

EDITORIAL

POPULATION TREND, FAMILY PLANNING AND BIRTH CONTROL

"And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth..." (Genesis 1, 28). It certainly appears that man has heeded this injunction too well, for the problem of population increase has grown from a theoretical argument in the time of Malthus to a real problem facing all the governments in the world today. It is reckoned that the world population doubles itself every half a century, and this increase exceeds that of food production and land development significantly. To add to this natural increase, the advance of medical knowledge has controlled pestilence, and reduced mortality to such an extent that there is a real fear that we are actually keeping alive undesirable heredo-familial tendencies, which, in the natural state, would tend to eradicate themselves selectively. Similarly, wars no longer contributed the same effect to population limitation in that although the destructibility of weapons increases by leaps and bounds far beyond human imagination, the death ascribable to wars actually decreases progressively. The wiping out of an entire army or the putting of a whole city to the sword belongs to the past, and today a soldier stands far better chance of surviving a war than his forebears. True that the threat of a nuclear war may bring about a global destruction, but with due restraint, which human beings usually seem to possess at critical moments, a war may continue to show its hopeful tendencies of increasing safety to its participants!

More population means the demand for more food, more housing, more facilities, and more of everything. This Oliver Twist inclination sends fears into the heart of practically all the modern statesmen who have to struggle with budget deficits at the best of times, and certainly cannot bear to countenance an increasing demand for the future. Hence the limiting of population has caught world fancy, and as a concept, it has gained in popularity year by year.

One of the most humane and effective means of population limitation is birth control. Unfortunately, for birth control to be useful in the control of population, it must be easily taught, easily applied, effective, without side effects, and employed at the right time. Birth control may be no more than family planning, which concerns with spacing of birth, so that

there is better health for the mother, better care for the children, and better adjustment for the family budget. This need not affect the population; as planned parenthood does not preclude a dozen offsprings per family; and to keep a population stable, three children per couple would be more than ample. A distinction must be made, therefore, among family planning, birth control, and population limitation. The same theme of technique runs through all three, but one does not necessarily lead on to the other.

Medical science has been brought up on the ethics of the preservation and the prolongation of life, and of the relief of suffering. If doctors are to play an active part in birth control and population limiting, then medical training would have to be re-orientated and medical ethics revised. This is not necessarily a stricture, as re-orientation and revision can be for the better, and no doctor in his senses would claim perfection for the present day medical training and ethics. Nevertheless, a fundamental point is at stake, and it may be worth the attention of the entire profession.

All said and done, population control would appear to be a negative solution. We may increase till one day we have only standing room, but a three-dimensional expansion in the way of accommodation is still possible! We may multiply till we outstrip food production, but present human digestion has only an efficiency of less than 20%, and a technical advance in this direction can improve food prospects by untold bounds! Besides, to remove all fear of want may mean a removal of all problems, and one may permit oneself the philosophical question if it is entirely healthy for mankind to be completely at ease. A life without challenge may spell the deterioration of brain and brawn, and in any case, in a society where everything is satisfactory, a government would have no excuse to exist! Are Governments all over the world spelling their own doom in urging population control? A lesson may be derived from an ancient song of a Chinese farmer in the time of Emperor Yao as follows:

"When the sun rises, I shall toil,
And when it sets, I shall rest.
I dig a well that I may drink,
And plough my field that I may eat.
What has the Emperor done for me!"