

## THE ENDOWMENT OF MOTHERHOOD

Some few years ago the Fabian Society, which has been so efficient in keeping English Socialism to the lines of "artfulness and the 'eighties," refused to have anything to do with the Endowment of Motherhood. Subsequently it repented and produced a characteristic pamphlet in which the idea was presented with a sort of minimising furtiveness as a mean little extension of outdoor relief. These Fabian Socialists, instead of being the daring advanced people they are supposed to be, are really in many things twenty years behind the times. There need be nothing shamefaced about the presentation of the Endowment of Motherhood. There is nothing shameful about it. It is a plain and simple idea for which the mind of the man in the street has now been very completely prepared. It has already crept into social legislation to the extent of thirty shillings.

I suppose if one fact has been hammered into us in the past two decades more than any other it is this: that the supply of children is falling off in the modern State; that births, and particularly good-quality births, are not abundant enough; that the birth-rate, and particularly the good-class birth-rate, falls steadily below the needs of our future.

If no one else has said a word about this important matter, ex-President Roosevelt would have sufficed to shout it to the ends of the earth. Every civilised community is drifting towards "race-suicide" as Rome

drifted into "race-suicide" at the climax of her empire.

Well, it is absurd to go on building up a civilisation with a dwindling supply of babies in the cradles--and these not of the best possible sort--and so I suppose there is hardly an intelligent person in the English-speaking communities who has not thought of some possible remedy--from the naive scoldings of Mr. Roosevelt and the more stolid of the periodicals to sane and intelligible legislative projects.

The reasons for the fall in the birth-rate are obvious enough. It is a necessary consequence of the individualistic competition of modern life. People talk of modern women "shirking" motherhood, but it would be a silly sort of universe in which a large proportion of women had any natural and instinctive desire to shirk motherhood, and, I believe, a huge proportion of modern women are as passionately predisposed towards motherhood as ever women were. But modern conditions conspire to put a heavy handicap upon parentage and an enormous premium upon the partial or complete evasion of offspring, and that is where the clue to the trouble lies. Our social arrangements discourage parentage very heavily, and the rational thing for a statesman to do in the matter is not to grow eloquent, but to do intelligent things to minimise that discouragement.

Consider the case of an energetic young man and an energetic young woman in our modern world. So long as they remain "unencumbered" they can subsist on a comparatively small income and find freedom and leisure to

watch for and follow opportunities of self-advancement; they can travel, get knowledge and experience, make experiments, succeed. One might almost say the conditions of success and self-development in the modern world are to defer marriage as long as possible, and after that to defer parentage as long as possible. And even when there is a family there is the strongest temptation to limit it to three or four children at the outside. Parents who can give three children any opportunity in life prefer to do that than turn out, let us say, eight ill-trained children at a disadvantage, to become the servants and unsuccessful competitors of the offspring of the restrained. That fact bites us all; it does not require a search. It is all very well to rant about "race-suicide," but there are the clear, hard conditions of contemporary circumstances for all but the really rich, and so patent are they that I doubt if all the eloquence of Mr. Roosevelt and its myriad echoes has added a thousand babies to the eugenic wealth of the English-speaking world.

Modern married people, and particularly those in just that capable middle class from which children are most urgently desirable from the statesman's point of view, are going to have one or two children to please themselves but they are not going to have larger families under existing conditions, though all the ex-Presidents and all the pulpits in the world clamour together for them to do so.

If having and rearing children is a private affair, then no one has any right to revile small families; if it is a public service, then the parent is justified in looking to the State to recognise that service

and offer some compensation for the worldly disadvantages it entails. He is justified in saying that while his unencumbered rival wins past him he is doing the State the most precious service in the world by rearing and educating a family, and that the State has become his debtor.

In other words, the modern State has got to pay for its children if it really wants them--and more particularly it has to pay for the children of good homes.

The alternative to that is racial replacement and social decay. That is the essential idea conveyed by this phrase, the Endowment of Motherhood.

Now, how is the paying to be done? That needs a more elaborate answer, of which I will give here only the roughest, crudest suggestion.

Probably it would be found best that the payment should be made to the mother, as the administrator of the family budget, that its amount should be made dependent upon the quality of the home in which the children are being reared, upon their health and physical development, and upon their educational success. Be it remembered, we do not want any children; we want good-quality children. The amount to be paid, I would particularly point out, should vary with the standing of the home.

People of that excellent class which spends over a hundred a year on each child ought to get about that much from the State, and people of the class which spends five shillings a week per head on them would get about that, and so on. And if these payments were met by a special

income tax there would be no social injustice whatever in such an inequality of payment. Each social stratum would pay according to its prosperity, and the only redistribution that would in effect occur would be that the childless people of each class would pay for the children of that class. The childless family and the small family would pay equally with the large family, incomes being equal, but they would receive in proportions varying with the health and general quality of their children. That, I think, gives the broad principles upon which the payments would be made.

Of course, if these subsidies resulted in too rapid a rise in the birth-rate, it would be practicable to diminish the inducement; and if, on the other hand, the birth-rate still fell, it would be easy to increase the inducement until it sufficed.

That concisely is the idea of the Endowment of Motherhood. I believe firmly that some such arrangement is absolutely necessary to the continuous development of the modern State. These proposals arise so obviously out of the needs of our time that I cannot understand any really intelligent opposition to them. I can, however, understand a partial and silly application of them. It is most important that our good-class families should be endowed, but the whole tendency of the timid and disingenuous progressivism of our time, which is all mixed up with ideas of charity and aggressive benevolence to the poor, would be to apply this--as that Fabian tract I mention does--only to the poor mother. To endow poor and bad-class motherhood and leave other people

severely alone would be a proceeding so supremely idiotic, so harmful to our national quality, as to be highly probable in the present state of our public intelligence. It comes quite on a level with the policy of starving middle-class education that has left us with nearly the worst educated middle class in Western Europe.

The Endowment of Motherhood does not attract the bureaucratic type of reformer because it offers a minimum chance of meddlesome interference with people's lives. There would be no chance of "seeking out" anybody and applying benevolent but grim compulsions on the strength of it. In spite of its wide scope it would be much less of a public nuisance than that Wet Children's Charter, which exasperates me every time I pass a public-house on a rainy night. But, on the other hand, there would be an enormous stimulus to people to raise the quality of their homes, study infantile hygiene, seek out good schools for them--and do their duty as all good parents naturally want to do now--if only economic forces were not so pitilessly against them--thoroughly and well.