper for her husband simultaneously, investigator tries to find out what she thinks of large and small families. She says:

'Well, it's funny you know, really. I never meant to have more than two. We had Harry, and it was nearly four years before Lucy came along, and when I had her I thought to myself: well, that's a boy and a girl, I don't want no more. A boy and girl is just what I want. But it's funny you know, once they begin to grow up, you do miss it, not having a baby to cuddle up. They get so independent like, they don't want no more fussing and cuddling. She was six when Ruth came along, and I *was* pleased. It's funny, I'd never really wanted her, it was just to have a baby about, you know what I mean. And it was the same with Joe—though he's been a little torment, I will say that, always up to some michief. I've never known such a kid for mischief, not of all the lot I've had. Let's hope this one will be a girl—they aren't half the trouble.'

'Do you think you'll have any more after that?'

Louise laughs:

'I'll do what I've always done. I'll say to myself, this is the last. Never again. And then I'll go and have another one. I got three too many already, but I wouldn't be without them. (She kisses Joe)'.

Investigator asks if she has found it very hard work looking after them all:

'Well, you have to keep at it don't you. But it's funny, there don't seem to be much more to do with four than with one. I used to think Harry was a handful, but it don't seem to be any more. I don't know, when there's a lot of them they muck along together more, you know. They aren't always pivvering about after you.'

That is Louise. She has married a farm labourer like her mother. She lives under similar circumstances, and she has very similar ideas about bringing up children. She has no appearances to keep up, like her London sister, and she does not bother with book knowledge. It is unlikely that she will have as many children as her mother did, but she will probably have a large family for this generation.

Next comes Pearl.

Pearl

Pearl is a dark-haired, rosy-cheeked young woman of 27. She has two little boys: William, aged 8; and Douglas, aged 2. Her husband is now in the army, and she lives by the river, with his parents. She was married when she was barely nineteen, the marriage being, as Mrs. Smith puts it, a 'case of had to'. William was born only a few weeks after they were married; there was quite a scandal about it in the

village, and Mrs. Smith was very upset about it at the time. But now all this is forgotten and forgiven, and the marriage seems to have turned out happily enough. The only reminder of the past now seems to lie in the fact that Pearl is much fonder of the younger child than of William. She does not say this, but it is clear from her manner to the two children, and also from her account of how jealous William was when Douglas was a young baby. But the trouble seems to be over now, and when we arrive William is trundling his little brother about in a go-cart most amiably, and later takes him on his lap to give him tea.

It was not possible to get much impression of Pearl's housekeeping capacities, because all the windows were blown out by bomb-blast last week, and all are blacked out with wood, linoleum and paper, and naturally everything looks rather a mess. The shock of this event colours most of Pearl's conversation about children. She says she wouldn't dream of having any more till the war's over:

'Take last week for instance. Whatever'd I have done if I'd had another of them to worry about? The two of them were in their beds when it happened, and I rushed upstairs, and found them all covered with glass—every inch of Douglas's cot, it was a mass of glass. . . . And then think, if it was a tiny baby there, he'd have been killed wouldn't he, that's certain? No, I'd never have another baby while all this sort of thing's going on. . . . Then again, I keep worrying, suppose they was to drop gas, then what would I do? William knows how to use his gas mask of course, they have it at school, but what would I do with Douglas? He'd scream himself silly if I was to try and put that thing over *his* face. It doesn't make you want to have kids, does it? There's so much worry to it these days.'

Investigator tries to find out why Pearl had no children for six years after her first. She laughs uneasily:

'Well, I daresay Mum's told you how it was with Bertie, all that fuss and palaver. Well, it kind of put me off all that kind of thing, you know. I felt I'd had a mouthful over Bertie, I didn't want no more of it. Silly, because of course I was married and all that afterwards, but that's how I felt. Just I didn't want any more to do with it. I'm not like that now, but I wouldn't have no more, not with all these raids on.'

The spacing in Pearl's family seems to be due to psychological causes. While the reason for waiting six years till she had Douglas has now disappeared, the war affords a new motive for waiting before a third child is contemplated.

May

May is a pretty, gentle girl of 25. She is small and slight, and has always been delicate, having had pneumonia three times during her childhood. She married at the age of 19, to a mill worker. He also is delicate, has stomach ulcers and is thus exempt from the army. His job is a skilled one and well paid, so May has never had to go out to work since she was married. For the first three years of her marriage she had no children—not intentionally—and May was very distressed about it, and had almost given up hope of having any when Helen started. She was very ill when the child was born, and the child was very small and feeble for the first few weeks, and nobody thought they would rear her.

However, after she was three months old she began to gain strength, and by nine months she was the prettiest, healthiest-looking little girl imaginable, though still on the small side.

They live in a six-roomed house near the river at X. The house is one of a row of similar houses, and May is not fond of it. She says:

'I do wish we could get somewhere further out. It's a nice little house, but I don't like being all packed in like this. I'd like a nice little house standing all on it's own, right outside, with a nice piece of garden, and a few trees round about. I don't think it's healthy, poked away in a row of houses like this. It's so foggy and misty always, even summertime.'

The house, however, is their own. It belonged to her husband's mother who lived with them till she died, and left them the house, furniture and all. May doesn't care about the furniture, either—it is mostly heavy, rather ornate mahogany, very good quality, but not her taste:

'Often when I'm going round doing this work in the mornings I think to myself just how I'd like this place if I had a lot of money and could start right from the beginning. I'd have nice light furniture everywhere—you know, that new kind of wood that you don't polish or anything. It would all be very plain, and I'd only have just a few pictures that I really like. I don't like them all over everywhere the way we've got them. And I'd have lino, not all these heavy rugs and that to catch the dust. . . .'

In spite of her complaints May takes a tremendous lot of trouble to keep the place looking nice. The elaborate carved mahogany is polished like glass.

She is devoted to Helen—now nearly two—and by all orthodox standards has completely spoiled her—spends all her spare time playing with and talking to her, rushes to pick her up at the first whimper, and gives her as far as possible everything she wants. But the results seem to justify the method; Helen is a happy, contented little thing, enchantingly pretty and very alert and intelligent. She can talk extremely well for her age, and though she is barely two, can do all sorts of household jobs, like drying and putting away crockery, tidying books into their right places, sweeping up crumbs. Owing to the anxieties of her early weeks May is still very solicitous about Helen's health. She plans her whole day's work in terms of whether it is going to be fine enough for Helen to go out or not, and if so what time of day would be best for her.

The investigator asks May if she means to have any more children. May laughs rather ruefully:

'It doesn't look as if I'm going to have much choice. It took three years before she started, and it looks as if it'll be another three years before Johnnie decides to come. I did think for a little while there might be something, last autumn, but it didn't come to anything. I wasn't sorry, really. I don't really feel up to another one just yet. I was terrible ill with Helen, you know, and it seemed to pull me down so. I don't feel quite right yet, even now. And I keep thinking, if anything was to happen to me, what would become of Helen. Rob couldn't look after her, being at work all day, and I wouldn't like her to go back to Mum's. No, I think it's just as well the way it is.'

'If you felt quite well and strong, would you want a big family?'

'Well, that's hard to say—I wouldn't want a big family like Mum's—not thirteen of 'em—my goodness! But sometimes I think I'd like three or four, and then again I think, well, if I had the others to look after, I couldn't give so much time to Helen could I? And we have such happy little times together, don't we my precious? I don't know, it all seems just so happy and quiet the way it is, just Helen and Rob and me, we can do what we think we will and have such good times together. I don't think I'd like a crowd of kiddies the same way. Then Helen is such a quiet, good little thing, I couldn't expect they'd all be like that. Look at her dress now, you wouldn't think she'd worn that all the week would you, a kiddie of two?'

The dress is a white wool one, with pink rosebuds round neck and sleeves, and it is absolutely spotless as if it had just been put on.

'She's that kind of kiddie, you see. I haven't had to force her into it—she's always kept herself clean like that. If she gets a speck of dirt on her hand she'll run to me at once and say "Wash, Mummy, wash".'

'Don't you think she'd be better with a brother or sister?'

'Well, to tell you the honest truth, I don't know that she would. She's such a funny little old-fashioned thing, she seems to be just as happy with grown-ups as with children. She's real company to me, you know, when I'm here alone all day. And there's a little girl next door, I can always have her in to play with Helen if I think she's getting a bit lonely. But she's a funny kid. She'd just as soon be with me.'

'How do you feel about all this propaganda for the birth-rate?'

'Well, I think it's all right for those who are strong enough and have got the money for it. But I don't think it's right to have children and then find you can't look after them properly. I think it's better to have one and give it all your attention than to have a dozen and never be able to care for them as you should do.'

That is May. She has apparently made every effort to have children, but has so far only achieved one in six years of married life. Though it is not her plan to have an only child, she seems to be acquiring an attitude which may well lead her not to want another at all. Physical disability apart, it seems unlikely that her family will ever consist of more than two or three.

Joy

The youngest of Mrs. Smith's daughters is Joy. She is like Pearl to look at, dark and rosey-cheeked. She is very clever, and in spite of only having had a village education to the age of 14 has managed to pass all her exams for becoming a qualified nurse, and is now specializing in midwifery. She is unmarried, and declares herself to be totally uninterested in men, and never wants to get married. She is certainly very keen on her job, and at the moment she has no boy friends, and never makes any effort to get any—never goes to dances or anything of that sort.

She was asked what she thought about all this talk of the falling birth-rate in the papers. She replied:

'It's only because they want men to fight in another war. The more babies people have, the more they'll have to fight for them in the next war. I think it's horrible. They don't want the babies for their own sakes at all, just for the wars. If it was for the people's sake, well, there's too many people in the country already. Look at the horrible great towns, millions and millions of people all packed together. I think this country would be a much better place if there were only half as many people in it. Then there would be proper houses for them all and everything.'

XX—LIKE MY MUM

The investigator asks her why she specializes in midwifery:

'Well, it's interesting work you know. You really feel you're *doing* something. Not like the chronic cases, you know you can't do any real good with them.'

'You feel like that about the work, even though you disapprove of so many babies being born?'

'Yes, I do. I mean I think that the babies that *are* born should have the best chance you can possibly give them, and that's our job. Like a little while ago, we had a little prem. born—it didn't weigh above two-and-a half pounds, and nobody thought it would live. But we worked at it, we did everything we knew—it was under oxygen for nearly a week; it couldn't suck or anything, we had to feed it through a tube. And you can't imagine the thrill when it first began to suck. I was on duty in the nursery that morning, and I was putting the tube down its throat as usual, and all of a sudden it gets hold of the tube between its little gums and starts to suck like mad. I was so thrilled I could just have danced about the nursery. I gave it one of the bottles, one of the very easy ones—and it sucked down nearly an ounce right off. And when it was finished, I dashed off to tell sister, and she was as thrilled as I was. We could neither of us hardly speak. After that it went ahead lovely, and we sent it home weighing five-and-a-half pounds. I haven't heard since, but I expect it's getting on fine, they do once you get them up to five pounds. Well, it's that kind of thing that makes me love the work. You feel it's really worth while, if you can save a little life like that that the doctors have given up.'

And that is Joy, twelfth of Mrs. Smith's thirteen children. A very difficult birth herself, she is devoting her life to helping other people's babies into the world as her incidental contribution to a birth-rate problem in which she has no interest.

Trends

None of Mrs. Smith's daughters will contemplate having a family of the size she had. In Jill's case it's impossible. Kay has married a class higher than her parents. She and her husband are one of those relatively well-off couples who feel that children are a great expense, and who in fact do spend a lot on their children without having a very clear idea where and when all the money goes. Kay, like many others, had got well into the routine of an office job, with leisure habits to match, before she felt she could afford her first child. She finds it difficult to adjust herself to an entirely new routine, and she tries to make child-rearing a matter of rules and times like her job. The result is that she finds even a single child a real strain, and doesn't want another for many years to come.

Louise is just the opposite to Kay. She has married into the same class as she was born, she has no pretensions and no appearances to keep up, and her four children do not bother her nearly as much as Kay's one. She does not trouble about rules, she lets her children get dirty, and she's perfectly willing to have a crowd of children on a fraction of the money Kay feels she needs to bring up one properly. Louise is the only one who looks like having a big family, and her whole attitude is nearest to her mother's of all the daughters.

Pearl delayed her second child for private psychological motives of her own, and she does not intend to have a third while the war is on. May, on the other hand, did not intend to wait three years for a child,

but no child arrived for that period. She is lavishing all her attention on an only daughter, and though she seems to hope vaguely that another will come along, the fact that two more years have elapsed and no second child arrived does not worry her much.

Joy is not married, and does not intend to marry. Her career is to help bring children into the world. She does not believe in the desirability of raising the birth-rate, but she thinks that those children who are born should be given the best possible chances in life.

What are the common factors? Primarily, the lack of interest in bringing a lot of children into the world. Mrs. Smith is proud of her family and she has no regrets or self-recriminations. With the possible exception of Louise it is difficult to imagine any of her daughters being *pleased* if they had a large family. Even Louise says she always tells herself this will be the last, though not with much conviction. In general, the common thread of thought is simply that a big family is somehow abnormal. And that is the usual outlook running through all the material in this survey. One, two or three children is usual, accepted. More than three has to be excused or laughed off. And a family the size of Mrs. Smith's in this generation would take a lot of laughing off.

XXI. Mothers' Faiths

'As arrows are in the hand of the mighty man; so are children of the youth. Happy is the man that hath his quiver full of them; they shall not be ashamed but they shall speak with the enemies in the gate.' (Psalm cxxvii, 4–5.)

'The most disappointing feature in the Home and Family statement of the British Council of Churches is that of its sixty-four pages one and a quarter are devoted to a paragraph headed "The Family and the Church". But this is just what we want to know! We are told "the recent history of the family makes clamant the call for the Church to co-operate in a fresh and vigorous way in laying the foundations on which a vigorous and healthy family life can be reared in the modern world." But how?' (Kathleen Bliss. *Christian Newsletter Supplement*. No. 202. 23/2/44.)

'Well, no, I'm not religious. I don't run it down. It's nice for the kiddies.' (Poplar mother.)

The decay of religious faith in the past half-century is a commonplace. Mass-Observation has made a number of surveys on popular attitudes to religion, all of which show the same general trend. While there is, numerically, little anti-religious or atheistic sentiment, there is little positive faith, much vagueness, much of what can best be described as a hangover from other days when religious faith was a real stimulus and guiding principle in life.

From the viewpoint of social research, no subject is more difficult to approach than religion if we want to obtain accurate information on the part it plays in people's everyday lives. A two-way social sanction operates in affecting verbal attitude. First, it is still very widely the 'done thing' to pay lip service to religion. Secondly, religiosity, ostentatious religiousness, and to a certain extent church-going itself is often

socially despised. Thus, on the one hand people tend to say they have some sort of religious belief, however little that belief may mean to them; on the other hand those to whom religion really matters often tend to play it down, for fear of being thought over-pious.

If people are asked what their religious beliefs are, about one in ten say they have none at all. Men disclaim any religious belief about twice as often as women, and young people twice as often as old. The remainder consist of two-fifths who *say* they belong to some church or sect, and two-fifths who express some form of personal, unaffiliated faith.

In the present survey married women were asked: 'Are you religious or not', an intentionally vague question, intended to bring out the main stratifications of attitude. Effectively this question 'leads' in the opposite direction to the question 'What are your religious beliefs?' Whereas the latter question tends to exaggerate the extent of religious faith and affiliation, the present question tends to minimise them. This was clear from verbatim answers. Many women, for instance, said merely 'No, not if you mean going to church', and where this type of reply was given without further elaboration it was classified as 'not religious'. But the more detailed comments suggest that in fact many of those who replied in this way might have some degree of personal religious faith.

With these qualifications we can discuss the results. Analyzed by length of marriage, they were as follows:

Attitude to Religion	*Percentage having this attitude among those married*		
	Over 10 *years* %	5–10 *years* %	*Less than* 5 *years* %
Not religious	32	45	52
Vaguely religious	32	24	22
Church of England	24	17	19
Roman Catholic	8	12	6
Other sects	4	2	1

Among younger women, about half say they are not religious, a fifth that they have some vague personal faith, and the remaining 26% profess some sort of association with organized religion. Among the older women the proportion who say they are not religious is considerably smaller, though the difference is in the proportion expressing vague personal faith rather than in affiliation to church or sect. It must be remembered that in this sample the age limit was 45; results of other surveys show that the difference in attitude between the old and young generations is very marked. If the full adult age-scale is covered about twice as many of the under-forties say they have no religious beliefs as of the over-forties.

These results probably give a fair index of the proportion of married women whose religion means something, if only a little, to them. But if the same women had been asked what their religious beliefs were, many more would have said that they belonged to some church and considerably more would have expressed some sort of vague belief. Few of those who say they are not religious are anti-religious. Remarks of the type: 'No, I don't hold with it'; 'Where does religion get you?' etc., were rare. In general, remarks classified as vaguely religious and those classified as not religious tail off imperceptibly into one another. The key word throughout is 'vague', for the irreligious and the sectarians as well as those with some degree of personal faith.

