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The advantages and disadvantages of being an American, 1932.

THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF BEING AN AMERICAN

GIVEN BY

RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER

AT THE TEMPLE

JANUARY 24th, 1932.

The pre-war American would have been amazed at a theme such as we announced for our discussion this morning, "The Advantages and Disadvantages of being an American," for he was generally satisfied with his status and could think of no disadvantage in being an American.

He lived in "the land of the free, the home of the brave," a land of democratic institutions, a land of unbounded economic opportunities, where a beneficent system was making it possible for everyone to become rich. He was even possessed of a Messianic complex, of being somewhat of "the savior of the world." And he entered the World War with the Messianic hope of making the whole world safe for democracy as he had made his own country safe for democracy.

Close upon the heels of the World War there began, to the amazement of some people, a rather thorough-going movement of self-criticism, self-analysis. America began to take stock.

A literature appeared which was free from that encroachable romanticism which characterized the literature of pre-bellum days, a literature of stark realism which began to strip the American scene of its naive sentimentalism, its glamorous romanticism and revealed its drabness. A process of what has become to be known as debunking, set in in American life. Many a keen observer began to lay bare the culture, the sterility of American life.

Students of science and sociology, the type that brought into existence "Middletown" began to study America as it is, not as it might be or should be. There appeared in 1922 "Civilization of the United States" an inquiry of thirty American authors and "Behold America" by a group of thirty-four American authors which was published in 1931. There took place in America a ruthless self-investigation, sometimes almost morbid, sometimes almost stamped with a degree of self-flagellation. So much so that foreign observers like Bernard Shaw came to believe that Americans like to be abused. A good deal of complaisance vanished from American life. A sense of misgiving entered. So that today the question of the advantages and disadvantages of being an American is not so far fetched as it might have been a decade and a half ago.

The most apparent advantage of American life has until recently been our remarkable economic opportunities. That amazed the foreigner and attracted millions to our shores. Here the poor of the earth could come and rise speedily on the rung of material success. Here the section hand on a railroad could in a few years become the president of that same railroad. Here the farm lad could become a bank president. Here pack peddlers were known to become, in a decade or two or more, the owners of vast mercantile establishments. These were real things in American life. Rich in promise was this life. And the general standard of living was higher than that enjoyed by workingmen abroad. That was the most apparent advantage of living in America.

But in 1932 in the slough of a vast economic depression millions are somewhat disillusioned about it, and more or less skeptical about this economic security in the United States.

Men who are unemployed in the United States, and there are millions of them, are no better off than are men who are unemployed in Germany or England. They are unemployed, - out of a job. They are not earning a living and are forced to charity and the doles. And the fact that a man is unemployed and underfed in a land of abundance, is

no consolation to him. In fact it is an added irritation. In as much as this depression is not an accident in our life but one of a series of recurrent disasters which are becoming more and more frequent, that still further destroys the illusion of our unique economic advantage. There is a great big ugly fly in the ointment of economic prosperity in America. And that system which was to put two cars in every workingman's garage is found to have driven millions to the bread-line and to have destroyed in a year what they had accumulated in a decade .

There was a large element of security in American life of old, a security based upon our possession of a vast continent of untold wealth. Up to recently free land could be had for the asking. And the successful conquest of this vast continent gave Americans a sense of well-being, confidence and optimism, - elements which were lacking in the lives of many of the people of the old world. Then too, we found ourselves separated from the old world by vast oceans and thereby free from being entangled in their bloody political wrangles.

But suddenly we were shocked into a realization that wide oceans did not separate us from the entanglements of the old world, but we actually sent millions of our men three thousand miles across the sea to participate in the entanglements of the

old world. We were suddenly shaken into the realization that in a land of boundless wealth we can find ourselves poor. So that a good deal of the optimism and confidence vanished from American life.

The greatest advantage, of course, of American life is that it is young. And that too, perhaps, is its greatest disadvantage. We have here the elan, the dynamics of youth. We have the infectious enthusiasm of youth. We are brim-full of hope. We acknowledge no limitations. We dare to experiment, particularly in the scientific field and the physical spheres of life. Success waits upon enterprise - that's been our creed. We are inventive, enterprising, strongly imaginative in the physical sphere. We are young.

