

► *The truth behind the
rising birth rates.*

BABIES: QUANTITY OR QUALITY?

BY MILDRED GILMAN

OUR 1942 baby crop, the Census Bureau estimates, reached an all-time high of three million, against 2,715,000 in 1941 and the previous record of 2,950,000 in 1920. Not all this impressive rise can be attributed to the war, because the American birth rate has been rising steadily since 1933. It is now 22.9 per thousand, topping Germany's boasted all-time high, in 1939 and 1940, which by doubtful Nazi count was 20.4.

Since then Germany's birth rate has declined considerably and must continue to do so because of the country's tremendous loss of manpower in Russia and on other fronts. Moreover, the German rise in births was due in large part to artificial stimulants such as marriage loans, birth propaganda, high bachelor taxes, encouragement of illegitimacy, medals and bonuses for prolific parents. But America's birth rate has climbed without any such outside driving forces.

These facts have evoked a good deal of uncritical self-congratulation in our country. Here is a

sample: According to the *United States News* of December 4, 1942, our high birth rate figures

indicate that the United States is not a declining nation, like some of the Old World countries where birth rates have been on the downgrade for years. They mean that the United States is still young and growing, that its population probably will continue to grow if the postwar years are years of prosperity and great employment. They mean that more schools will be needed, that industry will have to expand to meet the demands of a growing nation. They mean a revision of estimates by those who predicted that, once the population reached 140,000,000, the country would begin to go downhill. They mean that America has not lost its virility.

Unfortunately, those who celebrate the new virility do not often pause to analyze what lies behind the soaring figures. Had they bothered to investigate the quality of the baby crop their enthusiasm might be somewhat muted. After all, there is more to a birth rate than mere numbers. For one thing, there is the worrisome factor known to population specialists as the "differential." The American

differential is far from good and, what is more, it is getting worse, not better.

In less scientific terms, too many subnormal people, too many "borderline" cases, are breeding too high a proportion of our infants. These children born with a low mental heritage and subjected to inferior environments—to parents who lack the psychological and economic stability to raise children properly—are filling our asylums, juvenile courts and hospitals throughout the land. The feeble-minded constitute 2 to 3 per cent of the American population, 27 per cent of our prison inmates. Of the borderline and dull individuals the proportion in general is 18 per cent, and in prisons 53 per cent.

Before shouting hurrah for birth statistics, patriots might ponder the findings of a study conducted at the University of Chicago in recent years. It showed that unless conditions changed for the better, about 37 per cent of our baby crop is doomed within fifteen years to death, disability, incurable disease, insanity, hopeless maladjustment, delinquency and criminality. This unpleasant estimate, of course, is due primarily to the fact that more than *half* of our babies each year are born to that depressed "third

of a nation, ill-fed, ill-clothed, and ill-housed." The birth rate of families on relief has been 50 to 60 per cent higher than that of families of the same type not on relief.

The war has, if anything, tended to lower the quality element in the baby crop. It has created overcrowded conditions in defense areas, has depleted the supply of doctors in many regions, and has restricted available beds and care in maternity hospitals. We are becoming more familiar with stories of infants born without benefit of medical care in trailers; of mothers giving birth in doctors' offices and returning immediately to their homes; of mothers spending one or two days at the hospital instead of the recommended minimum of ten days; of girls who are no more than children themselves giving birth, in the hectic moral climate of war-time.

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Something has gone wrong with our planning since Colonial days. We have "let nature take its course," which hasn't been a happy one, from the standpoint of eugenics. According to Dr. Ellsworth Huntington in his book, *Tomorrow's Children*, a study was made of

"more than two thousand New England and New York families of the eighteenth century." They were divided into two groups,

first, the quarter who occupied the leading positions, and second, the other three quarters. The average number of children whose births were recorded is approximately seven (7.2) per family among the leaders, and six (6.2) among the others. Part, but probably not all, of this difference may be because infants who died very young were fully recorded in the families of higher intelligence. In that case the death rate among the children of the leaders must have been lower than among the rank and file. This seems reasonable, for at present, even with all our activities in behalf of public health, the death rate among children diminishes rapidly as one goes from lower to higher levels of intelligence.