In the London sample there was no significant difference between the religious views of women in high and low birth-rate areas. In Gloucester there were slightly, but only slightly, fewer saying they were not religious at all.

There was a slightly greater tendency for more educated people to say they belonged to the Church of England and for less educated to express some vague personal form of religious belief.

Those with families of three or more had some sort of religious faith twice as often as those with smaller families, and this, as we shall see, is not only a reflection of the higher age of mothers of large families.

Vague

Most of those who were classified as not religious simply said 'no' without further elaboration, whereas many of those classified as vaguely religious began by saying no, and showed by their further remarks that in fact religion did play some part in their lives. Thus, while similar replies were classified consistently and the differences and similarities between groups have significance, no great value should be should be attached to the absolute figures.

Examination of verbatim comments, however, shows clearly enough how nebulous a thing religious belief today often is. Typical comments of the vaguest sort included:

'Only to a certain extent. I don't rush to go to church.' (44D.)

'Well, I was born Roman Catholic, but I'm not anything in particular at the moment except I've got a little bit of faith left.' (29D.)

'I wouldn't say I was, and I wouldn't say I wasn't. I don't often go to church.' (30C.)

'Well, not in the churchy way. I should say I'm religious in a way. There's things I believe in.' (37D.)

One of the commonest comments indicated some sort of underlying belief in a personal God. This unformulated idea that there is 'Somebody' probably represents the most frequent form of religious attitude today. It is expressed in various ways:

'I'm not really religious but I do believe in the Almighty. Although I don't go to church I do believe there's somebody above.' (36D.)

'Well, I don't go to church and all that, but I believe in somebody. I'm not against it.' (32C.)

'Well, I do believe in somebody watching over us, but I don't go to church.' (40D.)

'Well, I believe there's some God somewhere. There must be somebody to plan things.' (42D.)

'I believe there's a certain person above and something always turns up to help you if you're not wicked.' (40D.)

' I believe in God, I suppose.' (29C.)

For many who have no real personal faith, the religious sanction still holds as a sort of background ethic for everyday conduct. For instance:

'Well, to tell you the truth I do what I can and I don't do anybody any harm' but I'm not a churchgoer.' (45C.)

'Not very much. I do as many good acts as I can, and I believe in helping others.' (44D.)

'Well, no, I do believe in something. It's hard to say what. But I think we ought to think of others beside ourselves.' (33D.)

'I don't profess to be religious and yet I don't believe in anything I'll be sorry for. (40D.)

Religion is often associated with ethical values which people hold themselves, though sometimes with little or no religious basis. Many women protest that they are good, or do good, despite their lack of religious faith:

'No, I'm not wicked, but I'm not religious. I'm as good as some of 'em that goes to church.' (40D.)

'Not exactly. I try to live as good as I can. It's not much good going to church if you can't live a good Christian life.' (36C.)

'I'd like to , but I don't get the chance to go to church. There's no bad in me. I'm a good living person.' (30D.)

'I'm not a churchgoer, although I've a rigid sense of right and wrong.' (26B.)

Then there are those who have no real faith, but pray occasionally in times of stress, or even regularly:

'No. Of course I often say a prayer. It helps somehow.' (29C.)

'Well, I say my prayers, but I don't go to church to say them.' (37D.)

'No, but I've got faith in that Almighty and I pray in all the air-raids.' (40D.)

And those who go to church off and on, but have little faith in religion:

'I do go to church sometimes, but I wouldn't say I was very enthusiastic about that kind of thing.' (30C.)

'I go to church every Sunday, if that's religion.' (28C.)

'Well, I go to church now and again, but I'm not so very religious.' (35D.)

And those whose only response to the question is the remark that they go to church on special occasions:

'Well, I don't go to church except for weddings and funerals.' (30C.)

'Well, I don't go to church except sometimes when there's a National prayer.' (33C.)

'Well, I go to church twice a year, at Christmas time, and to see the New Year out and the old one in.' (33D.)

'Well, I'm religious in myself, but I don't go to church, not unless there's something very special on.' (39D.)

In this, as in other religious surveys carried out by Mass-Observation, there were the usual spontaneous comments on the inadequacies of organized religion—many coming from those who claimed to have some personal faith themselves:

'I believe in living according to the best of your ability. I don't agree with the churches and the way they spend so much money on services and things, and outside is so much suffering they don't do anything about.' (30C.)

'Roman Catholic. Although I don't believe in all this moaning and preaching. If they practice what they preach then it's all right. But not all of them that goes to church do.' (33D.)

'Well, I believe in God, but I don't go and listen to what somebody's paid to go and say in a pulpit.' (37D.)

'Well, I'm not very religious, not since the war. I feel you don't have to pay for a seat to pray to Jesus Christ or listen to any sermons. The Church is all a paying system, you've got to pay for your seat, and it's pay all the time. And if you're not dressed up you're looked down on.' (36D.)

These comments cover all the main types of spontaneous remarks. Their common factor is vagueness. The East End Mother who said of religion that it is 'nice for the kiddies' summarizes the position of religious faith in thousands of households today. An unformulated but pervasive goodwill towards the idea of religion; a frequent but shallow faith in Somebody, Something, somewhere; a hangover from a generation to whom religion meant more.

Religion and Attitudes to Planning

With beliefs so nebulous and verbal attitudes so ambiguous it would be surprising if any major difference existed between the ideas of religious and irreligious on family planning. However, Catholic doctrine on contraception might be expected to have some effect of the attitudes of those who say they are Catholics. Breaking down results by religious attitude we find that:

30% of those who say they are not religious favour leaving family-size to chance;

34% of those who say they are vaguely religious favour leaving family-size to chance;

33% of those who say they are Church of England favour leaving family-size to chance;

48% of those who say they are Catholics favour leaving family-size to chance.

XXI—MOTHERS' FAITHS

There is no significant difference between the attitude of irreligious, vaguely religious and those who say they belong to the Church of England, though these groups may be slightly less in favour of planned families. Catholics are more often in favour of leaving family-size to chance, but not so much more so as might perhaps be expected. Less than half of them take this attitude. However, the Catholic's attitude is sometimes quite definite and there can be no doubt that the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church on contraception has its effect on a sizeable minority of its formal adherents.

The number of Nonconformists included in the sample is not large enough for any conclusions to be drawn, but broadly speaking we can say that people's religious beliefs or lack of belief today have only a very slight effect on their attitude towards family planning, with the exception of Catholics, who show a rather greater tendency to believe that nature should be allowed to take her course.

How does this work out in practice? Some indication can be obtained by taking the average family size of women married over ten years and correlating it with their attitude to religion:

The average family-size of women married over 10 years who say they are not religious is .. .. 2·1

The average family-size of those in this group who are vaguely religious is .. .. 3·2

The average family-size of those in this group who say they belong to the Church of England is .. .. 3·0

The average family-size of those in this group who say they are Roman Catholics is .. .. 3·0

Thus, despite the fact that there is no significant difference between the ideas of religious and irreligious on family-planning, *the religious average one child more than the irreligious.* And this difference in *behaviour* is not the result of Catholics—who are the only group believing appreciably less than others in contraception—having any more children than other religious groups. If anything, in fact, it is those unaffiliated to any sect who swell the total, though the difference here is very likely due to chance. By taking the group married over ten years we eliminate the effect of age on religious attitude.

This, in itself, does not necessarily prove a connection between religious faith and willingness to have larger families—though it strongly suggests it. Those who say definitely that they are not religious may represent an all-round sceptical type; a type whose lack of religious beliefs is just part of a more general lack of faith. But this does not affect the point we wish to demonstrate, which is the connection between some sort of focal point or aim in life and willingness to have children.

A positive correlation was also found between people's views on the importance of children to married life and their religious outlook:

Importance of children to married life	*Percentage thinking children thus important among*			
	Non-Religious	*Vaguely Religious*	*C. of E.*	*Catholic*
	%	%	%	%
Very important	54	65	71	72
Important	28	22	21	18
Not very important	7	6	3	2
Depends	4	3	3	3

There is thus a significant difference between the proportion of irreligious and religious women thinking children are *very* important.

These results are all the more arresting when we remember the weakness of the great majority of all the attitudes we are considering. Even the small modicum of faith left is enough to have an appreciable effect on basic attitude and behaviour.

Faith in the Future

In past generations religion has been a prime stabilizing influence, providing a hope and a belief in the purpose of life where life held out a minimum of earthly hope and a problematic earthly purpose. Today:

'I'm not actually religious. I've lost my faith, such contrary things are going on it don't make sense. The Bible says "Thou shalt not kill" but the parsons and all go to war and bless it. It don't make sense to me but it's nice for the children and I don't stop my little girl going. Of course I had a strict religious upbringing so I don't say as I don't say me prayers sometimes. It's a kind of habit. I'm C. of E.' (Bermondsey mother, 44.)

'A kind of habit' cannot go far towards producing the solid background of purposefulness which might persuade parents to have children in a world where their earthly chances decrease in proportion to their numbers. Yet, even now, it may well be going far enough to make the difference between producing enough children to keep the race going, and producing families too small to prevent eventual extinction. It is not Mass-Observation's concern to argue the rights and wrongs of past or present attitudes where demonstrable factual checks are not available. But the steady weakening of spiritual beliefs clearly adds greatly to the importance of current material outlooks. Faith in the future must focus increasingly on immediate earthly prospects as spiritual values decay and the wider focus blurs.

All the evidence of this survey demonstrates the close association between family-size and the expected future chances of the children. The immediate future of the birth-rate and the expected future of the country in the minds of parents are likely to be closely associated. We

asked married women what they thought things would be like after the war, with the following results:

Attitude to Post-war	*Percentage expressing this attitude among those in Low birth-rate areas*	*High birth-rate areas*
	%	%
Optimistic	22	32
Pessimistic	46	26
Half and half, no change	10	10
No opinion, vague	22	32

Despite the greater vagueness about the future in the high birth-rate districts there were more optimists there than in the low birth-rate areas. A breakdown by education for the whole sample shows:

Attitude to Post-war	*Percentage expressing this attitude among those with Secondary Education*	*Elementary Education*
	%	%
Optimistic	35	28
Pessimistic	37	31
Half and half, no change	7	9
No opinion, vague	21	32

Of course the prevalence of pessimists in the low birth-rate districts does not in itself demonstrate any direct connection between small families and a gloomy outlook on the future, but the above differences between the distribution of optimism and pessimism among those of different educational levels shows that the tendency to pessimism where families are small is not simply due to an association between higher education and scepticism. Women were asked whether they thought it would make any difference to the number of children they would like to have if they could be sure of the future, with the following results:

Q. Do you think if you could be sure of the future that would make a difference to the number of children you would like to have?

Attitude	*Percentage expressing this attitude among those married Over 10 years*	*5–10 years*	*Less than 5 years*
	%	%	%
Would make a difference	28	40	55
Would not make a difference ..	62	47	34
Other replies	10	13	11

XXI—MOTHERS' FAITHS

Three out of five of the more recently married women think that their attitude might be changed if they could be sure of the future. Analysis by education shows that:

45% of those with elementary education think that if they could be sure of the future if might make a difference to the number of children they would like to have;

39% of those with secondary education think this.

Being sure of the future means different things to different people. For some it means the certainty that there will be no more wars; for some the certainty of a regular job for their husband. We discuss this later. But generally speaking women had in mind the same problems of post-war when they replied to this question as they did when they replied to the specific question on post-war anticipations.

Wars

Well over half of a random sample of men and women in London thought that there would or might be another war after this one, the majority thinking it would start within the next 15–25 years. Very similar results have been obtained by opinion polls in America, Canada and Australia, and probably we should find much the same pattern in those European countries which have been involved in the wars of the twentieth century.[1] For that is the pattern of this generation. When

[1] *Opinion News*, polls digest of the National Opinion Research Center, University of Denver says (July 1944):

'If Allied soldiers went into battle thinking they could not win, what would be their chances of victory?

'The question is rhetorical, of course. Yet there is definite evidence that civilians are approaching the post-war period definitely convinced that a lasting peace is impossible.

'N.O.R.C. (National Opinion Research Center) questions, asked on three nation-wide surveys, indicate that a majority of the American public believe there will always be wars. The most recent survey—September 1943—found 37% of the National cross-section believing that "no matter what is done to prevent them, there will *always* be wars", and 20% convinced that, while "it is *possible* to prevent all wars, people will never do what is necessary to prevent them", a total of 57 per cent, agreeing in essence, that World War III is inevitable.'

Polls figures for Australia, Canada, United States, and a small Mass-Observation survey in London show:

'*Do you expect the United States to fight another war within the next fifty years?*

	U.S.A.
Yes	59%
Depends on the peace	4%
No	25%
Undecided	12%

'*Do you think there is likely to be another world war within the next twenty-five years?*'

Canada	*Australia*
29%	52%
16%	—
34%	34%
21%	24%

'*Do you think there is going to be another war after this one or not?*

	London
Yes	46%
Depends on the peace	19%
No	16%
No opinion	19%

'*How long do you think it will be before it starts?*

	London
Less than 5 years	5%
5–15 years	14%
15–25 years	27%
Over 25 years	3%
Don't know	51%

Civilians of the allied nations are going into battle for peace thinking they cannot win, and for the most part expect to lose within the lifetime of younger people. The U.S.A. poll gives a long horizon, but a poll in two states on the question 'Do you think there will be another world war after this one in your lifetime' shows a sharp break in opinions about the age of fifty, suggesting that most people expect the next world war within the next 25 years. Of those aged 21–30, half expect another war within their lifetime. These are tomorrow's parents.

women were asked whether they might alter their ideas about the number of children they wanted if they could be sure of the future, many replied in terms of war:

'Yes, it would. If there was no more wars. The war's stopped me up to now, and a lot of people I know said I had pluck, to have one just now, but I reckoned it out like this—the war can go on and on, and then I might be too old to have another baby.' (34D. Catholic.)

'Oh yes. I thank God at times we've got two girls and not two boys. What's happened now puts you clean off having more.' (32C.)

'If we knew there'd be no more wars it'd be different. As things are we don't know what we're really in for.' (24D.)

'Yes, a lot. People would be more settled and not have so much on their minds. You could settled down to ordinary life if you knew there'd be no wars. It would make a lot of difference.' (24C.)

'I think it would. You don't feel you want to bring children up so that there'll be another war in twenty years. Roughly wars seem to pan out every twenty years.' (29C)

'I think it is that. The place isn't fit to bring up children. You might have another war very soon, and it makes you think is it worth having the trouble to bring up children for cannon fodder?' (25C.)

'With the practical promise of a third war, who the hell wants a family?' writes a middle-aged married man, in his own business and well able to afford children but deliberately childless. An elderly woman:

'What has happened to the babies we have brought up, worked for, gone without for, only to be cannon fodder? And to be left lonely in old age.'

And a mother with two sons fighting in this war:

'. . . I am always reproaching myself that I ever had children to have to suffer and endure the hardships they are no doubt enduring. They did not ask to come into this world, and it certainly is a world full of trouble. . . I have regretted having children because I am so fond of my sons. I would sooner not have had them than bring them into this world of slaughter and agony.'

Insecurity

Generalized insecurity, the feeling that the modern world is not a fit place for children, is mainly found at a conscious level among the middle classes, the more thoughtful and intellectually inclined. Working-class wives sometimes say that they don't want to bring children into a world of war and suffering, but personal insecurities generally overlie the broader reasons. We have already shown that there is no widespread revolt against parenthood, in the sense of a refusal to have any children at all. But a minority refuse. Their refusal, as shown in the subjective case-histories supplied by the National Panel, and in a few interviews where no children at all are wanted, is usually based on a rejection of the future world as a proper place for young life. An L.C.C. social worker, generalizing from her own experience of others:

'There are also the pessimists to be considered—those who definitely disbelieve in bringing children into a world like this. A good many men appear to have been affected in this way after the last war. I myself came across a case of a shell-shocked

man who was so disgusted when he found out that his wife was going to have a baby that he left her and has never lived with her since, although he provides her and the child with a regular allowance. Probably we shall get a certain number of similar cases after this war—especially if the economic system is mismanaged and we have a period of unemployment again.'

And here is the father of a single child. He was severely wounded in the last war and has been partially crippled ever since. Writing about retribution, he gives his views on war and governments and politicians:

'War is all-hell and I am inclined to want to finish with the hellishness as soon as possible. If I really thought that justice could be done, I might be more keen about "retribution": but remembering the last war and "Hang the Kaiser" I'm not sanguine. But then, I've lost all hope in the ruling class, and see no chance of any material change; so I simply don't believe either in the Government's will or power to make an end of all who caused war. . . .'

And of his family:

'Have one child, aged nearly sixteen. This is all we will have. The world isn't fit for children. We presume there will be endless wars, and so won't bring up cannon-fodder any more. We began married life with the intention of having a child, or perhaps two. Narrowing of means and the devilishness of the world, made us decide to stop after number one. We were dubious from the first, and so waited a few years before the first—and, as events decided, the only one. Nothing, we think, would encourage us to have more: the certainty of external wars (or, at least, wars) during the next few generations, makes us determined to contribute as little as possible to them.'