Of course, we are not really young. All those who came to these shores came from the old world, from older civilizations, from older countries. They brought a good deal with them of the habits, thoughts and actions of the old world. But the land was new, an undiscovered continent of promise, glamorous possibilities. And everyone who came here was submitted to a new experience in his life, that of pioneering, building up from the bottom, making new adjustment. And old men were re-newed. For men are re-newed by new opportunities

and new tasks. And the newness, the freshness, the vigor entered into the blood of these people.

This is all to the advantage of American life.

It is not ingrown, incrustated or hard-shelled. There is still so much of initiative and of idealism and of generosity and of faith in American life. We are not crushed with the burden of ancient memories. We are not suffering from the dire political legacies of hate as are some of the peoples of the old world. And ours is not a decadent, dying civilization. It is new, young.

But youth, my friends, also spells immaturity. And our immaturity manifests itself in numerous ways. In the first place we do not evaluate. Youth seldom evaluates. We are too busy. We ask ourselves what we are busy about. Action is its own justification. To be a "go-getter" is an end in itself, quite regardless of whither he is going or what he is getting. We are not concerned so much with meaningful ends. To be energetic, on the alert, to be ambitious, that's an acceptable criticism of a good American. That all this impetuous enterprise may be leading us away from the real objective of life,-that doesn't occur to us.

We do not evaluate. We are too young. We are one-sided. That is also a characteristic of youth. We are single-tracked. We are not well-rounded. In the best sense of the word we are

careerists. Each one of us tries to succeed in a maximum degree, in his chosen job or profession. All else matters quite little. We all want money and comforts, not as a means of achieving a fuller and richer life but because we believe that by these things is life measured.

Now the old world is no less grasping than the new world. But it does possess standards of higher value than the material value.

Our immaturity manifests itself also in our intellectual immaturity. We spend more money on education than any other people in the world and yet our level of intelligence is quite low. Our tastes are the tastes of raw youth. The moving picture industry of the United States is a fairly good gauge of the average mentality of the American people for it caters to the average mentality. And that industry is geared up to the mentality of the juvenile. The American movie is sentimental, unshaded, literal, obvious. Where it is not vulgar it is hopelessly stupid. And Hollywood is an American institution, quite as American as Harvard or Yale.

Because we are immature, we are easily victimized by propaganda, by high pressured salesmanship, by press agents, by advertising. In no country in the world has the art of advertising

reached such a degree of perfection as in these United States. Ours is "the land of the ready followers" as Prof. Jastrow calls it;-"the land of the ready followers."

It took exactly six months, from Nov., 1916 to April 1917 to change the American mind from peace to war. It took just six months from priding ourselves and praising our President for keeping us out of war to put on millions of uniforms and to fight.

Our country too, because it is intellectually immature, is the most prolific breeding-ground for all kinds of cults, fads, quackery, charlatanry and isms. We have a most appalling underworld in American life. Almost anything goes, given sufficient noise and ballyhoo.

Being young, my friends, we worship size, bigness, quantity, mass. Our business must be big business. Our cities must be big cities. Our buildings must be big buildings, otherwise we are not happy. The 'still small voice' is seldom heard and seldom heeded in these United States.

Recently Professor John Dewey wrote the following: "I can think of no change which would be more beneficial than one which would make us prize quality more and quantity less. Our American zeal for size is one thing that stands in the way of our

giving proper attention to higher values. The exaggerated importance attached to size has affected our schools and the instruction they give. It stands in the way of a multitude of desirable improvements. If parents were in a position to make quality of life supreme in their own households, the larger problem of the schools would be taken care of."

And another great disadvantage of American life, my friends, is that we are not realists. And that's also a characteristic of youth. We are sentimentalists. We accept the fiction for the fact; the shadow for the substance. We prefer to live in a world of beautiful ideal abstractions which we create for ourselves, and ignore the unpleasant facts of the actual world in which men and women live. And because of ~~that~~ the charge of hypocrisy is frequently laid at the door of the American people.

For example, we are champions of peace, we advocate peace throughout the world with the zeal of the missionary, and yet contrary to this preachment, we spend more money on our army and our navy than any country in the world. In spite of our preachment of peace we are one of the few countries in the world which compells its students in schools and colleges to submit to

compulsory military training. And we are not averse from time to time to use force in our dealings with our weaker neighbors to the South of us and in the Carribbean countries. Not that we are hypocritical, but it is because we have so long talked of ideal abstractions that we have taken these ideal abstractions to be realities and the realities to be instances of little or no importance.

