

have evolved over many centuries. But this does not mean that skilled assistance should not be offered to improve low yields ; on the contrary, the whole aim of international as well as national action should be to raise the standard of living of the individual. That is why we cannot stand aside and watch while the fruits of scientific efforts are nullified by the appearance of ever increasing numbers of mouths. Mr. Clark's attitude of facing the current increase in the world's population as though it were an inevitable, unalterable law of nature implies the subservience of man's intellect to his animal instincts ; such an approach, if generally adopted, would be disastrous to the human race. From our experiences of the Western world, however, we can hope with some certainty that wiser views will prevail—if only on account of the emancipation of the women of the East.

Childbearing and the Standard of Life

by Sten S. NILSON

Mr. Colin Clark raises a question of the greatest importance. Can the future increase in world population be economically provided for? Mr. Clark is certainly much too optimistic when he concludes that this can be done, subject only to three conditions: increased freedom of trade, freedom of emigration from a few small and isolated areas, and transfer of capital to the smaller among the underdeveloped countries.

The problem is much larger than Mr. Clark wants us to believe. It is quite true that some Malthusian writers have tried to make it look even greater than it actually is, but let us not refer to any of them. We should rather look at a standard work like the report on the world social situation, with special reference to standards of living, which was published last year by the United Nations Department of Social Affairs.¹ Here every effort has been made to reduce to its proper proportions the problem of how to feed the world's rapidly increasing population. The report warns us that it is as dangerous to exaggerate the difficulties as it is to underestimate them. After reading Mr. Clark's article one begins to wonder if the danger of underestimation is not greater than that of exaggeration. The United Nations report shows how "totally inadequate" the post-war increase in food production has been when compared to the accelerating growth of the population. The present and the prospective rate of increase of population are such that, as stated in the report, "even a moderate advance towards better nutritional levels for the world as a whole within a reasonable time is a formidable problem" (p. 44).

Mr. Clark is certainly right in insisting that everything possible should be done to ease the present pressure. I myself have repeatedly advocated a more liberal practice in regard to immigration into my own country, Norway, so I do not think I belong to the "uncharitable Malthusians" mentioned in the last paragraph of his article. But migration can only be a palliative. The permanent solution is to be found in limiting the present growth of population, which seems too rapid for any increase in production that is practically possible, or at least likely to materialise.

¹ *Preliminary Report on the World Social Situation* (New York, 1952).

It is not necessary to discuss here the statistical evidence relating to these facts. I should rather like to draw the attention of readers to another and equally interesting aspect of the matter, which is not mentioned by Mr. Clark. One of the major social and health problems of the world today results from the too frequent childbearing of women in all underdeveloped countries. Curiously enough there is only a very brief reference to this fact in the *Preliminary Report on the World Social Situation* (p. 144). The problem deserves much more earnest attention than it has received hitherto. It is no excuse that many men have always considered this whole matter in an attitude of serene indifference. The women have not. As Queen Victoria wrote in a letter to the King of the Belgians in 1841 :

I think, dearest Uncle, you cannot *really* wish me to be the "Maman d'une nombreuse famille", for I think you will see with me the great inconvenience a *large* family would be to us all, and particularly to myself ; men never think, at least seldom think, what a hard task it is for us women to go through this *very often*.

It may be true that excessive childbearing is accepted in a spirit of fatalistic resignation by most women in the countries concerned today, but such is equally the attitude of large parts of these populations to hunger, illness and poverty. And we see how the fatalism is rapidly giving way to a new spirit, a spirit of unrest, of dissatisfaction with miserable conditions and demands for a better life. Here is opened up a road to the future fraught with great possibilities, but also with great dangers. Although the new spirit is a potent force for good, it may easily lead to the blocking of further progress. Its results may be not so much to substitute hopeful and energetic enterprise for lethargy, but rather to increase people's insistence on immediate consumption and reduce their willingness to save anything for the future. In this situation it is a great and unqualified advantage if women come to realise that there exists a possibility of rearing stronger and healthier children, fewer in number than those who are being born at present. Here is the best possible form of investment : giving the next generation proper care, good health and instruction. Moreover in such an investment the parents can clearly see the advantage to themselves.

Mr. Clark contends that people in the Orient get their many children because they want to have them. This is not a valid generalisation, although it would be equally erroneous to believe that the women of Asia are crying out for birth control. Indeed many among them might be shocked and horrified if they were told about contraception ; but the majority would probably react in a different manner. No doubt millions and millions of women, in a more or less dumb sort of way, do desire release from perpetual childbearing and all the misery that so often accompanies it. Such an attitude is sometimes said to be incompatible with the Oriental frame of mind. However, there is clear evidence to the contrary, evidence coming not from Westerners comfortably seated at their writing-desks to explore the mysteries of Orientalism, but from workers in the field. Read for instance the words of Mrs. Shakuntala Paranjpye, who has been working in different parts of India for over 13 years. In her report to the First All-India Conference on Family Planning (Bombay, 1951) she says—