A younger married man writes:

'When I was married in 1939 my wife and I both decided we did not desire children. Circumstances since have not altered this view, but rather have they tended to confirm it more strongly. Our reasons are manifold, and I like to think they are not selfish ones entirely. It is not a question that we want to be forever "gadding about" or that we consider children or a child, an inconvenience. My wife, I know, likes children, but I have no special love for them. . . . Many people make the war an excuse for *having* children but quite honestly the war is a good reason to me not to have children. Long before the war I was terribly worried about conditions which would be brought about by a conflict, and now that the war is here, I feel that I have not been wrong. It seems to me a crime to bring children into this unhappy world. . . . The world is facing a great upheaval, now and in the future after the war. . . .'

'In my particular case, financial considerations do not enter into our decision. No amount of legislation, or financial assistance would cause us to alter our decision. The only thing which might is a change of attitude of our approach to the subject.

'The fact that the Government urge everybody to increase the birth-rate leaves me entirely cold. I am not conscious of any duty to posterity. . . .'

These are the exceptions, the mainly intellectual few who refuse to bring babies into a world of war and insecurity. Views on the world's future are seldom so pessimistic and certain as *consciously* to stop people from having children *by themselves*. But they are a powerful contributory influence in damping down the desire for children, and, where that desire is already weak, they may finally turn decisions against an addition to the family, or hold up the first for an indefinite period. For instance:

'Glad we had only one: world certainly not fit for civilized man.' (Father, 63.)

'Married eleven years. No children. Didn't want 'em first years. Had plans which war upset. Will not attempt to have family until some signs of life becoming

ordinarily decent again. Maybe that this will be such a long time that biology will determine that we have no children. To be honest I would not be tremendously upset at that.' (Married man, 25.)

'I think that lack of faith in the future is a big factor. To quote a friend of mine: "Well, if I *did* have another we want another girl. No boys to grow up ready for the next war".' (Middle aged mother.)

Feelings of insecurity and purposelessness in the modern world, with little other-world hope or spiritual sanction, bite deep into the consciousness of many parents. It is a complicated conception, only half-articulate in the articulate—perhaps impossible for the majority to express in words. We have documented one aspect of the fear of purposelessness in the last survey in this series (*The Journey Home*, John Murray, for the Advertising Service Guild, 6s.). A special study is now being made of the aims of ordinary people in life, which may illuminate the subject further.

But, in Mass-Observation's experience, it seldom happens that the ideas which the minority can render lucidly are absent from the minds of the majority who find difficulty in putting their thoughts into words. In our work with the National Panel of correspondents we find, except where the special interests of social or economic grouping are implicated, that the ideas of the coherent minority are usually similar to those of the less coherent majority who left school at 14. The distribution of ideas is often different, but it is nearly always true to say that a clear trend of feeling which runs through the considered replies of the thoughtful is also present among the general population. Though it is no cross-section and gives no accurate indication of quantitative distribution, the Panel affords a means of studying the depth and ramification of attitudes which can only be studied superficially by verbal interview, formal or informal.

Here, then, are two lucid middle-class women. Each believes that children are vitally important to married life if it is to be complete. And here are extracts from the reasons which they believe to be restricting the size of families today:

1. 'Fear, i.e. not wholesome instinctive fear of danger, but dread that the modern world offers no assurance of work, let alone just reward for work: that the world is empty of faith, hope and sanity: empty of a normal community life, simple neighbourliness: no assurance even of a full stomach (e.g. old age on ten shillings per week perhaps). The rule of every man for himself and devil take the hindmost has grown from a modified jungle rule to a colossal industrial octopus, with which the ordinary human creature cannot hope to pit his wits and the work of his hands. Governments which could impose riches or poverty, a life or death sentence, with rough justice in the old days, are not measuring up to the demands of modern circumstances where they must control world distribution of commodities and production.'

2. 'Lack of purpose or aim in life. Although this attitude is less apparent in wartime, before the war it made people sit on the fence and decide that children weren't worth it. There is so little opportunity for worth while service to the community in modern life, so much competition, that a negative attitude, a will to death, is engendered, and this works against the desire to have children, or limits families to one or two.'

The final sentence of the last quotation borders on the intuitive, and this is dangerous ground on which to base any conclusions. But these women's intuitions, appended almost apologetically at the end of a list of good concrete material 'reasons' why families should be small, are perhaps worth considering. Another young mother, after listing what she calls the 'obvious' reasons, including her own economic difficulties, says she has a 'feeling there is something deeper'. She believes people are becoming sterile, and she too mentions the 'Will to Death'. A school-mistress concludes her reply:

'But behind all these conscious calculations, I feel there is the strength or weakness of the creative urge in the community, affecting all of us, unconsciously, in the lower depths of our being where there seems to be some common mind or life expressing itself through the individual members of society. I believe that in times of expansion, when there is a spirit of adventure abroad, when life seems good and worth while and there are great things to be done, there is then an urge to create—to pass on life, which makes people desire children and large families. Against this urge only the more cautious or calculating will oppose economic disadvantages. On the other hand, in a period such as that we have been going through, when there is general disillusionment and lack of faith in life, when there doesn't seem room even for the present inhabitants of the world—and there is so much uncertainty and fear about the future—this subconscious urge is so weak, that it takes very little in the way of consciously appreciated disadvantages to outweigh it.'

In the forest of question marks which is the birth-rate problem, this one may remain standing after the others have fallen. To what extent is the will, even the ability, to perpetuate the race linked deep with the sense of life's purposefulness and point? The spiritual purpose has gone or is blurred for the majority today. The long-term other-world goal is replaced by the material near-future prospect. Children are no longer a material asset to their parents as they commonly were before the Industrial Revolution. The small family makes every kind of sense in modern society, except the kind which presupposes a future fit for babies to grow up in.

Maternal instinct today is fighting a losing battle against inconvenience, self-sacrifice and the future. When a mother thinks of the future of her baby she thinks of the sort of childhood she can give it, the sort of life it can expect in the world, and the sort of dance and bother and sacrifice it will give her. Against the instinctive urge she balances up the child's future and her own. Today the scales tip the wrong way just too often. More than anything else she puts this down to lack of money. There won't be enough to give the child the chances in life she wants it to have; there will be too heavy a sacrifice of the parents' standards. These motives are real enough to those who give them, but that does not mean that they do not hide deeper underlying ones. In fact, all that these 'reasons' demonstrate is that parents today lay a great deal of store by the provisions they can make for their children's material well-being; and by the material standards they can keep up themselves. Legislation aimed at increasing the birth-rate has so far been directed towards these immediate material standards. Where it has been tried, there is little indication that it has had any perceptible result. This may

mean that measures so far attempted in other countries have not been wide or imaginative enough. But if that is so, then the eventual answer may be that nothing short of full-scale bribery will persuade parents to have more children in modern society. Wherever we look among birth-rate problems, one fact stands out—the *will* to have more children is lacking. Here is what another woman's intuition says about it:

'I should say that with people who deliberately restrict the number of their children the main factor, whether realized or not, is a timid attitude towards life, a lack of faith in it or God, a craven hankering for a certain standard of comfort and respectability, failure to realize that life is better than not-life however hard it is. Indeed, except for physiological factors which I am not competent to discuss, I believe this fear and timidity is really the only factor or at any rate the primary one, that limits families. The other things, such as small incomes and small houses and worry about the future, all spring essentially from that loss of faith. The rise in the birth-rate during the war points the same moral. People have had their small fears swallowed up in the larger ones—wives the fear of being left alone without a child of their husband's, husbands of not perpetuating themselves, of being snuffed out without having passed life on.'

World Fit for Babies

Faith centres increasingly on the immediate material future as spiritual purposefulness declines. We have already shown that optimism about the post-war world is found most frequently among the broad groups in which families are largest. If we correlate the family-size women want with their attitudes to post-war we find:

	Percentage wanting this number among those having the following attitude to post-war	
No. of children wanted	*Optimistic*	*Pessimistic*
	%	%
None, one, two	45	62
Three or more	31	18
Other replies	24	20

All these results strongly suggest that those who look on the bright side of things tend to have more children than those who take a gloomy view of the future. The optimists in this case consist largely of those who *hope* for the best, the pessimists of those who *expect* the worst. The main difference is one of attitude to the future rather than firm belief about what it holds. And, in this respect, there is a certain similarity between postwar outlooks and religious attitudes. There are those who really believe that things must and will be different after the war, just as there are some whose spiritual faith is definite and deep, but they are a small minority. More typical were comments of the type: 'Well, we've got to hope for the best' or 'I hope they'll be better than they were. They ought to be'. This kind of outlook was more frequent

in the high birth-rate areas, among the worst-housed, most poverty-stricken. Broadly speaking, the optimists are those who are not afraid of the future, though many are far from sure of what it may bring; the pessimists are those who are fearful, distrustful, looking forward to a future full, usually, of the same difficulties as the past.

Work

The main and outstanding fear of the future is the fear of unemployment. When women were asked whether they might change their minds about the number of children they wanted if they could be sure of the future, many of the younger ones looked at the question immediately in terms of their husbands' post-war job:

'I think so. You don't know what the future is going to be like. My husband, he's got his job to go back to. But what I'm afraid is he won't want to go back to the same old work. And what then? (26C.)

'Oh, well, if we could be sure of the future and a regular job it would.' (24D.)

'Yes, if I could be sure of him coming out of the army and walking right into a regular job it would. As it is I can't afford to keep more than one.' (25D.)

'Yes, it would. If you'd know your husband was coming to a good job it would. But you don't do you?' (31D.)

Sometimes women's views on the post-war world centred entirely on their post-war prospects. One war-bride, on night-shift in a factory, living in one furnished room, said:

'I don't ever think of it! I daren't think of it. I hope my husband doesn't have to walk the streets.'

She is childless so far, but wants two children. Asked why she didn't want any more, she replied:

'The fear of having to struggle. There's always that fear at the back of your mind.'

Pervading pessimistic views of the future is the belief that peace will inevitably mean a return of unemployment. Many hark back to the 1920's, some of the older women from memories of their own youth, the younger from hearsay. A woman of 36:

'I hope it *is* going to be better than after the last. I remember my Dad coming out, and getting very depressed because he couldn't get a regular job. My mum was always after him for hanging about the house. I felt depressed myself to see him so squashed, and there was no money coming in, other than his dole money. I hope they're going to be better this time.'

Two of the over-forties:

'I imagine it's going to be like it was after the last with a good few down and outs hanging at street corners.'

'After the last war it was desperate. I think it'll be the same. No work and no houses and helping the foreigners everywhere, and the debt we have to pay to America. I don't think we'll ever get back to what it was.'

And two under-thirties:

'That's what worries me. You hear so many things about the last war. Will it be the same now?'

'It looks like it will be the same as the last war by the men that are coming home now. All right at first, and then soon forgotten.'

Belief that there will be widespread unemployment spreads through all age groups. Here are typical comments from women married during the war years, childless so far. First a factory-worker of 29, married in 1940. She is living with her parents. 'I've tried ever so hard to get a place of my own' she says, 'but the flats are so expensive, and I don't want the other kind.' Her post-war prospect:

'I think things are going to be terrible, such a lot of people out of work and young couples without homes, And we've got to get all those other countries in running order.'

She wants two children, because 'if I had one it would grow up greedy and selfish, while if there's two they'd fall back on one another.'

Second, a girl of 24, married in 1943, also in factory work; her husband in the forces like No. 1:

'I think it'll be chaos. There'll be few jobs and a scramble for them. Somehow I don't think there'll be much security, and it'll take a long time to settle down.'

She wants two or three children:

'For one reason I don't think I can afford more than that, not if I have to pinch and scrape for a nice little home. More than two or three's a crowd.'

Third, a part-time worker, married a month ago:

'Terrible. It'll be the same as before. Out of work and on the dole.'

She wants two children. No more because 'you have to see if you can keep them'.

And here is a woman of 25, with one child, living at home in a Poplar tenement:

'I don't think they'll find work for the men coming home. I think there'll be a lot of unemployment and misery and we've got to help the other countries as well.'

She wants two children, and no more because 'after the war there'll be a lot of unemployment, and the house we're living in at present isn't a fit place to bring up children in.'

Housing

Next to unemployment, anticipation of housing difficulties after the war helps to build up the picture of continuing struggle and difficulty. One young woman of 21, living in furnished rooms with a 15-months' old baby put her views like this:

'Well, I reckon myself that there won't be anything for us at all unless the government get a move on. And I'll tell you what I think—I don't think they should put off the housing till the men are all coming home. They should give the wives some help in getting a home together for when their husbands come home. If the Government

want family life then they should give more encouragement to people that want a good family life, that's what I think. There's a lot of girls willing enough to have the children, if only they could be sure of something—a nice place to live in and no unemployment. I do think the government have only theirselves to blame if people won't have babies.'

We have discussed housing difficulties in detail elsewhere. Here is a hint of the raised standards which we suggested might be expected:

'I think there'll be a lot of trouble after the war, with women growing lazy about their homes. I know a lot that say they *like* going out to work and getting their children fed at school or a nursery—they won't like to settle down to housework again. I think unless they set their minds to giving us all the modern conveniences and central heating and everything, women aren't going to like going back into the home. I think that'll cause more trouble than the Government have thought of.'

Promises

A few women mention the promises and plans of this war with hope:

'Well, we seem to be going ahead and making heaps of plans. If they keep their word it shouldn't be bad. When you listen to the different speeches your hopes get raised.' (39D.)

'I don't know. In the last war they didn't make all the promises they have in this, and that's what makes me think things will be different, I hope so, we've had a rough time in the past.' (35D.)

But much more frequent was the general feeling that things would go on as before, that 'they' wouldn't make any real effort to change them. Same-as-ever comments:

'Just like after the last. No difference at all. It's always the same and it always will be. I thought different a year or two back, but now by the looks of things I think it's going to be just as bad as last time.' (38D.)

'I suppose as before, just living and working.' (41D.)

'The same as they were after the last war. There's a lot of talk and it's all wind and it'll all go down like a bladder. If the working class stand together they'll make a better England, but they never will. . . . No, it'll be the same as after the last war.' (40D.)

'I think they're going to be awful. All promises, and then the same as the last time.' (30D.)

Remarks on the possibilities of official postwar planning range from general scepticism to complete distrust of motives:

'Well, I can tell you one thing. The people see that the Government's got no intention of altering things. They've seen nothing done, and I don't think there will be.' (25D.)

'If they really meant all they say, they wouldn't talk so much.' (24D.)

'Well, it's all promises. It's just the same as what they told our fathers, and I think it's going to be just the same this time.' (20D.)

'I don't know, they keep promising us things. They did after the last, but we never saw anything.' (25D.)

'Oh, God knows. I dread it, sometimes. I think there's going to be trouble. I don't think the men will stand it. I think the Government hasn't made enough money out of this war and that's why it goes on, and when they've made enough it will stop.' (40D.) (And, in reply to the question on surety of the future: 'No, I shouldn't want no more. They said a war to end war, last time.')

The 'we and they' pattern comes out strongly in replies to this question. Many believe that 'they' will have to be forced into producing a better state of affairs by 'us'. Viewpoints differ. The more optimistically minded say 'we' have *got* to see things are improved, like this 45-year old mother of five children from Bermondsey:

'Well, we'll be a pack of fools if we don't see to it that the post-war is all right. Bloody fools we'll be. We got to *see* it's all right, and that's all there is to it.'

There is a frequent belief that the men coming home from the forces this time will see to it that improvements are made. A mother of six ('I wanted two. I miscalculated. Reckon I didn't know enough') says:

'Well, I perfectly remember from the last war, and it was dreadful. But I don't think our boys coming home will sit down under it this time. The last time it was volunteers, but this time a lot of them have been conscripted, they were made to go, and they'll want a decent life after all they've been through, and what we've had to suffer at home too.'

But it is a question of if, and a question of struggle:

'I don't think it's going to be so easy, but I think we shall all get through it somehow. I don't believe it's going to be as bad as after the last war, because I don't think people would knuckle down under it, not after all we've gone through.' (37D.)

'I think it ought to work out all right, if the boys coming home stick up for their rights, but they'll have to stick up for theirselves or the Government won't do nothing for them.' (44D.)

The frequent picture is one of angry men wresting concessions from a government which will give in to keep them quiet. Some comments from younger women, married to men in the forces during the war:

'It's hard to say. I don't know much about the last war, except what I've heard from others. I hope it won't be the same. We've just got to wait. But one thing I remember my husband used to say, we've got to stick at it if we want changes. If we want to get it we'll have to go all out.' (22D. Husband killed in Middle East.)

'It's very hard to say. If it's going to be like after the last then there'll be a revolution here.' (24D.)

'That's a big problem. It all depends what they intend doing. It's their place to see every man has work that's been called up; after all they didn't want to go. After the last war it was terrible. If they don't find the men work there'll be a revolution here.' (27D.)

'I think we shall have to look out for ourselves, because nobody else'll look after us. And I don't think the men coming home will put up with things as they did after the other war—I think we'll see it this way: if the Government can spend that money year after year on a war, they can spend some money giving people a decent life in the peace.' (27D.)

