Marriage and the Population Question

Bertrand Russell

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MARRIAGE AND THE POPULATION QUESTION.

BERTRAND RUSSELL, F.R.S.

THE influence of the Christian religion on daily life has decayed very rapidly throughout Europe during the last hundred years. Not only has the proportion of nominal believers declined, but even among those who believe, the intensity and dogmatism of belief is enormously diminished. But there is one social institution which is still profoundly affected by the Christian tradition—I mean, the institution of marriage. The law and public opinion as regards marriage are dominated even now, to a very great extent, by the teachings of the Church, which continue to influence in this way the lives of men, women, and children in their most intimate concerns.

It is marriage as a political institution that I wish to consider, not marriage as a matter for the private morality of each individual. Marriage is regulated by law, and is regarded as a matter in which the community has a right to interfere. It is only the action of the community in regard to marriage that I am concerned to discuss: whether the present action furthers the life of the community, and, if not, in what ways it ought to be changed.

There are two questions to be asked in regard to any marriage system: first, how it affects the development and character of the men and women concerned; secondly, what is its influence on the propagation and education of

children. These two questions are entirely distinct, and a system may well be desirable from one of these two points of view when it is very undesirable from the other. I propose first to describe the present English law and public opinion and practice in regard to the relations of the sexes, then to consider their effects as regards children, and finally to consider how these effects, which are bad, could be obviated by a system which would also have a better influence on the character and development of men and women.

The law in England is based upon the expectation that the great majority of marriages will be lifelong. A marriage can only be dissolved if either the wife or the husband, but not both, can be proved to have committed adultery. In case the husband is the "guilty party," he must also be guilty of cruelty or desertion. Even when these conditions are fulfilled, in practice only the well-to-do can be divorced, because the expense is very great.[1] A marriage cannot be dissolved for insanity or crime, or for cruelty, however abominable, or for desertion, or for adultery by both parties; and it cannot be dissolved for any cause whatever if both husband and wife have agreed that they wish it dissolved. In all these cases, the law regards the man and woman as bound together for life. A special official, the King's Proctor, is employed to prevent divorce when there is collusion and when both parties have committed adultery.[2]

[1] There was a provision for suits *in forma pauperis*, but for various reasons this provision was nearly useless; a new and somewhat better provision has recently been made, but is still very far from satisfactory.

[2] The following letter (*New Statesman*, Dec. 4, 1915) illustrates the nature of his activities:

"DIVORCE AND THE WAR. TO THE EDITOR OF THE NEW STATESMAN.

Sir,—The following episodes may be of interest to your readers. Under the new facilities for divorce offered to the London poor, a poor woman recently obtained a decree *nisi* for divorce against her husband, who had often covered her body with bruises, infected her with a dangerous disease, and committed bigamy. By this bigamous marriage the husband had ten illegitimate children. In order to prevent this decree being made absolute, the Treasury spent at least £200 of the taxes in briefing a leading counsel and an eminent

This interesting system embodies the opinions held by the Church of England some fifty years ago, and by most nonconformists both then and now. It rests upon the assumption that adultery is sin, and that when this sin has been committed by one party to the marriage, the other is entitled to revenge if he is rich. But when both have committed the same sin, or when the one who has not committed it feels no righteous anger, the right to revenge does not exist. As soon as this point of view is understood, the law, which at first seems somewhat strange, is seen to be perfectly consistent. It rests, broadly speak-

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junior counsel and in bringing about ten witnesses from a city 100 miles away to prove that this woman had committed casual acts of adultery in 1895 and 1898. The net result is that this woman will probably be forced by destitution into further adultery and that the husband will be able to treat his mistress exactly as he treated his wife, with impunity, so far as disease is concerned. In nearly every other civilized country the marriage would have been dissolved, the children could have been legitimated by subsequent marriage, and the lawyers employed by the Treasury would not have earned the large fees they did from the community for an achievement which seems to most other lawyers thoroughly anti-social in its effects. If any lawyers really feel that society is benefited by this sort of litigation, why cannot they give their services for nothing, like the lawyers who assisted the wife? If we are to practise economy in war time, why cannot the King's Proctor be satisfied with a junior counsel only? The fact remains that many persons situated like the husband and wife in question prefer to avoid having illegitimate children, and the birth-rate accordingly suffers.