Thus for example, in an onslaught of moral enthusiasm we passed a prohibition law. The respectable citizens, the middle class and the rich were among the most enthusiastic to pass it for it meant that the working man would be a better working-man. He wouldn't drink. We always pass laws for the other fellow. And these respectable citizens, after the Law was passed, of course, were the first to violate it, bringing into existence a subsidized empire of crime, bootleggers and racketeers and bringing into existence the process of the undermining of our country. Respectable Americans heartily advocate Prohibition and find it not at all difficult to reconcile their advocacy for Prohibition with their well-stocked cellars.

Again we regard as one of our precious possessions, - one of our noblest traditions, the tradition of freedom, liberty, the right of free assembly, free speech, free expression, in this land. This has been blazened forth to the world, emblazoned in our

songs and national hymns. That's what we teach our children in school. And yet we are as little averse to persecuting the dissenter in war time and in peace time, quite as relentlessly as the less romantic and more cynical countries of the world. We are quite willing to become heresy hunters. We persecute the passivist and the communist because we don't like his economic theories. We persecuted the I. W. W. We deport people whose ideas we don't like and we don't find it difficult at all to demonstrate our protests. In fact we do what we do in the name of these ideals to the very challenge of the persecutions in which we indulge. Americans find it easy to reconcile freedom, fair play and the rights of men - Sacco and Vanzetti - Mooney and Billings - glaring injustices which shocked even the cynics of the old world.

We preach equality and yet we persistently segregate some ten millions of our people. We subject them both to economic and social disabilities. We consign them to slum and to menial occupations. We humiliate them and all in the name of "the land of the free and the home of the brave," - a land of liberty where there now rages an anti-semitism and a lurid anti-Catholicism and

all forms of inter-racial, inter-group hostility.

We are realists. When we speak of America, immediately there comes up before our mind a glamorous picture of ideals. We do not see the land in the raw, as it is, concretely, not as it expresses itself optically, in hopes and wishes.

There are some of the disadvantages of being an American, of belonging to a country where these things are possible. There are other disadvantages. This is a lawless land, a land of excessive crime. This is a land of unequal administration of justice and of courts which are not above reproach. It is a land of political corruption.

What does it all amount to though? It amounts to this. That being an American is not an unalloyed blessing and that ours is not the crown and summit of civilization.

Were I asked to choose, I would not choose to be anything else but a citizen of this country. But that does not mean that I am blind to the deficiencies and shortcomings of American life. These shortcomings and deficiencies and disabilities of American life, just as of Jewish life, are not ground for abdication or apology. They are ground for challenge, - duty, duty, for work and for service. America is not a fool's paradise, my friends, It is the home of one hundred and ten millions of human beings, diverse, heterogeneous,

who came from the four corners of the earth, average human beings, beset with the problems of making a living, of wresting a little happiness for themselves and their families.

The American people is possessed of a large measure of real courage and hope and ambition and good will and I believe it is striving awfully hard to let mind and intelligence get control of the helm of American destiny. For it is a land like every other land, beset with hard realities in which only time and the devotion and intelligence of the best minds of its people can help us. America, my friends, is not merely the land of Washington and Lincoln, of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, the Puritan and the Pilgrim. It is not nearly as simple as all that. American life is a confused, complex, every-day world in which the breadline frequently follows the full dinner pail. It is a world in which normalcy yields to prosperity and prosperity to the panic. It is a land where peace movements jostle with navy leagues. It is a land where good-will movements thrive along side of Ku Klux Klans. It is a land where race and religious discrimination is practiced while the gospel of the Brotherhood of Man is preached. It is a land where people vote and money rules. It is a land of the idealist and the

humanitarian, the criminal and the bootlegger, the scientist and the educator. It is a land of selfishness and altruism. It is a real world for real men. To me a marvelously promising world because of its reality, a marvelously challenging world because of its inabilities and imperfections, a land where one should want to work so as to make it come a little closer the dream which we have of it; a world which can be made more beautiful, more wholesome, more noble.

The supreme advantage of being an American, my friends, consists in being a member of a people in the process of making to which every individual may contribute his share of mind and heart and soul. It is an amalgam, physical and spiritual which is still in the process and therefore there is rich promise in such a life. The man who has youth, who has courage, who has enthusiasm will find much in American life to reward him and to satisfy him. A land where caste does not separate man from man, in which those traditions which do exist are helpful and stimulating traditions.