We stress this type of comment because it is clear from every type of post-war study Mass-Observation has made in recent years that this widespread belief that 'they' don't want to help 'us' is at the back of moods which so often look like apathy and hopelessness about the future. *It is not that people are afraid of a hard time, but they are disheartened by the prospect of a future which they feel is not theirs at all.* In the Forces, among the husbands these women say will see to it that there are changes after the war, officers have had to resort to elaborate pep-talks and subtle near-compulsions in order to get the men to fill a

form which preserves their democratic right to vote in an election. The men have just not thought it worth while preserving that right. There is some apathy, but apathy where it exists is based on the feeling that there's nothing can be done, not that it isn't worth doing anything. It is not apathy but a dull and persistent scepticism about the goodwill of all politicians and parties which makes many men feel that the vote is not worth preserving.[1] The 'we-they' antithesis is often a stronger force than the class symbols of political parties. If cross-cuts class and creed and unites left, right and indifferent in a common belief that 'they' won't get 'us' anywhere.

This is the real lack of faith in the future. Not a belief that things are going to be tough, and it will take a long time to get right: that belief is inevitable and no doubt correct. But a belief that nobody's going to *try* and put things right and improve them, that the nation is going to muddle on through the chaoses of another 1919–39 to another world war in 1965. As one 30-year old mother put it:

'I think things won't be right for a very long time. About twenty years. Till it's time for the next war.'

The sense of purposeful community is lacking in this country today, apart from the temporary motives of war. A common religious faith produced a common sense of purpose in the past, but that has nearly gone. Belief in the inevitability of progress helped people in other generations to feel that we were all getting somewhere, but that is going too. In the narrower community of the family economic bonds and a common purpose helped to creat unity, but today families are an economic burden and sons and daughters go off to pursue their individual and private aims as soon as they stop being a charge on the parents' purse. Universal suffrage, hardly won, gave a new focus to aspirations for the good of the community; but that too is slipping, because men and women are beginning to feel that those who stand on platforms are not worth voting for.

We shall never know to what extent child-bearing is related to faith in the future until a new faith arises and can be measured against birth-rate trends. These superficial verbal attitudes give a clue, but only a clue. We don't know what lies at the back of the minds of those women who say we must hope for the best, or how deep-seated are the forebodings of those who reply with a single word 'awful' or 'terrible'. If we could really separate out those who believe that the future has meaning and purpose from those who think it has little or none, the results might be different and perhaps more startling. As it is we can say definitely enough that belief in bearing children is more closely linked with faith in the future than mothers realize. How closely we cannot say. But if family allowances in cash or kind fail, if money and comforts and helps

[1] For a summary documentation of reasons why members of the Forces do not bother with the voting forms, see our article in *Picture Post* (19 August 1944), *cf.* also *The Journey Home* (No. 4 in this series), especially Chapter XII.

and prestige for parents do not produce enough children to keep the race from extinction, there is a clue for population policy in the comment of a working mother:

'I want my children to have something to hope for when they grow up.'

XXII. Eugenic Prospect

This is an examination of the reasons why women don't have more children. Now the survey is completed, analyzed and reported on, we wonder—have we started at the wrong end of the birth-rate problem? Would it perhaps have been more fruitful to find out first why women *do* have children at all, and worked back to the question of numbers? For the *cons* cover most of the material imperfections of modern industrial society, the *pros* are the minds of mothers and fathers and the intimacies of home. After seeping ourselves for six months in the word-lives of many hundreds of parents and potential parents we come to a conclusion which is hard to demonstrate explicitly, but which we feel the whole of this survey demonstrates implicitly.

If there is a solution to the problem of the declining birth-rate it lies in strengthening the motives *for* having children, not in weakening the motive *against*. Against more children are ranged all the raw material of white-papers, blue books, blueprints and political programmes. Wage-levels, job-securities, housing problems, ill-health and sub-health, the monotony of housework, the tempo of modern life, the presence of the Beveridge Giants and the absence of the Atlantic Freedoms in the world. Against more children are the distractions of life today—motor cars and motor bikes, cinema, dance-hall, corner-house. Against more children is the emancipation of women, their desire to spend more of their life outside the home. Against more children is the rising standard of living, organized movements for social betterment, promoting parental ambition, making mothers and fathers want a better, and dearer, childhood for their babies than they had themselves. Against more children is twentieth century industrial civilization, individualism, perhaps even democracy itself.

For children is the still small voice of parental instinct which says its worth it.

All that can be done to lessen the motives against is to make life easier all round. If a maternal state subsidized the mother during pregnancy and took complete charge of the child from birth, then nine months' discomfort would be the only motive *against*. But what would happen to the motives *for*? Do we know enough about the fulfilments which make parents go through every inconvenience and sacrifice in order to have and bring up a few children as well as possible now, to be sure that the removal of sacrifice would not also mean the removal of the desire to procreate? A child is a social achievement. There is private

satisfaction and social prestige in having brought up a child well. If it is too easy, what will happen to the prestige and satisfaction?

Then there is the paradox of social development over the period during which the birth-rate has declined. There is no doubt that this has been a period of social betterment all round. an improved standard of living, a steady increase in social services. An American writer suggests that the best way to solve the problems of the over-fertile countries is to better the social conditions of their people. Then people will have fewer children. Certainly this is the pattern of the Western countries, which are now faced with the imminent problem of a declining population. Yet all legislative proposals for *in*creasing the birth-rate are directed to speeding up the development of just those social conditions which, for over half a century, have been accompanied by a *de*crease.

A vast programme of social reform is called for by the mothers of this country if they are to perpetuate the English race. That is the superficial moral of this survey, but we doubt very much if it is the real truth. Ask a man who visits the pub now and again at weekends why he doesn't drink more, and he may give a dozen different answers. He can't afford it; he has better things to do with his time; it would be bad for his health; his father took to drink and he doesn't want to go that way too; his social position is such that it doesn't allow him to be seen in the local too often; he prefers quality to quantity—three or four doubles on a Saturday rather than a pint every night of the week; he likes to vary his social environment—a night at the pub, a night at the pictures, a night at the club, and the rest at home; he considers it wrong to drink a lot—and so on.

All these reasons for not drinking more can be paralleled by the reasons mothers give for not having more children. They are perfectly valid and good reasons, yet they may mask the one real underlying motive. The man may simply not *want* to drink more. And the plain fact about the birth-rate is, in our interpretation, that women just do not *want* more children than they are having.

The brewers know well enough that to increase a man's drink bill they must, first and foremost, increase his desire to drink. They improve the social amenities too, for that makes it easier to drink, and to drink incidentally where drinking is not the main objective. But the main gist of their tremendous publicity is centred, not on the pleasant environment in which drinking may be done, not on the fact that drinking can be more or less an incidental to other congenial occupations, but on promoting the idea that drink is good in itself.

Like childbearing, drinking is done most where material amenities for it are worst and economic bases least secure. Bermondsey had a drink bill of £11 4s. a head in a year when the average for the whole country was £7 4s.[1] The population of Bermondsey was replacing itself when the populations of Hampstead and Chelsea were not producing

[1] Dr. Alfred Salter, M.B., in evidence before the Royal Commission on Licencing, 1930.

enough children to prevent them from eventual extinction, 'Wealth and babies' as Richard Titmus says, 'are distributed throughout the country in inverse ratio'. Those who can least 'afford' babies have most, just as those who can least afford drink, drink most.

There are many superficial 'reasons' for such a state of affairs. Foremost is the comparative lack of adequate birth-control knowledge among the poorer sections of the community. But is that a 'reason', or is it only a symptom of some deeper motive which stops the poorer sections of the community from finding out? The rubber goods shops are open to all; manufacturers of Surgical Wear advertize their free pamphlets on contraception in the mass-circulation journals, not in the class periodicals; Marie Stopes aims her informative publication at the poorer people; the private middle class clinic is more difficult to find than the public one. There is no reason why the poor should know less than the rich, except that they are less anxious to find out and less well-equipped to do so.

Wealth and babies are distributed in inverse ratio. But wealth and education are distributed in direct ratio. It is a manifest absurdity to attribute the presence of large families to the absence of money, just as it would be absurd to attribute a large consumption of drink to the same cause.

A lot is written about the fecklessness and irresponsibility of the poor. In peacetime Bermondsey they drink five times as much beer as milk. They spend more on alcoholic drink than on bread, milk, rent and rates put together. They are the feckless, irresponsible poor.

In an economic-ridden society the economic description comes naturally. But poverty is directly related to lack of education and education is directly related to the capacity for putting two and two together and seeing the whole implications of a situation. Not only are those who manage to stay at school after they are fourteen likely to be better trained to think things out, but those who are most capable of coherent thought are most likely to stay at school after they are fourteen.

If we say that babies are distributed in inverse ratio to *education*, then the picture begins to make sense. It will be remembered that:

The average family-size of women of the last generation whose daughters have had a secondary education is	3·6
The average family-size of those whose daughters have had an elementary education is	5·5

It seems safe to assume that more of the mothers of daughters with secondary education had it themselves than did the mothers of daughters with elementary education. So we can say there is a direct relationship between family-size and education. Of course this does not establish a causal relationship, any more than a causal relationship

between bowler hats and family-size would be established if we found (as we probably should) that those fathers who wore them had fewer children than those who wore caps. But we have to see what makes sense, and clearly less-money-more-children doesn't. Less-education-more-children does. Let us assume for the moment that there is a causal connection. How would it be interpreted?

Mass-Observation normally classifies people interviewed by socio-economic grouping. This method is considered unscientific by many social research organizations, who now tend to classify by income pure and simple. The latter method eliminates entirely the subjective judgement of the investigator. By Mass-Observations' method the investigator is asked to state to which social class the interviewer belongs. The classes are:

A. Upper class
B. Middle class
C. Artisan or skilled working class
D. Unskilled working class

Though there are elaborate tests standardized by market-research organizations for ascertaining to which social class any person belongs, in practice whenever street interviewing is done, the classification is based on the personal judgement of the interviewer. The interviewer goes largely by appearance, manner of speech, and general personal impression, which means that the judgement is largely subjective. Even in house-to-house interviewing Mass-Observation investigators base social groupings largely on personal impression. We do not ask for information as to whether the respondent possesses a car, a telephone, domestic help, etc.

The reason for sticking to this 'unscientific' method is that we believe the class grouping to be more meaningful than the financial grouping. In wartime particularly, when incomes are haywire, class remains. Grouped by income, a black market operative may have risen from the bottom to the top grade, but by class he will still be where he was in less prosperous days. And in general outlook on life he is likely to be nearer the social group from which he came than the economic group to which he has risen. Economic grouping is a very rough and ready index to mental training and social background, and when we are dealing with people's opinions these things are likely to be more relevant than the amount of money they earn. Generally speaking, social grouping is visible in dress, manner of speech, behaviour, whereas economic grouping may not be perceptible. Opinions are formed in the social group, and if we are measuring opinion it seems more reasonable to stratify samples by groups related to the formation of opinion than by groups only related to it at one remove. Age, sex and area stratification, universally used in all cross-section opinion polls, are immediately related to opinion-forming influences and group

environment. So is social class; and the only reason for substituting an income stratification is that it admits of objective criteria which class does not. In Mass-Observation's opinion it is more useful to adopt a relevant part subjective criterion than an irrelevant objective one.

'Class', as defined above, is more nearly related to education than to income. For instance, only a very small number of those with secondary education were classified as 'D' class by investigators, though many were doing similar work to those with elementary education classified as 'D', presumably at a similar wage. This dissociation of income and class is, of course, particularly pronounced in wartime, but in general a class grouping distinguished between educational backgrounds rather than economic foregrounds.

'Class' Attitudes

Very roughly speaking, classes A and B are those who have had a secondary education, and classes C and D are those who have had an elementary one. But there is a considerable overlap into C class of those who have had a couple of years at a secondary school; and one who had achieved considerable material success but had left school at fourteen might well fall into class B. So while a class grouping is roughly indicative of educational level, it tends to upgrade those who have made good, within limits, and downgrade those who have done badly despite more education, also within limits. This corresponds closely to what happens to people in their social environment. The local lad who makes good retains at least some of his former social habits and tastes; he inclines to mix with a class higher than his parents, but lower than his income. Conversely the aristocrat who loses his fortune never becomes working class, though he may be paid little and work hard.

There are certain very broad ways of looking on events which distinguish these class groups quite regularly. For the sake of simplicity let us group classes A and B together and call them upper class and group C and D together and call them lower class. At one of the most critical periods in this country's history, May 1940, a sample of men and women stratified on a class basis, were asked each day what they thought of the day's news. Adding the results for all the samples in the first half of May, we get the following results:

Attitude to the News	*Percentage expressing this attitude among*	
	Upper class	*Lower class*
	%	%
Disquiet	40	25
Optimism	23	25
Doubt	17	28

(Other attitudes and those who have not heard the news are omitted, so that these figures do not total 100%).

On this occasion it will be seen that the upper class showed conspicuously more disquiet, and slightly less optimism. The working class had more doubt. If the figures were readjusted and worked out as proportions of those giving a definite opinion, the optimism of the working class would be further emphasized, as compared with upper and middle classes.

This is a fairly usual class pattern when interpretation of a situation is concerned. In the lower class there is as much or more optimism as in the upper class; but there is more doubt and less pessimism. In other words, the working class are at least as inclined as the upper class to take an optimistic view of events, but where the upper class are pessimistic they tend to be undecided.

In the present survey we find this class pattern cross-cutting educational differences. Thus when women were asked what they thought things would be like after the war, there was little difference between the distribution if optimism and disquiet among those with secondary and elementary education. But there was a noticeable difference between the high birth-rate areas and the low. Presenting the facts in the same form as the above table we find:

	Percentage having this attitude among			
Attitude to Post-war	*Elementary Education*	*Secondary Education*	*High birth-rate areas*	*Low birth-rate areas*
	%	%	%	%
Disquiet	31	37	26	46
Optimism	28	35	32	22
Doubt	41	28	42	32

The implication of this table is clarified if we take only those expressing a definite attitude of optimism or disquiet about the postwar future in each group:

OF THOSE ABLE TO GIVE A DEFINITE OPINION ABOUT WHAT THE FUTURE WILL BE LIKE, THERE WERE:

55% OPTIMISTS AND 45% PESSIMISTS IN THE HIGH BIRTH-RATE AREAS

33% OPTIMISTS AND 67% PESSIMISTS IN THE LOW BIRTH-RATE AREAS

48% OPTIMISTS AND 52% PESSIMISTS AMONG THOSE WITH ELEMENTARY EDUCATION

49% OPTIMISTS AND 51% PESSIMISTS AMONG THOSE WITH SECONDARY EDUCATION.

Thus, though there are more people with definite views on the future among the more educated, the *distribution* of these views is the same as among the less educated. But in the East End of London, where birth-rates are high and most people belong to the same class

group, there are more than twice as many optimists per pessimists as there are in the boroughs where birth-rates are low, classes mixed.

What does this mean? A possible explanation which fits in with other trends is this. People's attitudes and outlooks are affected more by their social group environment than by their personal background and economic foreground. An overall tendency exists to assimilate the dominant positive outlooks of members of the group. Thus, allowing for the slightly greater proportion of doubt in the London area sub-samples than in the whole sample, we find that in the low birth-rate districts people are as opinionated as they are among those with secondary education—despite the fact that over half of them have only had elementary education. We find that, despite the better material and economic conditions in the low birth-rate districts, there is comparatively greater pessimism there.

The usual working-class tendency to adopt a vaguely optimistic attitude, or to be doubtful rather than definitely pessimistic, appears to be obscured by environmental factors.

Now, the tendency to optimism and doubt is largely a result of inability to see the long-term implications of a situation. In the critical war period of May 1940, which we have been discussing, for instance, C and D class people regularly expressed optimism about the news *because the British always pull through in the end*, or for similar reasons, not connected with the objective facts of the military situation. It was those who tried to look the facts in the face who were pessimistic because they could not see any valid *reason* for optimism. Similarly, the working class are regularly less opinionated because they are regularly less informed, and less interested in becoming informed, than the upper class groups. In a purely working class district these trends have free play. But in a many-class area class groups mix more frequently, and there is a tendency for the less educated to assimilate the views of the more educated. If, among the working class, both optimism and pessimism are about equally ill-informed, and the facts of the situation make a pessimistic view at least as tenable as an optimistic one, then the natural effect of inter-class contact would be to swell the numbers of pessimists at the expense of the doubtful and the wishful-thinking optimists.

The net result might be a more pessimistic outlook among the mixed-class group than among the upper class group who were largely responsible for effecting the change.

This may sound very elaborate, but we are in fact doing little more than attempting to analyse the basis of a commonplace belief. In wartime it is a common practice to withhold from the general public those aspects of a situation which give grounds for pessimism about future development. This is done for the sake of morale—to keep people fully interested and active, and to prevent thoughts of defeat interfering with effort. Yet those who *are* in possession of the withheld

facts are themselves expected to make the greatest efforts, to think least of defeat, to direct the efforts of those whom they protect from their own defeatist-breeding information. In other words, it is tacitly assumed that if the general public are given both sides of the case, it is likely to be adversely influenced in its behaviour by the worst side, while those who know all are expected to be moved to special effort by the best side.