The other episode is this. A divorce was obtained by Mr. A against Mrs. A and Mr. B. Mr. B was married and Mrs. B, on hearing of the divorce proceedings, obtained a decree *nisi* against Mr. B. Mr. B is at any moment liable to be called to the front, but Mrs. B has for some months declined to make the decree *nisi* absolute, and this prevents him marrying Mrs. A, as he feels in honour bound to do. Yet the law allows any petitioner, male or female, to obtain a decree *nisi* and to refrain from making it absolute for motives which are probably discreditable. The Divorce Law Commissioners strongly condemned this state of things, and the hardship in question is immensely aggravated in war time, just as the war has given rise to many cases of bigamy owing to the chivalrous desire of our soldiers to obtain for the *de facto* wife and family the separation allowance of the State. The legal wife is often united by similar ties to another man. I commend these facts to consideration in your columns, having regard to your frequent complaints of a falling birth-rate. The iniquity of our marriage laws is an important contributory cause to the fall in question. Yours, etc.,

E. S. P. HAYNES"

Nov. 29th.

ing, upon four propositions: (1) that sexual intercourse outside marriage is sin; (2) that resentment of adultery by the "innocent" party is a righteous horror of wrong-doing; (3) that this resentment, but nothing else, may be rightly regarded as making a common life impossible; (4) that the poor have no right to fine feelings. The Church of England, under the influence of the High Church, has ceased to believe the third of these propositions, but it still believes the first and second, and does nothing actively to show that it disbelieves the fourth.

The penalty for infringing the marriage law is partly financial, but depends mainly upon public opinion. A rather small section of the public genuinely believes that sexual relations outside marriage are wicked; those who believe this are naturally kept in ignorance of the conduct of friends who feel otherwise, and are able to go through life not knowing how others live or what others think. This small section of the public regards as depraved not only actions, but opinions, which are contrary to its principles. It is able to control the professions of politicians through its influence on elections, and the votes of the House of Lords through the presence of the Bishops. By these means, it governs legislation, and makes any change in the marriage law almost impossible. It is able, also, to secure, in most cases, that a man who openly infringes the marriage law shall be dismissed from his employment, or ruined by the defection of his customers or clients. A doctor or lawyer, or a tradesman in a country town, cannot make a living, nor can a politician be in Parliament, if he is publicly known to be "immoral." Whatever a man's own conduct may be, he is not likely to defend publicly those who have been branded, lest some of the odium should fall on him. Yet so long as a man has not been branded, few men will object to him, whatever they may know privately of his behaviour in these respects.

Owing to the nature of the penalty, it falls very unequally upon different professions. An actor or journalist usually escapes all punishment. An urban working man

can almost always do as he likes. A man of private means, unless he wishes to take part in public life, need not suffer at all if he has chosen his friends suitably. Women, who formerly suffered more than men, now suffer less, since there are large circles in which no social penalty is inflicted, and a very rapidly increasing number of women who do not believe the conventional code. But for the majority of men outside the working classes the penalty is still sufficiently severe to be prohibitive.

The result of this state of things is a widespread but very flimsy hypocrisy, which allows many infractions of the code, and forbids only those which must become public. A man may not live openly with a woman who is not his wife, an unmarried woman may not have a child, and neither man nor woman may get into the divorce court. Subject to these restrictions, there is in practice very great freedom. It is this practical freedom which makes the state of the law seem tolerable to those who do not accept the principles upon which it is based. What has to be sacrificed to propitiate the holders of strict views is not pleasure, but only children and a common life and truth and honesty. It cannot be supposed that this is the result desired by those who maintain the code, but equally it cannot be denied that this is the result which they do in fact achieve. Extra-matrimonial relations which do not lead to children and are accompanied by a certain amount of deceit remain unpunished, but severe penalties fall on those which are honest or lead to children.