In such a land it is well to live and well to work, provided we face realities, provided we try to be more mature and less adolescent in our outlook, in our points of view, in our opinion.

This is America. It is a country of which we can sing if we think of what we can make of it.

AN ABSTRACT OF THE ADDRESS

"THE ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF BEING AN
AMERICAN"

BY
RABBI ABBA HILLEL SILVER
SUNDAY, JAN. 24th, 1932

The greatest advantage of American life is that it is young.
And that too, perhaps, is its greatest disadvantage.

We have the elan, the dynamics of youth. We possess
boundless energy and enthusiasm. We acknowledge no limitations. Success
waits upon enterprise - that's our creed.

Of course we are really not young. All who came to these
shores were from the old world and from old civilizations. But this land
was new and its freshness and promise entered into our blood. Those who
came here passed through a new experience, that of pioneering. They were
remade.

American life is not ingrown, incrustrated or hard in its
shell. There is no crushing burden of memories, no dire political legacies
of hate. There is a large measure of idealism and of generosity in American
life. Ours is not a decadent civilization.

But youth also spells immaturity. And our immaturity manifests
itself in numerous ways. We do not evaluate. We are so thoroughly busy
doing things that we do not ask ourselves what it is all about. We are not
concerned with meaningful ends. To be a "go-getter" is an end in itself
regardless of where one is going or what he is getting.

We are one-sided and single-tracked. Our lives are over-
simplified. We are not well-rounded. We are careerists.

Older civilizations are not less grasping than ours but their standards of real values are higher.

We are intellectually immature. We spend more money on education than any other people but our national tastes are those of raw youth. The moving picture industry fairly well gauges the intellectual level of our people and it is geared up to the mentality of the juvenile. It is literal, sentimental, unshaded, obvious and when not vulgar, terribly stupid. Whether we like it or not Hollywood is an American institution quite as American as Harvard or Yale.

Because we are intellectually immature, we are so readily victimized by propaganda, by advertising, by salesmanship. Ours is "the land of the ready followers." It is the most prolific breeding-ground for cults, fads, quackery and all forms of adolescent vagaries crowd our psychic underworld.

Being young, we worship size, quantity, bigness. Business wants to be big. Cities want to be big. Buildings want to be big. Colleges want to be big. The still small voice is seldom heeded in our land.

As a people we are not realists. We do not face facts. We prefer to live in the world of our ideal abstractions and ignore the brute realities of the actual world. This sometimes lays the charge of hypocrisy at the door of American life.

Thus we are the champions of peace and advocate it with missionary zeal. And yet we spend more money on our army and navy than any other people of the world. We force military training on unwilling students in our schools and colleges. And we do not hesitate to employ force in our dealings with our weaker neighbors to the South of us.

In an onslaught of moral enthusiasm we passed the Prohibition Law. The middle classes and the rich helped to pass it in the hope of making the American workingman more efficient. Yet these respectable people were the first to violate the Law, thereby bringing into existence a subsidized empire of criminals, boot-leggers and racketeers. Furthermore they find it not at all difficult to reconcile their advocacy of Prohibition with their well-stocked cellars.

We are seriously disadvantaged as a people by this lack of realism and candor in our American life. Freedom is our priceless possession, so we maintain, and yet we persecute the dissenter in war time and in peace time quite as relentlessly as the less romantic and more cynical countries of the old world. The passivist and the communist are hounded quite as zealously here as abroad. And "the land of the free" is also the land of deportation.

We preach equality and yet we segregate millions of our negro citizens and consign them to slums and to menial occupations and subject them to all forms of social and economic disabilities.

There are other disadvantages in American life - our lawlessness, our appalling crime, our political inaptitude and corruption, our unequal administration of justice.

But what does it all amount to? It amounts to this; that being an American is not an unalloyed blessing. And that ours is not the crown and summit of civilization.

I would not choose to be anything else but an American. And a frank acknowledgment of its disadvantages and handicaps is to me ground not for abdication or apology, but for work and service.

America is not a fools paradise. It is the home of one hundred and ten millions of everyday average people, diverse, heterogeneous, struggling

hard to wrest a living for themselves and a bit of happiness.

America is not merely Washington and Lincoln. It is not only the Declaration and the Constitution. It is not only the land of the Puritan and the Pilgrim. It is not merely as simple as all that. It is a complex, confused world where the breadline often follows the full dinner pail, where normalcy yields to prosperity and prosperity to panic; where peace movements jostle against navy leagues, where good-will organizations thrive, as well as Klans and Kleagles, where revolution and religious discrimination is practiced while the brotherhood of man is preached; where people vote and money rules. It is the world of the idealist and the humanitarian, the criminal and the bootlegger, the scientist and the educator, of selfishness and altruism - a real world for real men.