A similar process is, we suggest, at work when a group of the uninformed live in close contact with a group of the informed. The more informed don't keep their information a secret, and the result of incomplete and incompletely assimilated information and ideas on the less informed is to depress them more than those who provide the information and ideas are depressed.

If this interpretation of the way area differences in outlook cut across educational differences is accepted, we are led to the conclusion that high birth-rates—persisting as they do in large working class aggregates—may well be related to general ignorance of, and lack of interest in, the likely long-term developments of present situations. Having a lot of children, like drinking a lot of beer, may well be related more closely to ignorance and apathy than to poverty.

Children, like drinking, are distributed in inverse ratio to wealth. But lack of money is clearly not the *cause* either of large drink-bills or large families. They are distributed in inverse ratio to education, but a heterogeneous social environment blurs the distinction.

Is the sad truth today that children are distributed in inverse ratio to knowledge and the ability and desire to assimilate facts? Have we to rely on the improvident and the wishful-thinking for the perpetuation of the race? The question marks must remain. But it is difficult to find any other interpretation which fits all the contradictions which this survey brings to light. The people who are having most children are mainly the people who care least how many children they have, or, at best, are least capable of finding and using means of preventing them. There is no reason to suppose that legislation will alter this pattern fundamentally. It may well accentuate present trends. If it is desirable to perpetuate the don't knows and the don't cares and the can't thinks while the others gradually become extinct, well and good. Let's get ahead with numbers, and to hell with eugenics.

But if we want quality as well as quantity, then the aim must be to stimulate the desire for more children where the desire and ability to limit families is most firmly established. Minds are made up most firmly at present where legislative possibilities are least likely to provide a stimulus. Babies bought on the cheap—or even at cost price—will come primarily from those to whom a little extra means a lot, whether they are bought for cash, goods, services, gardens, creches or living space. If legislation can appreciably raise the birth-rate by itself, it seems likely to raise it most where it is already highest.

XXII—EUGENIC PROSPECT

For the eugenic future, something deeper is needed. Something which will make the thoughtful breed as much as the thoughtless, the well-nourished have as many babies as the under-nourished, the over-privileged as the under-privileged, the well-educated as those who left school at fourteen. These mothers will have more children when they think having more children is a desirable thing. A few extra shillings a week, an extra bedroom, an opportunity to get out a little more; these things may change decisions where the desire is there already and environment is at its worst. They might even turn the scales enough to keep up numbers, for environment is poor enough among large enough sections of the community. But for a quality nation the *will* to bring more children into the world must be stimulated where it is now weakest.

Can this happen until 1950–60–70 seem years when it will be good for children to be alive? Babies are the future heroes and heroines of their parents. Will anything bring enough quality babies into Britain except the conviction of mothers and fathers that it will be a Britain fit for babies to live in? The only permanent answer to the birth-rate problem, we believe, lies here. If planning and legislation for baby production fail in an environment of fearfulness for the future of babies, or if they succeed best where their stimulus is least desirable, it will not be entirely surprising. Legislation should plan towards a purposeful future for tomorrow's unborn citizens and maybe the birth-rate, numerical and eugenic, will take care of itself?

SUMMARY

Preface

1. The problem of the declining birth-rate is the problem of a way of life, a civilization. In planning the work on which this report is based, Mass-Observation did not set out with the idea that it could find a cut and dried solution. We set out to provide as many pointers as possible, in a field which is, as yet, practically untouched by surveys of this kind.

2. The material consulted is described. It includes interviews with married women, long personal records of their own married lives and decisions about having children by men and women; the postbag of the Radio Doctor after two talks on birth-rate problems on the wireless; the postbag of a birth-control clinic; detailed observation of family routine, with particular reference to children, in typical households; long informal conversations on subjects related to family-size. In all some 2,500 parents and potential parents are implicated.

3. A detailed account of the interviewing method is given, with a full statement on the constitution of the samples interviewed. It is pointed out, however, that the statistical results incorporated in this report are at times misleading, and always need careful interpretation. The whole report is essentially interpretive, and without the mass of qualitative material available the numerical results would at best be so superficial as to be of little value, at worst would seem to lead to conclusions which the verbatim material shows to be false. It is further suggested that verbal attitudes on the subject of family-size are likely often to give an inadequate indication of the real reasons for having small families. The more widely accepted a convention is by society, the less likely the individual is to be able to state accurately his basic reasons for following it. The small family today is an accepted convention. To most people the family of two or three children looks the common-sense thing, and they give common-sense reasons for wanting it. *The problem for population policy is to change peoples' ideas of what looks common-sense.* At the outset a good deal may be done by assisting those who want more children to have more. But eventually, if the coming decline in population is to be forestalled, parents must be persuaded to *want* more. We can get little clue to means of changing desires from the common-sense reasons for restricting families. These reasons need interpretation and *checking against behaviour and related attitudes.*

4. The report as a whole, and each section of it, proceeds from the superficial 'reason' to the underlying motive.

I—What is Happening

5. The process which has led to the present situation, in which the populations of the countries of Central and South-Western Europe

and North America are likely to start declining within a few decades, is outlined.

6. It is shown that large increases in population in the past have been due to a declining death-rate, not an increasing birth-rate.

7. Death-rates have continued to decline, with the increase in medical knowledge, improved sanitation, etc., but around the middle of last century in many countries birth-rates began to decline too. For varying periods in different countries the birth-rate has been steadily declining, and has been doing so much faster than the death-rate.

8. In this country the birth-rate has been declining for over half a century. It is shown that this decline has been due to married couples having smaller families, other factors such as marriage age, amount of marriage, etc., having played an insignificant part.

9. The various terms used to describe the rates at which a population is increasing or decreasing are explained. The key to the situation is the *net reproduction rate*. This rate indicates the number of girl children who would be born to 1,000 girl babies born now, if the number who die at each age remains the same as it is now and the average number of children per mother remains the same in the next generation as it is in this. The net reproduction rate is expressed as the ratio of the number of girl children born to the number of mothers who bear them.

10. When the net reproduction rate falls below one, not enough potential mothers are being born to replace themselves in the next generation—unless either the death-rate declines or the size of family each mother bears increases.

11. In England and Wales the net reproduction rate fell below unity some twenty years ago. Today, no decline in the death-rate can offset the forthcoming decline in population. The only way in which a decline can be avoided is by mothers having larger families. In 1930–31 each married woman could expect an average of 2·19 children in the course of her life: for the population to replace itself she would have needed 2·72.

12. Allowing for sterile marriages and other cases in which the parents are unable to have children, an average family of at least three children is necessary to keep the size of the population stationary. The correct figure may be nearer four in all cases where difficulty is not experienced in having children; data on sterility is inadequate for an exact estimate.

13. It is shown that a declining population is an ageing population. This means that the death-rate will rise. At the same time the supply of potential mothers will decrease. Once started, a decline will be increasingly difficult to arrest. The longer it continued, the greater the changes in individual habits necessary to reverse the process.

II—What May Happen

14. The likely effects of a decline in the population on the life of the country are then discussed. It is shown that a steep and rapid decline, such as might possibly be in progress in half a century's time, would have a disastrous effect on economic conditions.

15. But the immediate problem is that of a relatively slow decline. In some respects the results of this may be good, *provided the danger of recurrent crises and unemployment can be overcome.* This danger is accentuated by a declining population, for reasons which are outlined. If means can be found of preventing these crises, then, in a period of slow decline, the standard of living is likely to rise.

16. However, this is no reason for welcoming a decline or for thinking a relatively small decline of little importance. For one thing the potential good results are by no means certain; for another, the early stages of decline will be producing the conditions which make a further and steeper decline more likely. While there is no reason to suppose that it would be disastrous if the population of this country declined by a few millions, if it did so, the likelihood of its continuing to decline by many more millions would be considerable increased.

III—Is It Important?

17. People's opinions about the importance of the declining birth-rate are then examined. It is shown that about one person in four welcomes the fact that the birth-rate has been going down for half a century, and the same proportion thought the rise in 1943 a bad thing.

18. Reasons given for thinking a declining birth-rate unimportant or positively good can be summarized as follows:

(*a*) Distrust of the motives of those who want the birth-rate to rise; mainly the belief that the Government wants more children in order to have enough soldiers for another war.

(*b*) The belief that a small population prevents war; that small and sparsely populated countries keep out of war; that these countries are often prosperous and have particularly good social services. The Scandinavian countries are frequently mentioned as an instance.

(*c*) A belief that this country is already over-populated, and that fewer people would relieve congestion.

(*d*) The belief that a declining population will mean a higher quality nation, because education, health services, etc., will have fewer people for whom to cater. A similar train of thought leads people to think that fewer people means less unemployed, because there will be fewer people to fill the jobs.

19. The first of these reasons is only likely to be countered when people believe that there is not going to be another war in the near future. At present a third world war is widely anticipated within the next twenty-five years or so.

20. There is considerable confusion in people's minds between the *effects* of a declining population and the *potentialities* of a small population. The European countries with a small or sparse population have achieved their economic and social position while numbers were increasing, not declining.

21. The other reasons involve an over-simplification of the issues. Broadly speaking, if a declining population produces the results which are often expected by those who welcome it, it will not be for the reasons they expect.

22. These facts need explaining before the basic assumptions on which any attempt to raise the birth-rate must be founded are accepted by considerable sections of opinion.

23. A fallacious belief that populations 'automatically' adjust themselves to the needs of the times, also tends to make people think the declining birth-rate unimportant. Thus many believe that large numbers of babies were born during the industrial revolution to meet the needs of the factories, but that mass-production now makes these large numbers unnecessary. Other believe that the losses involved in war are replaced 'automatically'.

24. Many of these reasons for welcoming the fall in the birth-rate are simply due to lack of factual information, and one of the first jobs of population-policy should be to put people in possession of the facts.

IV—Contraception: Cause or Effect

25. The immediacy and urgency of the problem in this country is stressed. It is shown, through examples of the reasons for having a baby now rather than earlier or later, that the recent rise in the birth-rate is no legitimate ground for believing that people have decided to have larger families. Very many of the babies born recently are ones which would have been born earlier had it not been for the war; and many would have been born later had it not been for drafting overseas and danger to the lives of husbands. Delayed births are catching up on some of the lost ground of the early war period: advance births, early in marriage, are under-cutting some of the postwar birth-rate rise which may be expected when husbands return home. But there is no indication that couples are having larger families.

26. In the present study we assume, with the writers of the League of Nations Report on the Future Population of Europe and the Soviet Union, that 'the new world will grow out of the old one in somewhat

orderly fashion'. It is very improbable that the decline in population, result of the consistent trends of over half a century, will be reversed within a few years. The birth-rate problem must be considered as *the* problem of this generation for Western civilization. We have to imagine it assuming an importance in forming policy and influencing thought as great, perhaps, as the prevention of war in the 1920's and 30's.

27. A wide variety of movements and processes may be expected both to result from, and be speeded on by, population problems. Most, like housing reform, movements for crèches, larger family allowances, domestic help schemes, baby-minders, etc., etc., are likely to be generally beneficial—though not necessarily of great importance in raising the birth-rate. Commercial developments, so far as we are able to visualize them, are likely at worst to be relatively harmless.

28. However, the population problem seems likely to provoke one movement with potential consequences sufficiently unpleasant to warrant careful advance scrutiny. An attempt to prohibit or limit the use of contraceptives would, at best, produce large numbers of 'unwanted' conceptions; at worst, might lead to a wider use of other methods of family-limitation, such as abortion.

29. The history of contraception in this country is then traced. It is shown that contraception is no new phenomenon, and that the various methods of limiting family-size sanctioned in various places at various times have included contraception, abortion, exposure and (as in modern Eire) abstention from marriage.

30. While it is true that the first big fillip to birth-control propaganda in this country, in the 1870's, immediately pre-dated the beginning of the decline in the birth-rate, this does not mean that contraception was the *cause* of the decline. Contraception is the *means*, and its wider use about the time that the birth-rate started to fall is part cause, part effect of the *desire* for smaller families. Reasons are given for supposing that the spread of contraceptive knowledge was largely an effect of maturing demand. Changes in domestic life occasioned by the Industrial Revolution, a questioning of hitherto accepted ideas all round, a new self-consciousness about the family-unit, all indicate a growing desire for smaller families.

31. This report, and, in the long run, population policy, is concerned with the desire rather than the means whereby the desire is put into practice. Just as making it easier to have large families will only be effective if people want them, so making it more difficult to have small families will only be effective if the desire for small families is weak or superficial. There is little evidence of a thwarted desire for larger families except among a small minority; and there is much evidence that the family of two or three children is what people *want*. Under

these circumstances it is doubtful whether putting difficulties in the way of having small families would have any important effect on numbers.

32. The general assumption throughout this report is that the number of children people *have* will become increasingly a reflexion of the number they *want*.

V—Are families planned?

33. If this is to be the case, there is still a long way to go. In this chapter the extent to which families today are planned is discussed. It is shown that a very widespread ignorance still exists about any method of contraception available for the woman. Reliance on the husband is very general and, especially among working class people, the husband appears frequently not to consider the wife's wishes. The use of *coitus interruptus* is also frequent, with frequent failures.

34. The working class wife's attitude to family-size is often a fatalistic one—'What you're dotted out for you have'. Among those with secondary education 16% said number of children should be left to chance; among those with elementary education, 40%. This preliminary indication of the background to the differential birth-rate is confirmed later.

35. A clear majority of the families of three or more children included in this survey are unplanned families, or the result of plans which have not worked out. Probably as many as two-thirds of families this size are unplanned.

36. Unless desires are changed, the birth-rate is likely to continue to fall for a long time ahead, simply as the result of increasing use of, and knowledge about, contraceptives. Even if desires remained the same as they are today, the average family-size would continue to decline for many years. A small change, induced by legislation, etc., in the number of children people *want*, might well be insufficient to balance increasing knowledge about the means of having the number they want.

VI—Marriage bases

37. In this and the following chapter the place of children in married life is discussed. We first discuss the reasons women give for getting married. Having children is not frequently mentioned.

38. Another survey in which a middle class sample were asked what they considered the essentials of a happy marriage, shows that children are less often included among the essentials than the interests, tolerance, affection and financial situation of the couple.

39. While this does not by any means imply that people do not think children important, it does mean that babies and the number of babies is not one of the chief things which are thought of before marriage.

40. This is truism enough, but when we come to consider the unexpected snags and fulfilments which women find in married life, the importance to the birth-rate of a more realistic approach to marriage is emphasized.

41. In this survey, discounting war-difficulties, 29% of those married 5–10 years were able to name some disadvantage in married life which they had not thought of when they married. The main unexpected snags were the loss of freedom and the work involved. For one in twenty of those with three or more children, children were the unexpected snag; and for about the same proportion of the same group, unexpected money difficulties had arisen.

42. These are the marriages which have not turned out as well as the wives expected—nearly one in three. Out of these grow the broken marriages. Between 5% and 8% of women in all groups except the most recently married are willing to tell a stranger on first acquaintance that they think their reasons for getting married were *wrong*. Many others do not feel able to say definitely that they were right. One total failure in twenty seems a minimum; the real proportion of near-breakdowns in probably about one in ten, perhaps more.

43. It is unlikely that the partners in these marriages will want to increase their families. Some are separated, either legally or voluntarily. But even if they are living under the same roof they are unlikely to want to complicate the domestic situation further by having more children.

44. Hitherto the holding together of marriage by the State might well have resulted in more children. But as knowledge of contraceptives increases, the problem for the birth-rate will not be to stop marriages from breaking up but to reduce the number of unhappy marriages. Education for marriage may be expected to take an important place in school curricula, for partnerships in which the obligations and restrictions of marriage are insufficiently appreciated are one of the wastage problems for population policy.

VII—The place of children in married life

45. It is a tacit assumption that there has been a 'revolt' against parenthood in recent years. We found no signs of any sizeable revolt against having a family at all. The overwhelming majority of all groups thought that children were important or very important to

married life, and a special survey among a middle class group showed that they were, if anything, more convinced of the importance of children to marriage than the wider sample.

46. But the *reasons* people give for thinking children important show clearly that this belief bears no relation to family *size*. One of the most frequent reasons given for thinking children important was that they hold the marriage together. A child keeps the husband at home, gives the couple a common interest when the interests which brought them together are waning, and so on. But these reasons do not necessarily imply more than a single child.

47. As motives run today, first children are usually born for the parents' sake; second children often to keep the first company; third and later children often by accident, or in order to have one of another sex.

48. No social improvements can be expected to have a great effect where these are the main motives. Nearly all social measures designed to raise the birth-rate will *also* have the result of reducing marital friction, giving husband and wife more time together, etc. An increased scope for mutual pleasures may well decrease the desire for children, unless motives are changed as well as facilities. It may seem a long step to the time when children will be born for their own sake rather than their parents', but as we shall see later, there are signs that some such motives are in fact producing the larger families today.