Within marriage, the expense of children leads to continually greater limitation of families. The limitation is greatest among those who have most sense of parental responsibility and most wish to educate their children well, since it is to them that the expense of children is most severe. But although the economic motive for limiting families has hitherto probably been the strongest, it is being continually reinforced by another. Women are acquiring freedom—not merely outward and formal freedom, but inward freedom, enabling them to think and feel

genuinely, not according to received maxims. To the men who have prated confidently of women's natural instincts, the result would be surprising if they were aware of it. Very large numbers of women, when they are sufficiently free to think for themselves, do not desire to have children, or at most desire one child in order not to miss the experience which a child brings. There are women who are intelligent and active-minded, who resent the slavery to the body which is involved in having children. There are ambitious women, who desire a career which leaves no time for children. There are women who love pleasure and gaiety, and women who love the admiration of men; such women will at least postpone child-bearing until their youth is past. All these classes of women are rapidly becoming more numerous, and it may be safely assumed that their numbers will continue to increase for many years to come.

It is too soon to judge with any confidence as to the effects of women's freedom upon private life and upon the life of the nation. But I think it is not too soon to see that it will be profoundly different from the effect expected by the pioneers of the women's movement. Men have invented, and women in the past have often accepted, a theory that women are the guardians of the race, that their life centres in motherhood, that all their instincts and desires are directed, consciously or unconsciously, to this end. Tolstoy's Natacha illustrates this theory: she is charming, gay, liable to passion, until she is married; then she becomes merely a virtuous mother, without any mental life. This result has Tolstoy's entire approval. It must be admitted that it is very desirable from the point of view of the nation, whatever we may think of it in relation to private life. It must also be admitted that it is probably common among women who are physically vigorous and not highly civilized. But in countries like France and England, it is becoming increasingly rare. More and more, women find motherhood unsatisfying, not what their needs demand. And more and more there comes to be a

conflict between their personal development and the future of the community. It is difficult to know what ought to be done to mitigate this conflict, but I think it is worth while to see what are likely to be its effects if it is not mitigated.

Owing to the combination of economic prudence with the increasing freedom of women, there is at present a selective birth-rate of a very singular kind.[3] In France, the population is practically stationary, and in England it is rapidly becoming so; this means that some sections are dwindling while others are increasing. Unless some change occurs, the sections that are dwindling will practically become extinct, and the population will be almost wholly replenished from the sections that are now increasing.[4] The sections that are dwindling include the whole middle-class and the skilled artizans. The sections that are increasing are the very poor, the shiftless and drunken, the feeble-minded—feeble-minded women, especially, are apt to be very prolific. There is an increase in those sections of the population which still actively believe the Catholic religion, such as the Irish and the Bretons, because the Catholic religion forbids limitation of families. Within the classes that are dwindling, it is the best elements that are dwindling most rapidly. Working-class boys of exceptional ability rise, by means of scholarships, into the professional class; they naturally desire to marry into the class to which they belong by education, not into the class from which they spring; but as they have no money beyond what they earn, they cannot marry young, or afford a large family. The result is that in each genera-

[3] Some interesting facts were given by Mr. Sidney Webb in two letters to *The Times*, Oct. 11 and 16, 1906; there is also a Fabian tract on the subject: "The Decline in the Birth-Rate," by Sidney Webb (No. 131). Some further information may be found in "The Declining Birth-Rate: its national and international significance," by A. Newsholme, M.D., M.R.C.S. (Cassell, 1911).

[4] The fall in the death-rate, and especially in the infant mortality, which has occurred concurrently with the fall in the birth-rate, has hitherto been sufficiently great to allow the population of Great Britain to go on increasing. But there are obvious limits to the fall of the death-rate, whereas the birth-rate might easily fall to a point which would make an actual diminution of numbers unavoidable.

tion the best elements are extracted from the working classes and artificially sterilized, at least in comparison with those who are left. In the professional classes, the young women who have initiative, energy, or intelligence, are as a rule not inclined to marry young, or to have more than one or two children when they do marry. Marriage has been in the past the only obvious means of livelihood for women; pressure from parents and fear of becoming an old maid combined to force many women to marry in spite of a complete absence of inclination for the duties of a wife. But now a young woman of ordinary intelligence can easily earn her own living, and can acquire freedom and experience without the permanent ties of a husband and a family of children. The result is that, if she marries, she marries late.