American life is possessed of vast power, courage, hope. It is striving awfully hard to give mind and intelligence the upper hand in controlling its destiny. It is beset with many difficulties and handicaps which time alone and the devotion of its best minds can solve.

1/ Pre-war Am pretty well satisfied with himself. - would have been amazed at such a query. - He was living in land of free etc. land of unlimited opportunity. Econ. system sound as a hickory nut. ^{Under a system of self-capitalism, every body was growing rich} There were nothing but democracy; which was best form of govt in world - He had something of a U.S. conception too. - the salvage of the world - blurring the war he even regarded it as his manifest destiny to make the world safe for dem.

(1) On heels of war - tidal wave of self-criticism. ^{Since began to take stock!} "Main Street" summarized a new realism - strip the Am. scene of its naive sentimentalism - its glamorous romanticism - revealed drabness etc.

"The Menckin Shore" - debunking - sterility - luciferous Middletown - sc. & sociological studies - What Am I? Misfit Am. byakers in the U.S. 1922

"Behold America" - 1931. rather self-analytic. morbid - masochism

→ Shaw. Conspicuous poor - misgiving. Question not for unreal.

2/ The most apparent advantage of Am life, to us & to foreigners, was its renewable econ. opportunities. Amazed world. Attitude multitude of independent. Here was a land plowing with wealth & barren. Then the poor of the earth could rise new jobs to competition, even to wealth. - capillary action - a recession-hand with recession could become it prevalent. A farm hand could become a bank president. A mill worker - had, the corporation, a stock peddler - had a vast mercantile estate - ways was higher -

conditions & being better. (But in 1932) - with slugs & huge ind. collapse - millions are thrashy disillusioned - sceptical abt. this Econ. supermach. & Am. - For a man who is unemp. in U.S. is no better off than a man unemp. in England, or Germany. - And we have relat. more unemp. than either of these countries - And that surrounded by small sides by abundance of which he cannot partake is not a consolation but an added irritation - And in so far as this depr. is not an accident - but only a series of recurrent disasters, which periodically become more frequent, still further destroys the illusion of our unique Econ. advantage - There is a great big, ugly fly in this ointment of Am. prosperity - The system which was to put 2 cars in every working man's garage is found to be sending millions of them to the bread-line - And the cost disgorged in a year what they accumulate in a decade -

3/ There was a large element of security in Am. life, much, which has vanished. It was based on our possession of a vast continent; untold wealth. Two lands was to be had until quite recently. With the discovery of the East - then came a series of confidence and optimism. We were rejuvenated by escape from the pol. wrangling of the Old World, and their bloody wars. But we were suddenly shocked with a real. that neither condition was permanently secure.

We were embroiled into the bloodiest war, the Old
world, actually reaching our men 300 miles across the
Atlantic to fight the battles, the participants in
their blood. warring. And we found ourselves
suddenly young and distinct, in the midst of our
vast, continental presence. Both our confidence
and our optimism are shaken.

4/ Greatest advantage: Our life is that it is young - and that,
too, perhaps is its greatest disadvantage.

① We have the elan, the dynamism of youth. - We possess
→ boundless energies, and unfettered enthusiasms. - We are
brimful of hope - We acknowledge no limitations to success
wait upon enterprise - That is our end - We are
revivacious, and, with physical force, highly imaginative.

② Of course we are really not a young people. All who
came here, are children of old countries and old countries.
But this land was new - and its power challenges
entered into our blood. It renewed the old, for
they had to pass through a new experience, that
of pioneering. They had to make to make new adjust-
ment. They had to build from the ground.
There are remains by new opportunities new tasks.

③ This is all to the advantage of our life. It is not in-
ferior, unmatured, hardened in its shell. There is no
crushing burden, memories - no dire pol. and social
legacies. It is not a decadent and degenerate civilization.