VIII—Social attitudes to large families

49. The small family is today the socially accepted size. Many reports from parents and others emphasize the contempt, shame or ridicule suffered by those whose families exceed three or so, or who have two or three children in rapid succession. It is becoming as socially shameful today to have a large family as it was in earlier days when a couple was known to be restricting the size of their family.

50. Further it is often considered shameful or undignified to have children after the age of about 35–37, or when one's youngest child has reached the age to leave school.

51. These two attitudes combine to entrench the small family. With spacing of two or three years, a two or three years' wait before having the first child, possible inability to conceive at exactly the planned time, and a marriage age of about twenty-five, a three-child family may be the maximum achievable before childbearing becomes vaguely shameful. Much could probably be done to change these attitudes both by putting the parents of larger families at less of a disadvantage to their less prolific neighbours, and by raising the

prestige of motherhood. This should be one of the early jobs of population policy.

IX—Unwanted children

52. Despite all these indications that the small family is the accepted ideal, however, there is no indication that many children remain 'unwanted' after they are born. But this fact is of little relevance here. Unwanted pregnancies are the important factor, and there is ample evidence that they are frequent. Though it is true enough that many mothers of very large families only wanted two or three children; though now they've got them they 'wouldn't be without them'; the fact remains that if they had been able to prevent their conception they would not have had them. The fact that large families are not often actively resented bears little, if any, relation to the population problem.

X—The size of family women want

53. Previous data on the sized family women want is examined, and it is shown that this is likely to give an over-estimate by the inclusion in the sample of old people past childbearing, and the parents of large families, who find natural difficulty in saying that they think a smaller family than their own the right size.

54. In the present investigation women were asked how many children they would like to have. Nearly half of those married over five years said they would like the number they had already got. Over half of those with three or more said this.

55. In some cases this probably indicated nothing more than a decision not to make any more mistakes. And this conclusion is reinforced by the fact that *one in six of those married over ten years said they would like fewer children than they already had.*

56. An average figure was worked out for the family-size various groups would like, ignoring those who specified the number they had already got. This is likely to produce a slight under-estimate for those married a long time, but almost certainly produces an over-estimate for war-marriages. The reasons why this is so are explained in the text.

57. On this basis, *the average number of children those with secondary and elementary education would like is the same. And the average number those who already have three or more would like is the same as for those with none, one or two.*

58. The average for all four of these groups is a family of 2·7 children. This is below replacement level.

59. Those married five years and under would like, on average, 2·5. These are the parents of the coming generation of children. We have already shown that the figure for this group is likely to be an over-estimate. Furthermore *all* these figures are likely to be over-estimates of the number of women would like *under present circumstances*—they are to some extent ideals, though, of course, individual circumstances have a great influence on replies. It is clear that if everyone felt able to have the number of children they now want, and no impediments such as sterility, absent husbands, etc., hindered them, the population would still not replace itself.

60. All the evidence indicates that the birth-rate is kept as high as it is largely by accidental births. Those with secondary and elementary education want the same number; but, in a similarly constituted sample by length of marriage of each group, those with elementary education *have had* 1·9 children, those with secondary education 1·2. Data on spacing, discussed later, shows that the less educated go on having children longer than the more educated, so this difference is likely to be accentuated later on in marriage. The families of the *mothers* of those with elementary education averaged 5·5 children; the families of the mothers of those with secondary education 3·6. This difference no doubt reflects partly the better *opportunities* of members of small families for extended education; but even if it were wholly a reflexion of this factor, its relevance to population policy would be just as great as it would be if it reflected solely the tendency for the more educated to have fewer children. Cause and effect are practically inseparable here, but the moral to be drawn seems much the same in either case.

61. It would, however, be a mistake in our view to put the differential birth-rate down entirely to differences in knowledge of contraception. Though, broadly speaking, the people who have more children want the same number as those who have fewer, there is considerable evidence that they *care* less about it. Class differences in family-size are likely to smooth over to some extent with the spread of contraceptive knowledge, but it is doubtful whether they would ever iron out completely under similar circumstances to the present.

62. The most popular family-size is two children. 61% of the newly-married would like this number. Practically no one, except those who have already got a lot of children and wish they hadn't, want none at all. Three-child families are quite popular, though not nearly as popular as two's. Only about one in twelve of the parents of tomorrow want more than three.

63. A rise in the birth-rate to replacement level might conceivably be affected temporarily if wastage through miscarriages, sterility, infant mortality, etc., were almost completely eliminated, and knowledge of contraception did not increase. But even then the country would be

relying on accidental births to keep it from extinction, and the solution would be very temporary. The *only* permanent solution is that people should want more children.

XI—Spacing and fecundity

64. Information on the spacing of children is then discussed. It is shown that there are no important differences in the past twelve years or so in the length of time people wait before having their first child.

65. Those with large families and those with elementary education tend to have their first child considerably earlier than those with small families and those with secondary education.

66. There is, however, no significant difference between the proportion of gaps of up to three years, and of three years or more *between* children of mothers with elementary and secondary education.

67. But there is a considerable difference between the spacing in families of two, and families of three or more. 28% of the gaps in the small families are under three years, compared with 50% in the larger families.

68. An analysis of the spacing of all the two-child families of parents married over 5 years shows that *twice as many of the gaps between children are five years or more where mothers only have elementary education as where they have secondary education* (20%–41%).

69. Since over five years is unusual for a *planned* spacing, and since we know in any case that planning is considerably less frequent among the less educated, it seems likely that most of the longer gaps indicate difficulty in conceiving the second child when it was wanted, or that one or more miscarriages have occurred between children.

70. Our tentative interpretation of this data is as follows. Those who tend to use contraceptives most have their first child considerably later than those who use them less. But contraceptive-users *space* their families in very much the same way when they have large ones, and have their children closer together than non-users when they have small ones. Contraceptives used for *spacing* do not appear to be an appreciable factor in the differential birth-rate—or rather, the effect of using contraceptives for spacing by the more educated is similar to the effect of low fecundity and miscarriages among the less educated. In other words it is only when contraceptives are used to delay the birth of the first child or to stop having children altogether that the family-size of non-users catches up on them.

71. This, of course, is only a temporary situation and dependent on the smaller use of contraceptives made by less educated and poorer

people at present. It probably means that they are less likely to do anything about it if they have difficulty in conceiving children than the more educated, and are more subject to miscarriage on account of their general standard of health. It *may* mean that they are less fecund.

72. The alleged decline in fecundity which has been put forward as a possible contributory cause of the declining birth-rate seems impossible to prove or disprove. Those who don't use contraceptives are having considerably smaller families than their mothers had, but since many of them don't use contraceptives *because* they have difficulty in conceiving this fact in itself demonstrates nothing.

73. It is, however, clear that very many couples do have difficulty in conceiving children, either their first or a later one. Where families are planned and spaced, involuntary delays may lead to a reduction in numbers. Sub-fertility is becoming increasingly important whether or not it is becoming more frequent. There is much evidence that couples frequently do nothing to remedy their condition; among working-class people especially it is often taken in a fatalistic way. Where medical advice is taken, it appears that quite frequently the patient is told there is nothing wrong, but still fails to produce children.

74. The underlying assumption seems to be that the fault lies in the woman, and it appears probable that examination of the husband is insufficiently insisted upon.

75. It is suggested that publicity emphasizing both the frequency of sub-fertility and the possibility of treatment is needed. This should be directed particularly to the working class.

XII—Why so few?

76. The reasons women give for not wanting larger families are broadly outlined, six different sets of data being compared.

77. The distinction is emphasized between the factors which:

(*a*) *Stop* people from having as many children as they want; and

(*b*) Might *encourage* them to have more than they want to have at present.

78. *There are two birth-rate problems which, in our estimation, call for quite different treatment. The problem of the wanted-unborn and the problem of the unwanted-unborn.*

79. The first problem is the broad problem of wastage. It includes infantile mortality, sterility, sub-fertility; but it also includes such factors as housing arrangements which make it virtually impossible to contemplate having a wanted baby; household responsibilities which seem so great that the mother cannot face having another child although she would like to have one; etc.

80. The evidence suggests that the number of women who feel unable to have a child they really want because of external circumstances is relatively small. Direct legislative action designed to raise the birth-rate will impact primarily on this group, and we do not consider that its effect is likely to be very great.

81. It is much easier for parents to say why they want small families than it is for them to imagine circumstances in which they might want larger ones. But the latter is the problem which has to be solved. There is *no* reason to suppose that because over half of women married 5–10 years say they don't want more children on account of money difficulties, housework, or the chances in life of the children, these women would have more if the difficulties were alleviated. These are simply the reasons *in favour of small families.* They only form a foundation from which to assess the relative importance of various possible means of persuading people to *want large families.*

82. The majority of women are not able to think of *anything* which might make them change their mind about the number of children they want, though they are ready enough to give their reasons for wanting the small number they do. Even when they were asked specifically whether five separate factors might might make them want more, except in the case of having the sort of house they wanted among the newly-married, a clear majority in all groups either thought their ideas would not be changed, or were doubtful.

83. We have to interpret the meaning of the reasons people give for wanting small families through verbatim comments, case histories, etc., check these interpretations against their response to various suggested means of persuading them to change their mind, and finally to check attitude against attitude, and behaviour against ideas.

XII—The Unborn

84. We have shown that only a tiny minority *want* no children at all. Very few indeed (5% in the highest group) want a single child.

85. There were 66 women in this sample who had not had a child at all after five or more years of marriage. Only 4 of these can be classified as not wanting children. The reasons why these women have not had children are given. It is shown that about three-quarters have not had children for physical or psychological reasons unrelated to general social conditions. About half of these either are, or believe themselves to be, sterile.

86. Of 98 women having only one child after five years or more of marriage, one-fifth have had miscarriages, Caesarian sections, operations making childbirth unlikely or impossible, or have borne a child which has died. One in eight have tried to have another, but have found

themselves sub-fertile. Various other reasons unconnected with social conditions are given. No more than one in four, probably less, of these one-child marriages fulfil the conscious wishes of the mother.

87. These represent the least ambiguous cases of wanted-unborn children, and they cover a large majority of all childless and one-child marriages.

XIV—Ill-health, sub-health and fear of childbirth

88. The fact that health reasons are not frequently given for not wanting more children is probably an inadequate index of the frequency with which sub-normal health influences decisions. Examples are quoted of cases in which tiredness, bad nerves, etc. are evidenced, though not necessarily as a specific reason for not wanting a larger family. The frequent defeatist attitude of working-class women towards their own capacity to bear children is instanced. It seems probable that low health standards have a considerable half-conscious influence on decisions, and that physical health may have its influence in producing a psychological attitude of unwillingness to get involved in the difficulties of having children.

89. The fear of childbirth, which is found most frequently among the working class aggregates in the East End, is a vital factor for a minority. Though the minority is small, the influence is great. As a *single* factor deciding people not to have another child it is the most clearly decisive of any.

90. There is evidence of a small-scale 'revolt' against painful labour due to the belief that those who can pay for it may now bear children without pain. This seems likely to grow.

91. It is significant that the fear of childbirth is most frequent in areas where the effect of frequent pregnancies on others can most often be seen. A good deal of this fear is based on knowledge of the death or illness of others, or of the frequently depressed health of working-class wives who have had many children. It is likely that a decline in infantile and maternal mortality would encourage a minority to have more children, as well as raising the birth-rate more directly.

XV—Selfishness ?

92. People frequently say of others that their reasons for having few children are selfish. These 'selfish' motives reduce to a desire for pleaures and leisure *outside* the home. In essence they boil down to preferring a wider social life to the ties of a large family. To the parents themselves they look common sense; people have little inhibition about giving as their own reasons those which others call 'selfish'.

93. Nor are today's parents impressed by the arguments of *their* parents when they say that they managed all right with a large family. The general attitude is that 'times have changed', and that anyway past generations would not have had such large families if they could have helped it.

94. If these 'selfish' motives were weakened by making it easier for parents to have more children and a wider social life as well, we see little sign that the effect on the birth-rate would be great. To ask women why they don't want large families today is often equivalent to asking them why they don't want to spend more time in the home. The reason in very many cases is not that there is anything wrong with the home, but simply that they prefer other things. If it is made easier for them to enjoy these external activities *and* have more children, that is no good reason for supposing that they *will* have more children. Making it easier to get away from home will not necessarily make home life more attractive.

XVI—Economic paradox

95. By far the most frequent reason women give for wanting a smal family is the economic one. Most suggested measures for raising the birth-rate involve, directly or indirectly, improvements of economic conditions. Yet an American writer suggests the improvement of economic status as the surest means of *reducing* the rate of growth in over-populated regions; the writers of the League of Nations Report on future population trends suggest that the 'relief of economic burdens of parenthood' may 'at worst . . . bring a strengthening of the trend towards lower fertility'; the improvements of economic conditions which population policy is likely to encourage will accelerate trends which have accompanied the birth-rate decline over the past half-century.

96. While it is true that very many parents feel they 'can't afford' more children, it is only at the lowest economic levels that this means inability to pay for the necessities of life. It is quite clear from the present material that family allowances, based on part-subsistence or even full subsistence costs, will only go a very short way towards meeting the difficulties of those who 'can't afford' another baby.

97. It is the cost of a 'chance in life' which most parents are considering when they say they restrict their families for economic reasons. The indications are that few would contemplate another child unless they were sure that they could give each member of the larger family the same chances as each member of the smaller one. Furthermore, most would wish to do this without depressing their own, parental standards.

98. Within this pattern, cash allowances seem likely to play a subsidiary part. While substantial minorities feel their decisions might be altered by family allowances, those who look upon cash payments favourably are thinking in terms of *sufficient money to pay the full basic*

costs. Even East End mothers suggest an average allowance of 14s. a week.

99. As well as encouraging children most among the lowest income levels, allowances on the scale women feel necessary to make them change their minds seem likely to provoke an unfavourable social atmosphere towards those with large families.

100. It is only in a context of general security that allowances can be devoted exclusively to the child, or can in themselves contribute greatly towards economic security. Recurrent unemployment and vacillation of income means that any allowance must be spread over the whole family at intervals, and the child's chances in life are in no way assured by the most generous allowance *alone*.

101. A consideration of what women mean by saying they are unable to 'afford' another child shows that:

(*a*) permanent economic *security* is much more important than temporary economic prosperity;

(*b*) the chance in life which they want for the extra child can never be assured by cash payments.

102. In our interpretation the evidence points to allowances in kind and services, with subsidiary cash allowances on a limited scale, as the only likely solution to the economic side of the birth-rate problem.

103. An extension of free education is particularly indicated, and this, unlike most other measures discussed, is likely to affect primarily the artisan rather than the unskilled working class. But the middle class is unlikely to be greatly affected. Educational chances for the children are of primary importance for this class, and it is suggested that an extension of non-fee-paying education, beyond anything so far contemplated, may be necessary in order to preserve the fee-paying class from extinction.

104. Cash allowances are a desirable adjunct to educational reform. Late education means a longer period during which parents will have to support their children. Among working-class people the raising of the school leaving age will involve considerable financial outlay, and many are worried about it for this reason.

105. Whatever the present economic situation of the parents, future difficulties can be more easily overcome if the family is small. Examples are given of parents whose present finances are adequate but whose children are delayed or not born at all because of uncertainty about the future. A programme of general economic security will have far more meaning in these cases than any scheme of direct financial aid.

106. Security of employment for husbands, plus higher rates of pay, are often suggested spontaneously by wives who reject the idea of allowances, and resent the possibility of being 'paid to have children'.

107. Indirect evidence indicates that, within the framework of security, the main body of allowances should be in kind and services rather than cash. Free orange juice, milk, etc., as already available, should be supplemented by coupons exchangeable for other necessities such as boots and shoes. Free education, free medical attention, should be extended so that the cost of parental ambition may be reduced. Eventually it may prove necessary to abolish paid services in these key matters in order to preserve those whose ambitions still extend to them from extinction.

108. In this context, a relatively small cash allowance will be an assured contribution towards the outstanding costs which remain.

109. The evidence on which these suggestions are based is largely omitted here in the interests of treating an exceedingly complex subject briefly. It is, of course, given in the text.

XVII—Housing

110. Housing problems are of paramount importance in determining family-size today, and are likely to become more important at the lower income levels as knowledge of contraception increases.

111. Three-fifths of those with elementary education, the same proportion of those with less than three children, and seven-tenths of the newly married felt that they might change their ideas about the number of children they wanted if they could live in the sort of house they liked.

112. There is ample evidence that, in the case of the recently married, housing conditions are really *stopping people from having wanted children.* 56% of war-brides were living with relatives or sharing houses (compared with 10% of those married over 10 years). Most of the rest were living in flats or rooms—less than one in ten of those married during the war had a house to themselves. These conditions often make it virtually impossible to contemplate a baby—'If I'd have a child just now, I'd be properly sunk'.

113. The housing problem is partly a wastage problem—the problem of the wanted-unborn. But we must be careful not to exaggerate the likely effects of improved housing on the birth-rate. Many of those who say they might have more children if they had the house they'd like, are simply those who are fed up with their present housing and feel they might change their minds about *anything* if it were improved.