For these reasons, if an average sample of children were taken out of the population of England, and their parents were examined, it would be found that prudence, energy, intellect and enlightenment were less common among the parents than in the population in general, while shiftlessness, feeble-mindedness, stupidity, and superstition were more common than in the population in general. It would be found that those who are prudent or energetic or intelligent or enlightened actually fail to reproduce their own numbers, that is to say, they do not on the average have as many as two children each who survive infancy. On the other hand, those who have the opposite qualities have, on the average, more than two children each, and more than reproduce their own numbers.

It is impossible to estimate the effect which this will have upon the character of the population without a much greater knowledge of heredity than exists at present. But so long as children continue to live with their parents, parental example and early education must have a great influence in developing their character, even if we leave heredity entirely out of account. Whatever may be thought of genius, there can be no doubt that intelligence, whether through heredity or through education, tends to run in families, and that the decay of the families in which it is

common must lower the mental standard of the population. It seems unquestionable that, if our economic system and our moral standards remain unchanged, there will be, in the next two or three generations, a rapid change for the worse in the character of the population in all civilized countries, and an actual diminution of numbers in the most civilized.

The diminution of numbers, in all likelihood, will rectify itself in time through the elimination of those characteristics which at present lead to a small birth-rate. Men and women who can still believe the Catholic faith will have a biological advantage; gradually a race will grow up which will be impervious to all the assaults of reason, and will believe imperturbably that limitation of families leads to hell-fire. Women who have mental interests, who care about art or literature or politics, who desire a career or who value their liberty, will gradually grow rarer, and be more and more replaced by a placid maternal type which has no interests outside the home and no dislike of the burden of motherhood. This result, which ages of masculine domination have vainly striven to achieve, is likely to be the final outcome of women's emancipation and of their attempt to enter upon a wider sphere than that to which the jealousy of men confined them in the past.

Perhaps, if the facts could be ascertained, it would be found that something of the same kind occurred in the Roman Empire. The decay of energy and intelligence during the second, third, and fourth centuries of our era has always remained more or less mysterious. But there is reason to think that then, as now, the best elements of the population, in each generation, failed to reproduce themselves, and that the least vigorous were, as a rule, those to whom the continuance of the race was due. One might be tempted to suppose that civilization, when it has reached a certain height, becomes unstable, and tends to decay through some inherent weakness, some failure to adapt the life of instinct to the intense mental life of a period of high culture. But such vague theories have

always something glib and superstitious which makes them worthless as scientific explanations or as guides to action. It is not by a literary formula, but by detailed and complex thought, that a true solution is to be found.

Let us first be clear as to what we desire. There is no importance in an increasing population; on the contrary, if the population of Europe were stationary, it would be much easier to promote economic reform and to avoid war. What is regrettable *at present* is not the decline of the birth-rate in itself, but the fact that the decline is greatest in the best elements of the population. There is reason, however, to fear in the future three bad results: first, an absolute decline in the numbers of English, French and Germans; secondly, as a consequence of this decline, their subjugation by less civilized races and the extinction of their tradition; thirdly, a revival of their numbers on a much lower plane of civilization, after generations of selection of those who have neither intelligence nor foresight. If this result is to be avoided, the present unfortunate selectiveness of the birth-rate must be somehow stopped.

The problem is one which applies to the whole of western civilization. There is no difficulty in discovering a theoretical solution, but there is great difficulty in persuading men to adopt a solution in practice, because the effects to be feared are not immediate and the subject is one upon which people are not in the habit of using their reason. If a rational solution is ever adopted, the cause will probably be international rivalry. It is obvious that if one State—say Germany—adopted a rational means of dealing with the matter, it would acquire an enormous advantage over other States unless they did likewise. After the war, it is possible that population questions will attract more attention than they did before, and it is likely that they will be studied from the point of view of international rivalry. This motive, unlike reason and humanity, is perhaps strong enough to overcome men's objections to a scientific treatment of the birth-rate.

In the past, at most periods and in most societies, the instincts of men and women led of themselves to a more than sufficient birth-rate; Malthus's statement of the population question had been true enough up to the time when he wrote. It is still true of barbarous and semi-civilized races, and of the worst elements among civilized races. But it has become false as regards the more civilized half of the population in Western Europe and America. Among them, instinct no longer suffices to keep numbers even stationary.

We may sum up the reasons for this, in order of importance, as follows:

(1) The expense of children is very great if parents are conscientious.