③ But youth also means immaturity. We are ~~intell. immature~~. And our immaturity manifests itself in numerous ways:

(a) We ~~are~~ do not evaluate we are too furiously busy to ask ourselves what it is all about. Action is its own justification. To be a "go-getter" is an end in itself, regardless of whether we are giving, and what he is getting. We are not concerned with meaningful ends. To be everywhere, at the alert, full of ambition is the ~~main~~ sole requirement of the acceptable man. That

~~all~~ all this impetuous enterprise may lead ~~in the way~~ away from the real meaning & purpose of life seldom occurs to us. Over-simplified

(b) We are one-sided single-track. We are not well-rounded. We are careerists, bent upon maximum success in our chosen jobs or callings. All else matters very little. We all want money & comforts ~~luxury~~ not as means toward fuller & richer lives, but because we believe life is measured by them. Older civilizations are not less prosperous > ours, but their standards of value are higher.

(c) We are intell. immature. We spend more money on Education > any other people. But on Education.

level is low. Our Tartars are those I saw youth.
The many pictures voluntarily fairly prizes the intell
gance & the masses of our people, it is graved up
to the mentality of a juvenile. It is literal,
sentimental, unshaded, obvious, and when not
vulgar, stupid. Helly word is an American
institution, quite fairly American to have a
gale.

(d) Because we are intell. minority we are so
readily not misled by propaganda, by salimandus, by
press agents, by advertising. For us country has
advertising reached such proportions a in Am-
erica are "the land of the ready followers" (Gostrow). In
6 months from Nov 1916 - to Apr 1917 - we was changed
by propag. from a few happy people, to a nation at
war. Our country is the most prolific breeder
ground for (cults) facts, preaching, diarant, isms,
which they crowd on psychic underworld.

(e) Being young we wish size mass, quantity
biggers. Business want to be big. Cities want to
be big. Churches want to be big. Colleges -
The small voice is not heard, at least not in the land -
(ref. Henry) ←

f) Prom to interfere with other lives - Moralize
people than legislation - who not know definite
limit of legislation.

④ Equality - Wage - Separation - Econ. & Socially
disabled - restricted to slums & to menial
occupations -

① a raging anti-semitism. ✓

② a lurid anti-Catholicism.

§. There are other disadvantages ^{and ineptitudes}
our law system - an crime - an pol. corruption
~~our courts which do not unite in fair~~
~~justice and are not above corruption~~
~~our unequal administration of justice - Court~~
But what it all amounts to is that:
Being an American is not an unalloyed
pleasure or the supreme crown and supreme
achievement of Western civilization.

② I would not choose to be anything else -
but I am not unaware of the discrepancies
and handicaps of an Am. life. I find in
them, as in my Jewish, not cause for
abdication or apology - but challenge -

Am. is not a poor parade. It is
what it is: the hugest 110 m. people - of
not yet culturally unified, not homogeneous -
but yet rich one - possessing vast power.

courage, hope, good-will eager to do the right,
 strong awfully hard to give mind and
 intelligence the ~~whole~~ guiding hand in its
 destiny, yet best with many hard realities,
 which two alone and the ~~whole~~ disturb
 its best mind & heart ~~to~~ will solve.

Am. is not merely Washington & London,
It is not merely the Court. Ideal. & Ind. 1st
Crestedness, the U.S. - It is not merely the
land of virgin Puritan. It is not nearly as
simple as all that. It is a complex, confused
every-day world where the head-line follows
the full-dress part, where normalcy yields to
persecution & persecution to panic, where peace
movements oppose every Navy figure, where
food will organization thinks and as well as the K.K.K.
thinks, where advice is decommuted is present
while the doings of brotherhood is proached -
where people vote and money rules - a
world of common brotherhood of ideal and human values
of Scientist + educator of art and craft of selfishness and unselfishness - a world
in real men

a card to be made more white, more beautiful, more ~~settling~~ left on beam 5 ft.

only with the development of biologic methods of contraception, which now seems to be in the rather immediate future.

Procreation is not the sole or even the chief end served by the sexual mating of human beings of opposite genders. Such unions, between civilized and enlightened persons, are the beautiful and ennobling physical expression of a union of souls and a potent means whereby such higher unions are consummated and developed, the bearing and rearing of children being a later, though important, part of the development.

When a man and woman enter upon the legalized and recognized sexual and social relationship we call marriage, a considerable period of time is required for the adjustment of their physical, emotional, and mental natures to each other. The early months or years of married life are full of delicate psycho-physical adaptations and equalizations and are fraught with possibilities of the richest and most satisfying experiences imaginable, or, on the other hand, of life-long frustration and disaster. The activity of our divorce courts testifies that these mutual concessions and compromises are not always made.