114. All the *statistics* really measure is the extreme unsuitability of much of present housing for bringing up children *at all.* It is significant that spontaneous child-housing grumbles seldom refer to the *size* of the house, often to the lack of amenities. Women imagine themselves in a place where these worries are eliminated, and they feel that everything would be different. But such changes as do take place will affect the next generation of parents: by then standards will have altered.

115. The unsuitability of most flats and tenements for family life is strongly indicated. Lack of garden space, children continually underfoot or precariously playing in the streets, washing indoors, lack of privacy, complaints of neighbouring flat tenants about the noise; these are some of the main grumbles of flat-dwellers.

116. Even among those who have three or more children already, two mothers out of five say they might want more if they had the sort of house they'd like. Under present housing conditions it is clear from the material that difficulties associated with housing increase greatly when families exceed two children.

117. Houses in the past few generations have been mainly built for small families. The post-war shelter programme envisages two-bedroom houses as the standard. Even for permanent housing it is not yet clear whether there will be more than a scatter of 3–4 bedroom dwellings.

118. This is not likely to cause much active dissatisfaction. *What parents want today is adequate facilities for bringing up a small family. But population policy aims at creating the desire for larger families, changing human needs. It may find itself stymied* 25 *years hence by the housing policy of this generation. We have to cater* now *for the unborn of* 1970, *and, if the population is not to decline the average family will need more than two bedrooms.*

119. At present those with children are at a disadvantage in seeking accommodation. The objection of landlords to letting their property to couples with young children is a serious deterrent and helps to weaken the social position of those with large families.

XVIII—Domestic helps

120. Lack of domestic help as a reason for restricting families is predominantly a middle-class problem. Working-class mothers frequently resent the suggestion that anyone should 'mess round *their* home'. they consider the housework their responsibility, and are often not at all happy about the idea of leaving *their* children with another woman.

121. But middle-class people have traditionally allowed the sanctity of home to be broken into by servants. The great change which has taken place in the domestic help system in the past few decades (and which is documented here) causes many of them to feel that lack of help in the house is at the back of their decision to have few children.

122. As a turning point in decisions, lack of domestic help is almost entirely a middle-class problem. But it is sufficiently important there to indicate the desirability of some radical solution. Both cost and scarcity are in question, and it seems probable that not only will the status of domestic servants have to be raised, but some form of subsidy may be

necessary to put them within the range of those who already feel the need urgently. Numerous possibilities have been publicly suggested, but whichever is adopted it is likely to put domestic help within the range of a far wider group than before. This may well increase the demand, and the solution of the problem in this generation breed another in the next. Like other improvements in social amenities, a rationalization of the domestic help system is likely to raise standards all round.

XIX—Middle class routine—the future pattern?

123. Indeed, today's middle-class problems are likely to become increasingly the general pattern, as the raising of general social standards proceeds. In this chapter detailed observations are recorded of the routine of two lower middle-class mothers of contrasting types. Their views about family-size are related to their daily habits and difficulties, and many of the factors discussed in earlier chapters are shown in operation.

124. Despite the great difference in their characters, their approach to family life, and despite the fact that one is an inefficient housewife and the other efficient, it is shown that their whole outlook includes many common factors.

125. We can characterize these common factors under one broad generalization. *These women feel that they have bitten off more than they can chew. They feel insecure, unable to act up to their own standards, tired and often depressed by the effort to do so. They feel that life is passing them by as they use up their energies in attempting something which they are unable to achieve to their own satisfaction.*

126. *These middle-class standards have run ahead of the means of achieving them, and in essence this is what is happening all along the line. Parents find all their energies consumed in achieving what they want for one or two children, and at the same time keeping up their own home- and social-standards. Ambition has run ahead of amenity, not only for the middle class, where amenities have deteriorated, but for the lower income groups as well, where amenities have improved but social ambition has increased more rapidly.*

XX—Like my Mum

127. What has happened to persuade those born into large and happy families to have so few children in their generation? We trace here the story of two generations, their household routines and the basis of their decisions about family-size. We first visit the house of Mrs. Smith, wife of a farm labourer and mother of thirteen children, all of whom still pay regular visits to their home. Then into the lives and households of her daughters.

SUMMARY

128. This account should be read in full. It is in itself a summary-in-action of most of the points we have been discussing, showing how the various motives for restricting family-size intermingle in practice, and cannot be adequately resummarized.

129. Among the daughters of this large family one common trend stands out. That is, their *lack of interest in the ideas of having large families themselves.* A variety of motives have been the immediate cause of restricting their families—sub-fertility, over-consciousness about household routines, factors of economics and ambition, psychological frictions between husband and wife, etc., etc.—but it is abundantly clear that none of Mrs. Smith's daughters has ever seriously contemplated having a really big family. Nor does Mrs. Smith encourage them to do so. Intensely proud of her own achievement in rearing thirteen children, decrying the softness of the present generation who cannot deal with a large family, she neverthless encourages her children to stop at one or two. And the only daughter who looks like having a largish family is the one whose environment and methods are nearest to those of her mother, who is married to a farm labourer, has children because she likes it, lives in a council house in a bit of a muddle, brings up a happy, healthy family but has no great ambitions for them, treats her children as instinct dictates, and runs her household as time allows, without worrying overmuch about dirt, prestige or the future.

130. This is the pattern which social ambition, the exhortations of baby-books and housewife-magazines, competition, the growing prestige of education, the stimulation of citizenship-interests in women, the pull of external distractions, and a hundred and one other factors, are helping to eliminate. It is, in a sense, a ramshackle makeshift pattern, but it succeeds by one criterion where the scientific, eugenic pattern today conspicuously fails. It delivers the goods.

131. Today, a family the size of Mrs. Smith's would take a lot of laughing off. Virtually no one would have such a family on purpose. The remaining few who would deliberately have a family half the size are out of date by current social codes. We have to construct a social framework where the family of 4–6, deliberately conceived by intelligent citizens with modern outlooks and modern interests, makes some kind of sense.

132. We suggest, first, a broad framework of economic and social security. *As a secondary measure*, legislation designed to lift the burdens of parenthood, ambiguous in its potentialities, possibly leading people to seek external activities more instead of having more children, but certainly—in our interpretation—a large effort for a very small birth-rate return if the framework is not built first.

133. Is this enough? To remove the main conscious restrictive factors, probably. But the problem we posed at the beginning remains. How far

are the reasons people give for following the social convention of small families their real reasons, and how far are they accepted 'excuses', social evasions of a deeper underlying mood? We attempt a partial answer to this question in the following chapters.

XXI—Mothers' faiths

134. The nature of women's religious beliefs and attitudes today is discussed. Even in the short age-interval which this survey covers, the proportion of women professing no religious faith at all is much larger among the younger than the older wives. Just over half of the younger ones say they are not religious, about a quarter profess some sectarian affiliation, and the rest hold some form of personal faith.

135. The predominant note throughout is vagueness. There is little sign that religion plays a vital part in the lives of any but a very small minority in any group; nor is lack of religious faith usually anything more definite than disinterest.

136. This predominant vagueness of attitude, which is documented, does not look, superficially, as if it could have any important affect on other conscious attitudes. In fact, a correlation of religious outlook and attitudes to family planning shows no significant difference in the proportion of irreligious, vaguely religious and Church of England people who do not use contraceptives. Roman Catholics say that family-size should be left to chance more, but not much more, often than other groups.

137. When, however, we check religious attitudes against *behaviour* we find quite considerable differences. In order to eliminate the effects of age on religious attitude, only those married over ten years are considered. These have mainly, as we have already shown, completed families. *The average family-size of those with no religious beliefs is* 2·1 *children: of those with personal religious faiths,* 3·2, *of those who say they belong to the Church of England,* 3·0*; of Roman Catholics,* 3·0.

138. Thus, though there is no difference between the attitude of religious and irreligious to family-planning, except in the case of Catholics, there is a difference in the number of children they actually have, which is *not* due to the Catholics in the sample being more prolific than others.

139. *These differences are all the more significant when we consider the weakness of the attitudes involved. Even the small spark of religious faith which remains today may be making the difference between perpetuation and eventual extinction.*

140. But religious faith is declining. As spiritual objectives and futures blur, faith in the material future becomes of increasing importance to

people's outlook. Neither religion nor the future of the world were at all frequently mentioned in spontaneous comment as a motive determining the number of children in the family. Yet, when women were asked if they thought that being sure of the future would make a difference to number of children they would like to have, over half of those married less than five years said it might.

141. As a further check, women were asked what they thought things would be like after the war. Pessimism predominated in the low birth-rate areas surveyed.

142. A correlation of attitudes to post-war with family-size would have no meaning, since the attitudes post-date the birth of the babies[1] However, attitude can be correlated with attitude. *Among those who were optimistic about postwar affairs* 45% *wanted none, one or two children only; among those who were pessimistic,* 62% *wanted this number.* 31% of the optimists wanted three or more, 18% of the pessimists. The rest were vague or wanted the number they already had.

143. There certainly appears to be an association between number of children and faith in the future which goes deeper than women realize (or, at least, are prepared to say).

144. The various aspects of the material future which are implicated are then discussed. The belief that there will be widespread unemployment after the war is related to family-decisions. Personal worries about the security of husbands in their jobs are also often felt by wives to be an influence.

145. It is very widely believed that there will be another war in the coming generation, and this broader lack of faith is also related to decisions on the number of children people decide to have. The evidence of opinion polls in America, Canada and Australia shows that this belief is not confined to this country.

146. A wider lack of faith in the goodwill of those in authority is shown, and related to case histories.

147. Lack of purposefulness in life, a disbelief in their own part in shaping the future, and a belief that others will not shape it the way they want, is—we suggest—deep ingrained in the attitude which stakes all in building up the personal material chances of a couple of children, the policy of safety-first both for the children and the parents.

148. We cannot *prove* a connection between family-size and a sense of purposefulness in life. We can only describe the symptoms and attempt a diagnosis. Whether this diagnosis is correct, time perhaps, will tell.

[1] Such a correlation was made, however, in order to see whether those who were pessimistic about post-war affairs were likely to be simply temperamentally pessimistic. Their was no difference in actual family size between pessimists and optimists.

XXII—Eugenic Prospect

149. The evidence we have collected leads us to present a somewhat *gloomy picture of the prospects of solving the birth-rate problem by direct pro-natalist measures, legislation and propaganda.*

150. One general conclusion, implicit in all this material, is reached. If the problem is soluble *it will be solved not by weakening the motives* against *larger families. The eventual solution lies in strengthening the motives* in favour *of having more children.*

151. The motives against are legion, and many have been described in detail in this report. Most of the major problems of our kind of civilization are involved.

152. But the number of parents who *want* another child and are *stopped* from having it by these social problems is not large. A fusion of many problems in their minds go to produce the common-sense, superficial 'reason'—but *the fundamental fact remains that for the most part parents today do not actively, knowingly, want more children than they are having already.*

153. Under these circumstances we cannot reasonably expect changes aimed at lifting the burdens of parenthood *alone* to produce many extra children. People do not change their habits just because it becomes easier to do so. They must *want* to change them before merely simplifying matters will have an appreciable effect.

154. At present, as we have shown, there is little difference between the number of children people in various groups *would like to have.* But there is a considerable difference in the number the more and less educated *do* have.

155. It has been said that wealth and babies today are distributed in inverse ratio. But clearly lack of money is not one of the 'reasons' why people have large families. Wealth and education are distributed in direct ratio, and babies are distributed in inverse ratio to education.

156. It would make some sense to suggest a causal connection between lack of education and large families, since we know that there are many more accidental conceptions among the less educated.

157. But evidence is given which suggests that the relationship between family-size and education is cross-cut by broad environmental factors.

158. Attitudes to the post-war world are compared by area and by education. Optimism and pessimism is distributed in almost exactly the same way among more and less educated people. But there are more than twice as many optimists per pessimist in the high as in the low birth-rate areas surveyed.

159. General trends of attitude among class-groups are then discussed. Lack of opinion, plus an optimism often based on 'wishful

thinking' rather than reason, are frequently found among the working class, the middle class being more opinionated and more pessimistic.

160. The same pattern is found in contrasting the high and low birth-rate areas. It is, we suggest, a 'class' trend which cuts across educational differences. Working-class optimism-plus-indifference is not a healthy hopefulness or a tough independence of external events. It is a superficial optimism with little solidity, and an indifference often near to apathy.

161. Both the qualitative and quantitative information obtained in this survey suggest that *the people who are having large families now are mostly those who care least how many children they have, and not those who really* want *a lot.*

162. Today we are relying largely on the ignorant and the apathetic, the don't knows and the don't cares, to keep the birth-rate as high as it is. Direct pro-natalist legislation is likely to accentuate this trend—a little extra will always mean more to those who have least, and those who have large families now through ignorance and apathy rather than desire come mainly from the lowest income strata.

163. Direct birth-rate legislation seems likely to raise the birth-rate most where it is already highest. But for a quality nation it will be necessary to raise it to at least the same level where today it is especially low. Babies are being born now in 'inverse ratio' to parental ambition, for ambition is one of the chief motives behind family restriction. To reverse this trend, new motives must arise. Direct planning for baby production may well pull up numbers and pull quality down. Only by indirect means, we submit, is the birth-rate problem likely to be solved permanently or satisfactorily. The success of direct measures is dependent upon the creation of a new mood and a new desire which will provide something for material stimuli to bite on. Plan and legislate towards a brighter and more purposeful future for tomorrow's babies, and the birth-rate may look after itself.

APPENDIX I

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

A. Exact age

B. Class

C. Date of marriage

D. Children.... boys.... girls.... ages....stillborn, died in infancy....date....(and add any other notes available on the children—health, appearance, dress, etc.)

E. Living in House/Flat with....bedrooms....living rooms. Owned/rented/living with relatives.

F. Contact educated up to....age

G. No. of children in family of mother of contact

H. (Verbatim). (*a*) Are you religious or not?
(*b*) (if yes) What is your religion?

1. Are you in a job now? (Factual. Find out precisely what the person is doing if working.)

2. (If working). (*a*) Do you expect to go on working after the war?
(*b*) Do you want to?

3. What do you feel the next ten years of your life will be like? Are you looking forward to them, or aren't you looking forward to them much?

4. What were your main reasons for getting married?

5. Do you think now that you were right or wrong in your reasons for getting married?

6. (*a*) Now you are married, were there any advantages which you didn't think of before?
(*b*) (If yes) What advantages?

7. (*a*) Are there any *dis*advantages which you didn't think of before?
   (*b*) (If yes) What disadvantages?

8. How important do you think children are to married life?

9. How many children would you like to have yourself?

10. (If 3 or under and this more than she has at present) Why don't you want more than that?

11. (If none, or no more than she has at present) Why don't you want any/any more children?

12. (If she has more than she says she wants) How is it that you have had more than you want?

13. (*a*) Do you think people should decide when they get married how many children they are going to have, or work it out as they go along, or leave it to chance?
   (*b*) (If either of first alternatives) Have you definitely decided yet yourself?
   (*c*) (Whatever answer to (*a*)) Do you and your husband agree or. disagree about this?

If at this point in the interview it is clear that the woman *cannot* have any more children, omit all the following questions except the last. If the woman wants *lots* more children, or clearly has no inhibitions about having as many as possible—but ONLY in these cases—omit questions 14–20. Ask question 21 in all cases.

14. (*a*) Can you think of anything that might make you want to have more children than you do now?
   (*b*) (If yes) What?

15. If you didn't have to go through so much in actually having a child, do you think that would make a difference to the number of children you would like to have?

16. (*a*) If the government gave money allowances for children, do you think that would make a difference to the number of children you would like to have?
   (*b*) (If attitude to family allowances favourable) How much do you think the allowances should be?

17. Do you think if you could have some help in the house that would make a difference to the number of children you would like to have?

18. Do you think if you could live in the sort of house you like that would make a difference to the number of children you would like to have?

19. Do you think if you could be sure of the future that would make a difference to the number of children you would like to have?

20. Can you think of anything else that would make a difference to the number of children you would like to have?

21. Finally, what do you think things are going to be like after the war?

APPENDIX II

FACTUAL INFORMATION

	Married for			*No. of children*		*Education*		*London Region*	
	More than 10 yrs.	*5–10 yrs.*	*5 yrs. or less*	*Less than 3*	*3 or more*	*Secondary*	*Elementary*	*Low birth-rate*	*High birth-rate*
A. Average age ..	38	31	26	30	37	32	32	32	32
B. Average number of living children	2·9	1·6	·7	·9	4·2	1·2	1·9	1·8	2·1
E. Living in house (%)	42	23	6	16	48	30	21	12	17
Living in flat (%)	48	58	38	47	42	38	49	62	59
Living with relatives and sharing (%)	10	19	56	37	10	32	30	26	24
G. Average number of mothers' children	5·5	5·0	4·5	4·6	5·1	3·6	5·5	5·0	6·0
People interviewed	288	182	317	612	175	222	565	221	192

MAIN RESULTS

Question H

(*a*) Are you religious or not?

(*b*) (If yes) What is your religion?