(2) An increasing number of women desire to have no children, or only one or two, in order not to be hampered in their own careers.

(3) Owing to the excess of women, a large number of women remain unmarried. These women, though not debarred in practice from relations with men, are debarred by the code from having children. In this class are to be found an enormous and increasing number of women who earn their own living as typists, in shops, or otherwise. The war has opened many employments to women from which they were formerly debarred, and this change is probably only in part temporary.

If the sterilizing of the best parts of the population is to be arrested, the first and most pressing necessity is the removal of the economic motives for limiting families. The expense of children ought to be borne wholly by the community. Their food and clothing and education ought to be provided, not only to the very poor as a matter of charity, but to all classes as a matter of public interest. In addition to this, a woman who is capable of earning money, and who abandons wage-earning for motherhood, ought to receive from the State as nearly as possible what she would have received if she had not had children. The only condition attached to State maintenance of the mother and

the children should be that both parents are physically and mentally sound in all ways likely to affect the children. Those who are not sound should not be debarred from having children, but should continue, as at present, to bear the expense of children themselves.

It ought to be recognised that the law is only concerned with marriage through the question of children, and should be indifferent to what is called "morality," which is based upon custom and texts of the Bible, not upon any real consideration of the needs of the community. The excess women, who at present are in every way discouraged from having children, ought no longer to be discouraged. If the State is to undertake the expense of children, it has the right, on eugenic grounds, to know who the father is, and to demand a certain stability in a union. But there is no reason to demand or expect a life-long stability, or to exact any ground for divorce beyond mutual consent. This would make it possible for the women who must at present remain unmarried to have children if they wished it. In this way an enormous and unnecessary waste would be prevented, and a great deal of needless unhappiness would be avoided.

There is no necessity to begin such a system all at once. It might be begun tentatively with certain exceptionally desirable sections of the community. It might then be extended gradually, with the experience of its working which had been derived from the first experiment. If the birth-rate were very much increased, the eugenic conditions exacted might be made more strict.

There are of course various practical difficulties in the way of such a scheme: the opposition of the Church and the upholders of traditional morality, the fear of weakening parental responsibility, and the expense. All these, however, might be overcome. But there remains one difficulty which it seems impossible to overcome completely in England, and that is, that the whole conception is anti-democratic, since it regards some men as better than others, and would demand that the State should bestow a better

education upon the children of some men than upon the children of others. This is contrary to all the principles of progressive politics in England. For this reason, it can hardly be expected that any such method of dealing with the population question will ever be adopted in its entirety in this country. Something of the sort may well be done in Germany, and if so, it will assure German hegemony as no merely military victory could do. But among ourselves we can only hope to see it adopted in some partial piecemeal fashion, and probably only after a change in the economic structure of society which will remove most of the artificial inequalities that progressive parties are rightly trying to diminish.

So far we have been considering the question of the reproduction of the race, rather than the effect of sex-relations in fostering or hindering the development of men and women. From the point of view of the race, what seems needed is a complete removal of the economic burdens due to children from all parents who are not physically or mentally unfit, and as much freedom in the law as is compatible with public knowledge of paternity. Exactly the same changes seem called for when the question is considered from the point of view of the men and women concerned.

In regard to marriage, as with all the other traditional bonds between human beings, a very extraordinary change is taking place, wholly inevitable, wholly necessary as a stage in the development of a new life, but by no means wholly satisfactory until it is completed. All the traditional bonds were based on *authority*—of the king, the feudal baron, the priest, the father, the husband. All these bonds, just because they were based on authority, are dissolving or already dissolved, and the creation of other bonds to take their place is as yet very incomplete. For this reason, human relations have at present an unusual triviality, and do less than they did formerly to break down the hard walls of the Ego.

The ideal of marriage in the past depended upon the authority of the husband, which was admitted as a right by the wife. The husband was free, the wife was a willing slave. In all matters which concerned husband and wife jointly, it was taken for granted that the husband's fiat should be final. The wife was expected to be faithful, while the husband, except in very religious societies, was only expected to throw a decent veil over his infidelities. Families could not be limited except by continence, and a wife had no recognised right to demand continence, however she might suffer from frequent children.