If during these critical months or years the delicate balance existing between the man and wife is upset by the physical disturbances suffered by a woman during pregnancy and the economic and social anxieties which too often accompany the immediate prospect of being saddled with the responsibility of caring for another, and helpless, human being, the possibility of a satisfying and spiritually productive adjustment to life is often irretrievably wrecked.

Nor is the honeymoon period the only time when the living of an unembarrassed and fully expressive sex life is desirable and necessary. As a man and woman go on living together, growing into a sweeter and stronger love and developing intellectually and spiritually, their expanding consciousness and devotion require frequent physical expression, in order that griefs may be minimized, joys increased, and the bonds of tenderness and sympathy strengthened.

The so-called lower animals and barbarous men mate and breed promiscuously and without restraint, in obedience to an unreasoned instinct; but as the race emerges farther and farther from savagery, the aesthetic and emotional factors in sex life loom larger and larger. Psychic inhibitions, of which fear and anger are the most destructive, can render the conjugal embrace wholly unsatisfying or even impossible to cultured and sensitive persons.

Among the causes of fear afflicting married persons in their amatory relations, there is probably none so frequent as is dread of an undesired and inopportune pregnancy. Moreover, deep and serious thought must be given to the devastating emotional and spiritual surroundings of the unwanted child, born into an atmosphere of anxiety, or even of hate.

The time has come when the human race must either take the next step in its spiritual evolution or retrogress. Life does not stand still. Woman has to a large extent been liberated from her economic and political bondage, but she cannot stand beside man in the fulness of freedom, as the other half of his soul, until she is emancipated from the fetters of involuntary motherhood. None need fear that such emancipation will result in the extinction of the race, for the maternal urge is as imperative as is that of sex.

If men and women are to fulfil their basic cosmic functions as developers and perfecters of each other's souls, the physical expression of their soaring love must be released from the shackles which so often bind it to the physiologic function of procreation; and until we remove the archaic and hypocritical legal restrictions on the dissemination of information to this end, we have little reason for calling ourselves a civilized nation.

Birth Control and Sex Morality

By WILLIAM ALLEN PUSEY, M.D.

THE physician, more than most men, is forced to a realization of the utter inconsistency and futility of society's attitude toward sex. He of all men is constantly forced to a realization that sex is the dominant subtle influence of life. Hunger may surpass it as an insistent appetite, but the satisfaction of hunger is associated with no social complications, and is not often a serious problem to civilized man in the Western world. The relation of the sexes is the unsolved problem of Christian civilization. Nature makes the sexual appetite insistent. Society says that the appetite must be suppressed, but, it need not be said, does not abide by its precept. The irresistible biological fact and the attitude of society furnish a constant conflict in which nature is inevitably the victor. One cannot frankly contemplate this situation without realizing that the social attitude is not only insincere and dishonest but stupid and fraught with tragedy.

To face this situation frankly does not mean that the only biological solution of it is unrestricted sexual license, but it does involve the conclusion that any successful handling of the sex problem necessitates a reasonable provision for the enjoyment of sex. It should be society's business to see that this is attained by providing proper conditions of married life. In rare circumstances satisfactory marital relations can be built upon a platonic foundation, upon the higher aspirations and tastes of life alone, but it is nevertheless true that sexual life is the elemental fact upon which satisfactory family life as a rule depends, and without satisfactory sexual experience married life is apt to be irreparably damaged.

It is here that the importance of birth control comes into the problem. Nature gets rid of an excess of any species by the most rigorous and relentless destruction. Instead of accepting this dire method, intelligent man always exercises some form of birth control. And it is in this effort at birth control in married life that such havoc is played with marital happiness. In the lack of knowledge of how to attain the end that must be attained—in other words, in the lack of knowledge of proper methods of birth control—penalties are put upon what should be the proper pleasure of sexual life in marriage that often utterly destroy it. It is particularly in the plastic period of young married life, when success and failure in marriage are in the balance, that this unhappy factor has its widest play and does so much to bring about marital failure. And this situation arises largely as a result of the anxiety and failures that come from un-

successful efforts at birth control. There could be no greater contribution to the morality of the world, as well as to its happiness, than would be the removal of this barrier to marital satisfaction.