It has been my experience that most people, regardless of their social status, are willing and grateful to receive advice in spacing and limiting their families. In slums and rural areas I have met with the same response from

people as in middle class localities. In fact, people of the working classes, whether they work in the cities or villages, have their roots in the rural parts of the land and readily realise that while they multiply, their holdings do not; that when a tree bears too much fruit it often succumbs under the burden and in any case such fruit is of a less quality than when it bears less. . . . One woman said, ". . . What is the good of going on having children? You can clothe one while the other goes naked. You can feed them in the morning, at night they have to sleep on an empty stomach". Once I came across a woman in a village who surprised me with her wisdom. She was a leather-monger's wife. Her daughter-in-law had a miscarriage, and the old woman wanted me to teach the young woman how to prevent conception for a few years. Knowing how our women long to be grandmothers, I was a little surprised at the request. Whereupon the old woman said: "Sure, I want a grandson. But the girl is a child herself. Don't we pluck the blossom of a young tree for a few years at first and let the tree grow up well before we allow it to bear fruit?"

Such instances only go to show that, though poor and illiterate, our common people possess a lot of horse sense and if you can talk their language it does not take long to make them realise the benefits of planned parenthood. Of course, a certain amount of tact and a great deal of patience are required on the part of the worker who undertakes the work. Above all, the worker needs to have the knack of being one of them. Not condescension but a feeling of true equality does the work. The subject is delicate and very personal, and it is better for the worker to wait for the right opportunity before broaching it. In fact, it is even better to direct the conversation so that at some stage those in need of limiting their families voluntarily come out with their wishes to that effect. It can be very easily managed if you get women to talk about their children. On such occasions it often helps if the worker volunteers information about her own limited family or of her relatives or friends who have planned their families. Direct advice is resented, but indirect suggestion goes home.

The Director of the United Nations Office for Population Studies in New Delhi last year published the results of a survey carried out in Mysore. Here it turned out that 60 per cent. of the urban and 40 per cent. of the rural dwellers interviewed took a positive interest in the limitation of births; in other areas the percentage rose as high as 70. Evidence of another and more alarming kind shows that people are willing to go to great lengths to escape a burden which often must be intolerable. There are signs that induced abortion is very frequent in the big Oriental cities and, further, that this most objectionable method of "birth control" is also well known in a number of rural areas. The Norwegian Bishop Fjellbu, who recently returned from a visit to the missionary stations in Santalistan, reported among other things on the health situation. Morbidity is great among the Santili, he said. There is cancer, tuberculosis and malaria, and a large number of women are brought every year to the mission hospitals after having tried to cut short one of their many pregnancies. It seems that in their desperation they drink some sort of poisonous herb, with results often ruinous to their health.

Mr. Clark says that all great religions welcome the creation of new life. While this proposition is essentially true, the consequences following from it may be easily exaggerated. The Royal Commission on Population in Great Britain, which published its report a few years ago, quotes as follows from a statement on the Roman Catholic position:

The charge must not, however, be brought against Catholic teaching that it is in favour of what the fanatical defenders of birth control call "avalanches" of babies. This attribution to Catholics of a desire of popu-

tion growth to an alarming extent and at every hazard is a mere rhetorical flourish. It has neither sense nor meaning. Catholic teaching, if loyally adopted, cannot possibly lead to an excessive and haphazard population, for the Catholic husband is taught, provided the moral law on marital relations is preserved, to exercise self-control in marriage, not to overtax the strength of his wife, not to procreate more children than he can hope to educate and rear healthily, and to make suitable provision for every child he has, so that all his children may become healthy, vigorous, and loyal citizens.

The difference of opinion concerns not so much the end as the means. The Catholic Church recognises only the use of periodic abstinence. While this of course is due to moral considerations it should be remarked that abstinence has in fact, quite apart from its moral significance, one great advantage, perhaps a decisive advantage when people living on or near the level of subsistence are concerned: it costs nothing in terms of money.

At the request of the Indian Government, an expert from the World Health Organisation has recently been working in India on the problem of the practical application of this method. It will probably never become a wholly efficient one as far as the control of births in individual cases is concerned, and for this reason it is rejected by many advocates of family limitation. However, with the progress of knowledge the method may be applied with less uncertain results than is the case at present. The Pope himself gave expression to this view in a recent pronouncement (here quoted from the French review *Population*, 1952 (p. 303), "Allocution du Pape au Fronte della Famiglia le 28 novembre 1951"):

One may even hope—although the Church naturally leaves this aspect of the matter to medical science—that science will succeed in providing a sufficiently secure basis for this permissible method, and our most recent information seems to confirm such a hope.

It looks as if some people are "more Catholic than the Pope" in these matters, an attitude which I think there is every reason to regret. One may refuse, as does Mr. Clark, to believe in the threat of over-population. Although all available evidence seems to me to show that it is a very real danger indeed, one can seldom be a hundred per cent. certain about things that concern the future of human society. Yet quite apart from what the future may bring, we should not forget one of the great problems facing humanity at the present day, a problem that has been too long neglected: the sickness and misery, the drudgery and ill-health for mothers as well as for children, which is the result of excessively frequent childbearing.