So long as the husband's right to authority was unquestioningly believed by both men and women, this system was fairly satisfactory, and afforded to both a certain instinctive fulfilment which is rarely achieved among educated people now. Only one will, the husband's, had to be taken into account, and there was no need of the difficult adjustments required when common decisions have to be reached by two equal wills. The wife's desires were not treated seriously enough to enable them to thwart the husband's needs, and the wife herself, unless she was exceptionally selfish, did not seek self-development, or see in marriage anything but an opportunity for duties. Since she did not seek or expect much happiness, she suffered less, when happiness was not attained, than a woman does now: her suffering contained no element of indignation or surprise, and did not readily turn into bitterness and sense of injury.

The saintly self-sacrificing woman whom our ancestors praised had her place in a certain organic conception of society, the conception of the ordered hierarchy of authorities which dominated the middle ages. She belongs to the same order of ideas as the faithful servant, the loyal subject, and the orthodox son of the Church. This whole order of ideas has vanished from the civilized world, and it is to be hoped that it has vanished for ever, in spite of the fact that the society which it produced was vital and in some ways full of nobility. The old order has been de-

stroyed by the new ideals of justice and liberty, beginning with religion, passing on to politics, and reaching at last the private relations of marriage and the family. When once the question has been asked: "Why should a woman submit to a man?" when once the answers derived from tradition and the Bible have ceased to satisfy, there is no longer any possibility of maintaining the old subordination. To every man who has the power of thinking impersonally and freely, it is obvious, as soon as the question is asked, that the rights of women are precisely the same as the rights of men. Whatever dangers and difficulties, whatever temporary chaos, may be incurred in the transition to equality, the claims of reason are so insistent and so clear that no opposition to them can hope to be long successful.

Mutual liberty, which is now demanded, is making the old form of marriage impossible. But a new form, which shall be an equally good vehicle for instinct, and an equal help to spiritual growth, has not yet been developed. For the present, women who are conscious of liberty as something to be preserved are also conscious of the difficulty of preserving it. The wish for mastery is an ingredient in most men's sexual passions, especially in those which are strong and serious. It survives in many men whose theories are entirely opposed to despotism. The result is a fight for liberty on the one side and for life on the other. Women feel that they must protect their individuality; men feel, often very dumbly, that the repression of instinct which is demanded of them is incompatible with vigour and initiative. The clash of these opposing moods makes all real mingling of personalities impossible; the man and woman remain hard, separate units, continually asking themselves whether anything of value to themselves is resulting from the union. The effect is that relations tend to become trivial and temporary, a pleasure rather than the satisfaction of a profound need, an excitement, not an attainment. The fundamental loneliness into which we are

born remains untouched, and the hunger for inner companionship remains unappeased.

No cheap and easy solution of this trouble is possible. It is a trouble which affects most the most civilized men and women, and is an outcome of the increasing sense of individuality which springs inevitably from mental progress. I doubt if there is any radical cure except in some form of religion, so firmly and sincerely believed as to dominate even the life of instinct. The individual is not the end and aim of his own being: outside the individual, there is the community, the future of mankind, the immensity of the universe in which all our hopes and fears are a mere pinpoint. A man and woman with reverence for the spirit of life in each other, with an equal sense of their own unimportance beside the whole life of man, may become comrades without interference with liberty, and may achieve the union of instinct without doing violence to the life of mind and spirit. As religion dominated the old form of marriage, so religion must dominate the new. But it must be a new religion, based upon liberty, justice and love, not upon authority and law and hell-fire.

A bad effect upon the relations of men and women has been produced by the romantic movement, through directing attention to what ought to be an incidental good, not the purpose for which relations exist. Love is what gives intrinsic value to a marriage, and, like art and thought, it is one of the supreme things which make human life worth preserving. But though there is no good marriage without love, the best marriages have a purpose which goes beyond love. The love of two people for each other is too circumscribed, too separate from the community, to be by itself the main purpose of a good life. It is not in itself a sufficient source of activities, it is not sufficiently prospective, to make an existence in which ultimate satisfaction can be found. It brings its great moments, and then its times which are less great, which are unsatisfying because they are less great. It becomes, sooner or later, retrospective, a tomb of dead joys, not a well-spring

of new life. This evil is inseparable from any purpose which is to be achieved in a single supreme emotion. The only adequate purposes are those which stretch out into the future, which can never be fully achieved, but are always growing, and infinite with the infinity of human endeavor. And it is only when love is linked to some infinite purpose of this kind that it can have the seriousness and depth of which it is capable.