Even in irregular sexual life there are, I believe, good grounds for the advocacy of birth control. It is a sad fact that under the conditions that civilization sets up sexual immorality is common. It is of course altogether deplorable, but it is a fact that, with men—and women—as they are, is inevitable. Even in women it is by no means restricted to those who are beyond the bounds of human protection or of humane efforts for their care. The professional prostitute has no problem of birth control; nature usually takes care of that, but anyway she is not racked by the fear of the shame of an accidental child, or by any compunction about abortion. But for all except the hardened prostitute the situation is different. Under the standard which society sets up but does not observe, an illegitimate child is a fact for which there can be no atonement, either by the mother or, what even to those mothers is more important, by the child. With the sexual instinct as it is, with society stimulating the appetite by every device that ingenuity can suggest—by prurient literature, drama, and art, especially by suggestive dress—with the possibility of marriage refused to many women, with the atonement for the illegitimate child beyond any possibility, women of any intelligence or decent instincts who find themselves in this condition—and there are plenty of women of this sort who find themselves in this condition—can see only one possibility of escape and that is abortion. They will resort to it regardless of any penalties that the law may set up or of the risks of death that it entails. They cannot do anything else. The aggregate of human agony that results is beyond any computation. In order to avoid argument I am not saying that these women are not deserving of their agony, but I would call attention to the fact that it would be better for society if the situation were handled differently. Birth control is better than abortion.

Education and Birth Control

By JOHN DEWEY

THE opposition to the birth-control movement is not a unique or isolated fact. It is an expression of an ever-recurring struggle between darkness and knowledge. We are given to thinking that science has overthrown all enemies to its advance. This may be true of the technical aspects of science, those which have no clear social bearings. It is not true when newly discovered knowledge has important bearings upon the conduct of life. There is always a rearguard of ignorance, prejudice, dogma, routine, tradition, which fights against the spread of new ideas that entail new practices. It has been so in astronomy, physics, biology. It is not surprising that it is so in the case of medicine.

The line of battle changes. The particular ideas that are resisted change. But relatively the fight is constant. Men do not any longer, except a few cranks, strive against the Copernican astronomy. But some conflict between new

truth and what is old and entrenched goes on, and probably will go on as long as man lives with a past behind him and a future ahead of him.

We forget how comparatively recent is any scientific knowledge concerning the processes of procreation and conception. It was only late in intellectual history that they were discovered to be chemical in nature, and that something of their mechanism was learned. Now, new knowledge always means the possibility of new control. With this particular scientific discovery there arose the possibility of intelligent control of blind natural processes. This is the logic of the birth-control movement. Just as expanding knowledge of electricity brought with it the electric light, telegraph, telephone, dynamo, so scientific knowledge of the transmission of life enables mankind to bring that process under human direction. Because knowledge always means increased control, there can be no doubt of where ultimate victory will lie in this particular conflict. The conflict between ignorance and knowledge becomes one between chance and control.

Meantime, however, individuals are prevented by law and by public sentiment from access to the knowledge which would give them more complete control of their conduct—laws and public sentiment that were formed when adequate scientific knowledge was lacking. How can anyone who believes in education and in enlightenment of the public through education fail to be opposed to this restriction on the flow of intelligence? The opposition to it should be all the stronger because what is proposed is only a legislation which places the source of this flow in the hands of scientists and physicians. There is always wholesome sanitation wherever there is free circulation of intelligence. We need light and circulation of air in intellectual and moral matters as in physical. Suppression and secrecy breed unfairness, mental and moral disorder. Our plea, from the side of education, is that there be removed arbitrary restrictions to that movement of knowledge and understanding which brings the action of the blind forces of nature under the control of intelligence.

The other point I wish to make is just as simple. All educators today attach great importance to the development of individual capacities. They are all opposed to merely mass education, to regimentation, the lock step, to uniformity imposed upon boys and girls, no two of whom are alike. But as long as multitudes of families have too many children and those children badly spaced, it is not possible for each child to have proper individual attention—physical, intellectual, moral. I have no hesitation in saying that no matter what educators may say and do in behalf of better development of individuals as individuals, their ideals cannot be realized unless there is intelligent control of the size of families. Mere mass and number will stand in the way with the great majority of families.

I can think of no change which would be more beneficial than one which would make us prize quality more and quantity less. Our American zeal for size is one thing that stands in the way of our giving proper attention to higher values. The exaggerated importance attached to size has affected our schools and the instruction they give. It stands in the way of a multitude of desirable improvements. If parents were in a position to make quality of life supreme in their own households, the larger problem of the schools would be taken care of.