Regardless of whether the cause is found in more births or fewer deaths among the leaders, the essential fact is that in the eighteenth century the number of persons who survived to become adults averaged about 14 per cent more in the families of the leaders than in those of the rest of the population.

Today, according to Dr. Theodore R. Robie in his pamphlet, *The Conservation of Intelligence*, "the feeble-minded are doubling their numbers every ten years, while normal people are not maintaining their numbers. If we let morons go on reproducing at this rapid rate, it will not be many years before the custodees will

exceed the custodians." In fact, if the insane continue to increase at their present rate, in 300 years they will comprise one half of our population.

Our early favorable differential birth rate continued until the first part of the nineteenth century. At this time the sensitive and intelligent people who should have continued to dominate our land were learning that bearing too many children was a dreadful burden to women. These people began to plan their families more carefully, while the less thoughtful, less stable individuals continued and are continuing today to produce the majority of the nation's children.

The steady increase in insanity in this country over a period of years confirms the unfortunate fertility of the unfit. The number of insane confined in sanatoriums has more than doubled in the past twenty years. There was a total of 472,385 patients in hospitals for mental diseases in the United States on January 1, 1940. One must, of course, take into consideration the fact that we have better vital and health statistics than we had twenty years ago, better facilities for housing the insane, and far better means of diagnosing mental illness. But, on the other hand,

this large figure of inmates does not include the more than eighty thousand mental defectives and the more than sixteen thousand epileptics in other state institutions. Nor does the figure take into consideration thousands of borderline cases — poor Uncle Willie who never did any harm, and so shouldn't be shut up; Minnie who really isn't too crazy, just a little odd. Both Willie and Minnie often lead normal lives, marrying and breeding future generations of feeble-minded or actually idiotic children.

A White House conference in the middle thirties estimated that in addition to the definitely feeble-minded children in the nation, no less than 5,650,000 of the 50,000,000 young people under twenty-one years of age in the United States are intellectually subnormal. The number since then has continued to increase. The education of a feeble-minded child costs more than double that of a normal child. At least \$10,000 of public funds are spent for every feeble-minded child born in this country, an amount which would take the normal child from first grade through college. Annually we spend around one billion dollars for our feeble-minded and mentally diseased.

What can be done to remedy this condition? The experience of Sweden offers some light. Worried by a falling birth rate and an increasing need for improving the quality of her population, Sweden has established three important national policies: (1) making contraceptive information and inexpensive tested contraceptives available to *all* members of the population, particularly to those who need it most; (2) sterilizing the mentally deficient; and (3) encouraging the higher mental levels to have more children with intelligently planned social and economic aids. In other words, in that country the birth of a child raises rather than lowers one's standard of living. There are housing projects in Sweden available only to families having two or more children. Good housing, according to Alva Myrdal, in her study on Sweden's social experiment, *Nation and Family*, is no longer considered a problem of charity but a problem of the future quality of the people.

There are clinics providing medical and dental care, extensive cooperative nurseries and pre-schools. Family recreation is considered important and tickets for travel by large families are provided. School children and pre-school children

receive free lunches. There are government subsidized summer camps and colonies for the city children, numbering as many as 16,000 back in 1936; there is increased security of employment for both father and mother, longer vacations with pay. According to Mrs. Myrdal,

Delivery care since January 1938 has been free to everybody. Highly trained district midwife nurses are engaged and paid by the community on a civil service basis, their services in the home, not only for delivery but for regular after-care, being available without cost. About half of all mothers will, however, continue to take advantage of the facilities for child-bearing in hospitals, where all care, including the doctor's, is also free.

World War II has slowed down the rapid development of the Swedish social experiment, but before the darkness settled, the good results were already evident. Although population as a whole has not increased, there has been a definite increase in the birth rate among people in the higher income groups.

As for the dictator countries, they offer a sharply contrasting solution to their eugenics problems. Hitler employs euthanasia ruthlessly to weed out idiots, children who show signs of being incurable, numbers of the dependent aged and many other classes. His entire program of eugenics, of

course, is intended to spread "pure Aryanism."