For the great majority of men and women, seriousness in sex relations is most likely to be achieved through children. Children are to most people rather a need than a desire: instinct is as a rule only consciously directed towards what used to lead to children. The desire for children is apt to develop in middle life, when the adventure of one's own existence is past, when the friendships of youth seem less important than they once did, when the prospect of a lonely old age begins to terrify, and the feeling of having no share in the future becomes oppressive. Then those who, while they were young, have had no sense that children would be a fulfilment of their needs, begin to regret their former contempt for the normal, and to envy acquaintances whom before they had thought humdrum. But owing to economic causes it is often impossible for the young, and especially for the best of the young, to have children without sacrificing things of vital importance to their own lives. And so youth passes, and the need is felt too late.

Needs without corresponding desires have grown increasingly common as life has grown more different from that primitive existence from which our instincts are derived, and to which, rather than to that of the present day, they are still very largely adapted. An unsatisfied need produces, in the end, as much pain and as much distortion of character as if it had been associated with a conscious desire. For this reason, as well as for the sake of the race, it is important to remove the present economic inducements to childlessness. There is no necessity whatever to urge parenthood upon those who feel disinclined to it, but

there is necessity not to place obstacles in the way of those who have no such disinclination.

In speaking of the importance of preserving seriousness in the relations of men and women, I do not mean to suggest that relations which are not serious are always harmful. Traditional morality has erred by laying stress on what ought not to happen, rather than on what ought to happen. What is important is that men and women should find, sooner or later, the best relation of which their natures are capable. It is not always possible to know in advance what will be the best, or to be sure of not missing the best if everything that can be doubted is rejected. Among primitive races, a man wants a female, a woman wants a male, and there is no such differentiation as makes one a much more suitable companion than another. But with the increasing complexity of disposition that civilized life brings, it becomes more and more difficult to find the man or woman who will bring happiness, and more and more necessary to make it not too difficult to acknowledge a mistake.

The present marriage law is an inheritance from a simpler age, and is supported, in the main, by unreasoning fears and by contempt for all that is delicate and difficult in the life of the mind. Owing to the law, large numbers of men and women are condemned, so far as their ostensible relations are concerned, to the society of an utterly uncongenial companion, with all the embittering consciousness that escape is practically impossible. In these circumstances, happier relations with others are often sought, but they have to be clandestine, without a common life, and without children. Apart from the great evil of being clandestine, such relations have some almost inevitable drawbacks. They are liable to emphasize sex unduly, to be exciting and disturbing; and it is hardly possible that they should bring a real satisfaction of instinct. It is the combination of love, children, and a common life that makes the best relation between a man and a woman. The law at present confines children and

a common life within the bounds of monogamy, but it cannot confine love. By forcing many to separate love from children and a common life, the law cramps their lives, prevents them from reaching the full measure of their possible development, and inflicts a wholly unnecessary torture upon those who are not content to become frivolous.

To sum up: The present state of the law, of public opinion, and of our economic system is tending to degrade the quality of the race, by making the worst half of the population the parents of more than half of the next generation. At the same time, women's claim to liberty is making the old form of marriage a hindrance to the development of both men and women. A new system is required, if the European nations are not to degenerate, and if the relations of men and women are to have the strong happiness and organic seriousness which belonged to the best marriages in the past. The new system must be based upon the fact that to produce children is a service to the State, and ought not to expose parents to heavy pecuniary penalties. It will have to recognise that neither the law nor public opinion should concern itself with the private relations of men and women, except where children are concerned. It ought to remove the inducements to make relations clandestine and childless. It ought to admit that, although lifelong monogamy is best when it is successful, the increasing complexity of our needs makes it increasingly often a failure for which divorce is the best preventive. Here as elsewhere, liberty is the basis of political wisdom. And when liberty has been won, what remains to be desired must be left to the conscience and religion of individual men and women.

BERTRAND RUSSELL.

CAMBRIDGE, ENGLAND.