	Married for			*No. of children*		*Education*		*London Region*	
	More than 10 yrs.	*5–10 yrs.*	*5 yrs. or less*	*Less than 3*	*3 or more*	*Secondary*	*Elementary*	*Low birth-rate*	*High birth-rate*
Not religious (%) ..	32	45	52	49	25	44	43	47	43
Vaguely religious (%)	32	24	22	23	38	20	28	24	27
Church of England (%)	24	17	19	19	23	29	17	19	18
Roman Catholic (%)	8	12	6	8	15	5	10	8	10
Other (%)	4	2	1	1	5	2	2	2	2
People interviewed	288	181	317	611	175	221	565	221	192

APPENDIX II

Question 3

What do you feel the next ten years of your life will be like? Are you looking forward to them, or aren't you looking forward to them much?

	Married for			*No. of children*		*Education*		*London Region*	
	More than 10 yrs.	*5–10 yrs.*	*5 yrs. or less*	*Less than 3*	*3 or more*	*Secondary*	*Elementary*	*Low birth-rate*	*High birth-rate*
Looking forward (%)	63	53	68	63	64	75	58	67	60
Not looking forward (%)	8	10	5	7	6	6	8	13	6
Neutral (%).. ..	29	37	27	30	30	19	34	20	34
People interviewed ..	288	180	313	606	175	220	561	218	190

Question 8

How important do you think children are to married life?

	Married for			*No. of children*		*Education*		*London Region*	
	More than 10 yrs.	*5–10 yrs.*	*5 yrs. or less*	*Less than 3*	*3 or more*	*Secondary*	*Elementary*	*Low birth-rate*	*High birth-rate*
Very important (%)	67	63	55	58	75	55	64	57	61
Important (%) ..	21	22	28	26	16	29	23	30	25
Not very important (%)	7	5	6	6	6	5	6	5	7
Depends and don't know (%).. ..	5	10	11	10	3	11	7	8	7
People interviewed ..	287	177	315	606	173	220	559	220	189

APPENDIX II

Question 9

How many children would you like to have yourself?

	Married for			*No. of children*		*Education*		*London Region*	
	More than 10 yrs.	*5–10 yrs.*	*5 yrs. or less*	*Less than 3*	*3 or more*	*Secondary*	*Elementary*	*Low birth-rate*	*High birth-rate*
0 children (%) ..	1	1	0	0	3	0	1	0	2
1 „ (%) ..	2	3	5	4	1	3	4	2	4
2 „ (%) ..	17	22	45	35	14	36	28	23	20
3 „ (%) ..	6	13	18	14	5	13	12	13	8
More than 3 (%) ..	9	6	6	7	8	9	7	10	3
Same number as got (%)	48	45	16	29	54	28	37	37	50
Vague (%)	17	10	10	11	15	11	11	15	13
'Or one more' (%)..	6	8	20	14	3	12	12	12	9
One of other sex (%)	2	5	9	6	3	9	4	5	2
People interviewed ..	287	180	315	607	175	220	562	220	191

Question 10 and 11

Why don't you want *more than that?* (*Any/any more children?*)

	Married for			*No. of children*		*Education*		*London Region*	
	More than 10 yrs.	*5–10 yrs.*	*5 yrs. or less*	*Less than 3*	*3 or more*	*Secondary*	*Elementary*	*Low birth-rate*	*High birth-rate*
Money (%)	17	29	23	22	25	13	26	12	32
Housing (%) ..	4	5	2	4	3	1	5	4	6
Health (%) ..	5	7	2	5	3	3	5	7	5
Age (%)	16	5	6	8	17	15	7	11	6
Fear of childbirth (%)	2	1	2	2	1	1	2	1	2
Work, responsibility (%)	13	17	15	14	13	16	13	12	13
Future security (%)	2	4	4	3	4	4	2	3	3
Children's chances (specified) (%) ..	10	12	22	17	10	16	15	13	12
Husband trouble (%)	1	3	0	1	1	2	0	3	0
War reasons (%) ..	4	3	2	3	2	3	3	3	6
Inability to have more (%)	19	7	2	10	5	9	9	11	10
Other (%)	6	4	4	5	2	6	4	3	5
Vague (%)	11	11	25	17	18	19	16	18	11
People interviewed ..	193	149	261	516	87	175	428	176	155

APPENDIX II

Question 13*a*

Do you think people should decide when they get married how many children they are going to have, or work it out as they go along, or leave it to chance?

	Married for			*No. of children*		*Education*		*London Region*	
	More than 10 yrs.	*5–10 yrs.*	*5 yrs. or less*	*Less than 3*	*3 or more*	*Secondary*	*Elementary*	*Low birth-rate*	*High birth-rate*
Decide in advance (%)	16	18	39	29	13	32	23	30	22
Work it out as you go (%)	21	27	21	25	12	31	19	21	19
Leave it to chance (%)	41	32	28	30	48	16	40	24	34
Impossible to decide (%)	14	17	7	10	18	14	11	16	15
No definite opinion (%)	8	6	5	6	9	7	7	9	10
People interviewed ..	276	179	313	604	164	219	549	212	189

Question 15

If you didn't have to go through so much in actually having a child, do you think that would make a difference to the number of children you would like to have?

	Married for			*No. of children*		*Education*		*London Region*	
	More than 10 yrs.	*5–10 yrs.*	*5 yrs. or less*	*Less than 3*	*3 or more*	*Secondary*	*Elementary*	*Low birth-rate*	*High birth-rate*
Would make a difference (%) ..	6	11	9	9	7	6	9	4	12
Might make a difference (%) ..	4	13	15	13	6	7	13	5	17
Doubt if would make a difference (%)	5	10	7	7	5	9	6	7	6
Would not make a difference (%) ..	83	64	58	64	80	68	67	75	60
No opinion (%) ..	2	2	11	7	2	10	5	9	5
People interviewed ..	191	143	286	485	135	171	449	162	163

APPENDIX II

Question 16*a*

If the government gave money allowances for children, do you think that would make a difference to the number of children you would like to have?

	Married for			*No. of children*		*Education*		*London Region*	
	More than 10 yrs.	*5–10 yrs.*	*5 yrs. or less*	*Less than 3*	*3 or more*	*Secondary*	*Elementary*	*Low birth-rate*	*High birth-rate*
Would make a difference (%) ..	11	25	29	25	12	13	26	16	29
Might make a difference (%) ..	16	23	27	24	21	16	26	19	29
Doubt if would make a difference (%) ..	6	12	7	8	7	10	7	15	9
Would not make a difference (%) ..	60	39	33	39	56	56	38	46	28
No opinion (%) ..	7	1	4	4	4	5	3	4	5
People interviewed	193	147	289	491	138	173	456	169	163

Question 16*b*

(If attitude to family allowances favourable) How much do you think the allowances should be?

	Married for			*No. of children*		*Education*		*London Region*	
	More than 10 yrs.	*5–10 yrs.*	*5 yrs. or less*	*Less than 3*	*3 or more*	*Secondary*	*Elementary*	*Low birth-rate*	*High birth-rate*
Don't know (%) ..	40	34	36	34	47	25	39	36	40
Average amount (shillings)	14	17	16	16	14	18	15	17	14
Number of definite replies	35	45	101	158	23	38	143	42	50

APPENDIX II

Question 17

Do you think that if you could have some help in the house that would make a difference to the number of children you would like to have?

	Married for			*No. of children*		*Education*		*London Region*	
	More than 10 yrs.	*5–10 yrs.*	*5 yrs. or less*	*Less than 3*	*3 or more*	*Secondary*	*Elementary*	*Low birth-rate*	*High birth-rate*
Would make a difference (%) ..	8	17	24	19	12	27	14	18	19
Might make a difference (%) ..	14	8	6	8	12	10	9	12	7
Doubt if would make a difference (%) ..	4	7	6	6	4	6	5	7	7
Would not make a difference (%) ..	71	65	61	64	70	55	69	58	74
No opinion (%) ..	3	3	3	3	2	2	3	5	3
People interviewed	191	146	289	490	136	174	452	168	163

Question 18

Do you think that if you could live in the sort of home you like that would make a difference to the number of children you would like to have?

	Married for			*No. of children*		*Education*		*London Region*	
	More than 10 yrs.	*5–10 yrs.*	*5 yrs. or less*	*Less than 3*	*3 or more*	*Secondary*	*Elementary*	*Low birth-rate*	*High birth-rate*
Would make a difference (%) ..	27	41	58	48	31	31	49	40	47
Might make a difference (%) ..	8	11	11	11	8	10	11	5	16
Doubt if would make a difference (%) ..	9	7	6	8	6	7	7	10	10
Would not make a difference (%) ..	51	39	23	31	51	50	30	38	26
No opinion (%) ..	5	2	2	2	4	2	3	1	1
People interviewed	193	147	289	489	140	173	456	173	162

APPENDIX II

Question 19

Do you think if you could be sure of the future that would make a difference to the number of children you would like to have?

	Married for			*No. of children*		*Education*		*London Region*	
	More than 10 yrs.	*5–10 yrs.*	*5 yrs. or less*	*Less than 3*	*3 or more*	*Secondary*	*Elementary*	*Low birth-rate*	*High birth-rate*
Would make a difference (%) ..	21	26	43	37	16	29	34	21	35
Might make a difference (%) ..	7	14	12	11	10	10	11	11	15
Doubt if would make a difference (%) ..	2	1	3	3	0	3	2	4	2
Would not make a difference (%) ..	60	46	31	38	62	50	41	49	32
No opinion (%) ..	10	13	11	11	12	8	12	15	16
People interviewed	189	142	285	481	135	172	444	161	162

Question 21

Finally, what do you think things are going to be like after the war?

	Married for			*No. of children*		*Education*		*London Region*	
	More than 10 yrs.	*5–10 yrs.*	*5 yrs. or less*	*Less than 3*	*3 or more*	*Secondary*	*Elementary*	*Low birth-rate*	*High birth-rate*
Think will be all right (%)	34	20	33	30	32	35	28	22	32
Do not think will be all right (%) ..	33	39	29	33	32	37	31	46	26
Neutral (%).. ..	33	41	38	37	36	28	41	32	42
People interviewed	286	180	314	605	175	221	559	218	188

APPENDIX III

THE CHECK INVESTIGATIONS

THIS book has been concerned primarily with married women in London, most of whom were not doing a full-time job outside their own homes. The reasons for this were explained at the beginning of the book, and it was stated that small check investigations were carried out in Gloucester and a factory doing light war work on the outskirts of London. We will now examine what differences there are in the results of these investigations and the main London one.

The average number of living children of the Gloucester mothers was 2·4 as compared with 1·7 for the whole sample. In order to be sure that the Gloucester figures were comparable with the figures for London a comparison was also made for women who had had an elementary education only, amongst whom the distribution of length of marriage in Gloucester and London was very similar. For this group, the average number of children in Gloucester was 2·3, and for the whole sample 1·9. It is clear therefore that the average family in Gloucester is bigger than the average in the London boroughs investigated, as would be expected from the 1931 gross reproduction rates.

With regard to family planning, 62% of Gloucester women with elementary education thought the number of children should be left to chance, as compared with 40% of all women with elementary education. Although the groups were not big enough for further subdivision to be valid, it is worth noting that the difference was 10% for those married less than five years and 30% for those married more than five years. It seems then that Gloucester women do not plan their families as much as London women, but that probably the difference is becoming less.

For most of the problems investigated, Gloucester gave the same results as London. Children were almost universally considered important, and about the same number were wanted in Gloucester as in London. Outlook on the future was the same, and although more Gloucester women said being certain of the future would make a difference to the number of children they wanted, an examination of the verbatim comments showed that this was only because more of them were living with relatives or sharing a house. More than 80% of Gloucester women married in the last five years did not have a home of their own.

In spite of this, rather fewer Gloucester women said having the sort of home they wanted would make a difference, and the difference was no greater among those married less than five years than among those married more. Presumably this indicates that in Gloucester, if you can get a house at all, you will probably get a reasonably satisfactory one,

whereas in London, getting a satisfactory home is a problem, even when you can get a home of some sort.

Attitude to childbirth and domestic help was very much the same in Gloucester and London, although the opposition to 'another woman in my house' was perhaps less strong in Gloucester. Family allowances were treated more sympathetically in Gloucester, there being less distinction drawn between the merits of this form of assistance and the merits of higher wages and a steady job.

But the differences throughout were of a minor order, affecting the figures rather than the quality of the comment. The conclusions so far reached would no doubt have to be modified in detail to suit different parts of the country, but there is no reason to suppose that they are localized results incapable of general application.

The War Factory

The workers at the war factory had of course far fewer children than the other married women, averaging only ·1 children each. The average age was 29, and 84% of them had had only an elementary education. The only group which was comparable to the corresponding group for the rest of the sample was the group of women married five years or less, with an elementary education and less than three children. There were 56 of these at the war factory, and the remainder of this section deals only with this group and the corresponding group for the rest of the sample, excluding Gloucester. Consequently, differences have to be in the region of 15% before they can be considered significant.[1]

With regard to family planning, 18% of factory workers as against 40% of the main sample said 'leave it to chance.' The factory workers, with their smaller families, are made up more of family planners than the rest of the sample.

The number of children wanted by factory workers was almost exactly the same as for other women. Outlook on the future was very much the same, but as in the case of Gloucester, factory women felt much more that being certain of the future would make a difference to the number of children they had.

But in the case of factory workers, the difference was due not so much to uncertainty about housing as the fact that most of their husbands were in the forces, and therefore they were anxious about whether their husband would get a job after the war.

These differences are readily understandable, and once pointed out, are obvious. But there were also other differences which may be of importance in considering the conclusions already reached. Factory workers were less deterred by the thought of the sufferings of childbirth than other women, were more ready to take advantage of domestic help, were more concerned about housing; and welcomed the suggestion of family allowances more.

These results may be interpreted to mean that factory workers are more self-confident than the women who are not doing a full-time job. They are tougher concerning childbirth, and more anxious to get away from their relatives to their own home. They have not the same fear of 'another woman in the house' so marked in some of the replies; and since they earn their own living they are not afraid that family allowances would be a form of charity. Before this interpretation could be clearly established, however, further investigation would be necessary.

On the whole, there is a greater divergence between the results of the war factory interviews and the main sample than between the main sample and Gloucester. But these divergences for the most part either do not affect the conclusions reached, or intensify them. The conclusions concerning fear of child-birth and family allowances are not affected by these results. Fewer factory workers fear child-birth but those who do so fear it no less intensely. With these few it is a powerful deterrent to having children. Family allowances would be welcomed more by factory workers, but the amount they ask for is if anything greater than that asked for by other women. There is no reason to suppose small allowances will have any greater effect on them than on others. The attitude of factory workers to housing is the same as the attitudes already discussed, but more frequently and just as strongly expressed. With them too housing is one of the most important factors. Only in the case of domestic help is there a possibility that their attitude might qualify slightly the arguments already put forward.

Factory workers are very slightly less than others against allowing another woman to do some of the work in their home, no doubt because their life does not at present centre round their home in the same way. It has been said that the provision of domestic help would have more effect on the middle than the working classes, at least until the working-class women got used to the idea. If there had been more factory workers in the sample, it might have appeared that although the effect on the middle classes would be bigger, the effect on the working class would not be altogether negligible. This suggests further that the working class attitude may change somewhat as the present factory workers become middle aged.

Beyond this minor qualification, there is no reason to suppose that the conclusions from the main sample need to be modified.

SELECT BIBLIOGRAPHY

A. M. Carr Saunders: *World Population.* Royal Institute of International Affairs. London, 1936. Pp. 336.

Enid Charles: *The Twilight of Parenthood.* Watts & Co., London, 1934. Pp. 226.

K. B. Davis: *Factors in the Sex Life of Twenty Two Hundred Women.* Harper & Bros., New York, 1929. Pp. 430.

L. Ginsburg.: *Parenthood and Poverty.* Fabian Society Research Bureau. London, 1939. Pp. 56.

D. V. Glass: *Population Policies and Movements in Europe.* Clarendon Press, Oxford. 1940. Pp. 490.

W. Goodsell: *Problems of the Family.* D. Appleton-Century Co., New York. 1936. Pp. 530.

L. Hogben (Ed.): *Political Arihtmetic.* Allen & Unwin, London, 1938. Pp. 531.

H. Kyrk: *Economic Problems of the Family.* Harper & Bros., New York, 1933. Pp. 500.

F. Lorimer & F. Osborn: *Dymanics of Population.* Macmillan & Co., New York, 1934. Pp. 461.

G. F. McCleary: *Population—Today's Question.* Allen & Unwin, London, 1938. Pp. 222.

T. H. Marshall and Others: *The Populatlon Problem.* Allen & Unwin, London, 1938. Pp. 176.

R. Pearl: *The Natural History of Population.* Oxford University Press, 1939. Pp. 416.

W. B. Reddaway.: *The Economics of a Declining Population.* Allen & Unwin, London, 1939. Pp. 270.

R. M. Titmuss: *Poverty and Population.* Macmillan & Co., London, 1938. Pp. 320.

R. M. & K. Titmuss: *Parents Revolt.* Secker & Warburg, London, 1942. Pp. 128.