In this country we spend millions for social work, for the alleviation of suffering, for education, but as a government we make little effort to get at the root of the difficulty, to prevent the unfit from breeding, and to encourage the increase of potentially good citizens. In fact, children are considered a detriment in many instances here, with many apartments and homes closed to families having children. There is no maternity insurance in America. Ruth Millett writes in the Middletown, Ohio, *Journal*,

What are women supposed to do — stop having babies? This is what women are wondering in one American city, whose Department of Public Works has just told its women employees that if they become pregnant they must take an 18-months' maternity leave without pay. That puts a married woman whose pay check is essential to the family's livelihood in a tough spot, especially if her husband has been drafted as a buck private.

But as important as good housing, good food, good education, maternity benefits, etc. are, we will still, even in a Utopian state with all these advantages, breed a fixed number of idiots and incompetents, lose too many infants and mothers, until we get at the source of our difficulties. A few privately financed organizations are attempt-

ing to do this, notable among them the Planned Parenthood Federation of America. One of the Federation's aims is the lowering of infant and maternal death rates throughout the country. To effect this, projects have been begun among groups in which infant and maternal death rates are unusually high: southern share-croppers, migrant workers in the West and South West, Negroes throughout the United States. The Federation also seeks to encourage responsible parenthood where health and economic circumstances justify it. For this purpose their annual directory lists, besides the more than eight hundred family planning clinics and related services in this country, many sterility services which help childless couples who desire to have children.

More and more states, suffering from the tax burdens of overcrowded hospitals, asylums and jails, from high infant and maternal

mortality rates, are seeking to get at the roots of their social ills. Six of them now include child-spacing services in their public health programs. Birth rates have not dropped in these states; in some instances they have increased due to a definite lowering of maternal and infant deaths. Connecticut, the only state in the union with the exception of Massachusetts, in which dissemination of birth control information is illegal, had a drastic example recently of the results of non-selective breeding. An institute for the feeble-minded in Mansfield had room for only a thousand patients. Another thousand were on the waiting list. In one year those on the waiting list gave birth to 650 babies.

These are some of the truths behind the bumper baby crops. Enthusiasm for the national virility needs to be tempered with an intelligent consideration of quality as well as quantity.

The Poet: To a World at War:

By Heinrich Heine

If you would honor me, lay a sword rather than a wreath upon my coffin; for I was, first of all, a soldier in the war for the liberation of humanity.

THE JAPANESE AT HOME

BY CHARLES LEWIS

I LIVED in the little bamboo dwelling of Taro Akataki, in the city of Kyoto, Japan, during 1938 and 1939. My object was to write, eventually, a book on Oriental anthropology and so I took notes about everything I saw. Before I left, I had filled a dozen volumes of notebooks to the brim. This material concerned only the personal characteristics of the Akatakis, a little family of rice workers — no military or industrial statistics, just a careful recording of the curious idiosyncrasies of a small, average Japanese family.

Herewith, then, is the record of an average day, lifted at random from my diary. This is how that day was spent by the people who are now our enemies. The day was March 3, 1939.

We slept along the floor on thin mattresses, the Akatakis with their heads pointing any direction except north, according to custom. Rising at about four in the morning, our first function was always to bow toward the Emperor in Tokyo and

say prayers for him, after which we rolled up our mattresses, put them away in the closet, and took our baths. The large, wooden bathtub was in the rear of the house. Before they climbed in, the Akatakis soaped themselves outside the tub and then Mr. Akataki himself led the procession, followed in order by the rest of the family according to age. Inasmuch as they do not eat meat and so presume their bodies clean, they didn't think it necessary to change the water.

Tea followed the bathing. A half-dozen cups apiece were not unusual. "I regard tea as a solid food," Mr. Akataki always said, claiming that it was crowded with vitamins and also involved a health-provoking, anti-acid situation. When I asked delicately whether tea might not be a substitute for edibles they did not have, the family advised me fervently that the government said tea was a solid food and consequently it could scarcely be anything else.

After tea, the Akataki girls and their mother put up each other's