“The New Civilization is saying to the Old now: ‘We cannot go on making power for you to spend upon international conflict. You must stop waving flags and bandying insults. You must organize the Peace of the World; you must subdue yourselves to the Federation of all mankind. And we cannot go on giving you health, freedom, enlargement, limitless wealth, if all our gifts to you are to be swamped by an indiscriminate torrent of progeny. We want fewer and better children who can be reared up to their full possibilities in unencumbered homes, and we cannot make the social life and the world-peace we are determined to make, with the ill-bred, ill-trained swarms of inferior citizens that you inflict upon us.’ And there at the passionate and crucial question, this essential and fundamental question, whether procreation is still to be a superstitious and often disastrous mystery, undertaken in fear and ignorance, reluctantly and under the sway of blind desires, or whether it is to become a deliberate creative act, the two civilizations join issue now. It is a conflict from which it is almost impossible to abstain. Our acts, our way of living, our social tolerance, our very silences will count in this crucial decision between the old and the new.”

H G Wells Introduction to The Pivot of Civilization.

From Chapter 1. A New Truth Emerges.

One of the chief aims of the present volume is to stimulate American intellectuals to abandon the mental habits which prevent them from seeing human nature as a whole, instead of as something that can be pigeonholed into various compartments or classes. Birth Control affords an approach to the study of humanity because it cuts through the limitations of current methods. It is economic, biological, psychological and spiritual in its aspects. It awakens the vision of mankind moving and changing, of humanity growing and developing, coming to fruition, of a race creative, flowering into beautiful expression through talent and genius.

…. 

Certain fundamental convictions should be made clear here. The programme for Birth Control is not a charity. It is not aiming to interfere in the private lives of poor people, to tell them how many children they should have, nor to sit in judgment upon their fitness to become parents. [But see Chapter 4: “Every feeble-minded girl or woman of the hereditary type, especially of the moron class, should be segregated during the reproductive period. …”] It aims, rather, to awaken responsibility, to answer the demand for a scientific means by which and through which each human life may be self-directed and self-controlled. The exponent of Birth Control, in short, is convinced that social regeneration, no less than individual regeneration, must come from within. Every potential parent, and especially every potential mother, must be brought to an acute realization of the primary and individual responsibility of bringing children into this world. Not until the parents of this world are given control over their reproductive faculties will it be possible to improve the quality of the generations of the future, or even to maintain civilization at its present level. Only when given intelligent mastery of the procreative powers
can the great mass of humanity be aroused to a realization of responsibility of parenthood. We have come to the conclusion, based on widespread investigation and experience, that education for parenthood must be based upon the needs and demands of the people themselves. An idealistic code of sexual ethics, imposed from above, a set of rules devised by high-minded theorists who fail to take into account the living conditions and desires of the masses, can never be of the slightest value in effecting change in the customs of the people. Systems so imposed in the past have revealed their woeful inability to prevent the sexual and racial chaos into which the world has drifted.

The universal demand for practical education in Birth Control is one of the most hopeful signs that the masses themselves to-day possess the divine spark of regeneration. It remains for the courageous and the enlightened to answer this demand, to kindle the spark, to direct a thorough education in sex hygiene based upon this intense interest.

Birth Control is thus the entering wedge for the educator. In answering the needs of these thousands upon thousands of submerged mothers, it is possible to use their interest as the foundation for education in prophylaxis, hygiene and infant welfare. The potential mother can then be shown that maternity need not be slavery but may be the most effective avenue to self-development and self-realization. Upon this basis only may we improve the quality of the race.

The lack of balance between the birth-rate of the "unfit" and the "fit," admittedly the greatest present menace to the civilization, can never be rectified by the inauguration of a cradle competition between these two classes. The example of the inferior classes, the fertility of the feeble-minded, the mentally defective, the poverty-stricken, should not be held up for emulation to the mentally and physically fit, and therefore less fertile, parents of the educated and well-to-do classes. On the contrary, the most urgent problem today is how to limit and discourage the over-fertility of the mentally and physically defective. Possibly drastic and Spartan methods may be forced upon American society if it continues complacently to encourage the chance and chaotic breeding that has resulted from our stupid, cruel sentimentalism.

To effect the salvation of the generations of the future--nay, of the generations of to-day--our greatest need, first of all, is the ability to face the situation without flinching; to cooperate in the formation of a code of sexual ethics based upon a thorough biological and psychological understanding of human nature; and then to answer the questions and the needs of the people with all the intelligence and honesty at our command. If we can summon the bravery to do this, we shall best be serving the pivotal interests of civilization.

To conclude this introduction: my initiation, as I have confessed, was primarily an emotional one. My interest in Birth Control was awakened by experience. Research and investigation have followed. Our effort has been to raise our program from the plane of the emotional to the plane of the scientific. Any social progress, it is my belief, must purge itself of sentimentalism and pass through the crucible of science. We are willing to submit Birth Control to this test. It is part of the purpose of this book to appeal to the scientist for aid, to arouse that interest which will result in widespread research and investigation. I believe that my personal experience with this idea must be that of the race at large. We must temper our emotion and enthusiasm with the imper-
sonal determination of science. We must unite in the task of creating an instrument of steel, strong but supple, if we are to triumph finally in the war for human emancipation.
From Chapter 4.

CHAPTER IV: The Fertility of the Feeble-Minded

The philosophy of Birth Control points out that as long as civilized communities encourage unrestrained fecundity in the "normal" members of the population—always of course under the cloak of decency and morality—and penalize every attempt to introduce the principle of discrimination and responsibility in parenthood, they will be faced with the ever-increasing problem of feeble-mindedness, that fertile parent of degeneracy, crime, and pauperism. Small as the percentage of the imbecile and half-witted may seem in comparison with the normal members of the community, it should always be remembered that feeble-mindedness is not an unrelated expression of modern civilization. Its roots strike deep into the social fabric. Modern studies indicate that insanity, epilepsy, criminality, prostitution, pauperism, and mental defect, are all organically bound up together and that the least intelligent and the thoroughly degenerate classes in every community are the most prolific. Feeble-mindedness in one generation becomes pauperism or insanity in the next. There is every indication that feeble-mindedness in its protean forms is on the increase, that it has leaped the barriers, and that there is truly, as some of the scientific eugenists have pointed out, a feeble-minded peril to future generations—unless the feeble-minded are prevented from reproducing their kind. To meet this emergency is the immediate and peremptory duty of every State and of all communities.

In my own experience, I recall vividly the case of a feeble-minded girl who every year, for a long period, received the expert attention of a great specialist in one of the best-known maternity hospitals of New York City. The great obstetrician, for the benefit of interns and medical students, performed each year a Caesarian operation upon this unfortunate creature to bring into the world her defective, and, in one case at least, her syphilitic, infant. "Nelly" was then sent to a special room and placed under the care of a day nurse and a night nurse, with extra and special nourishment provided. Each year she returned to the hospital. Such cases are not exceptions; any experienced doctor or nurse can recount similar stories. In the interest of medical science this practice may be justified. I am not criticising it from that point of view. I realize as well as the most conservative moralist that humanity requires that healthy members of the race should make certain sacrifices to preserve from death those unfortunates who are born with hereditary taints. But there is a point at which philanthropy may become positively dysgenic, when charity is converted into injustice to the self-supporting citizen, into positive injury to the future of the race. Such a point, it seems obvious, is reached when the incurably defective are permitted to procreate and thus increase their numbers. There is but one practical and feasible program in handling the great problem of the feeble-minded. That is, as the best authorities are agreed, to prevent the birth of those who would transmit imbecility to their descendants. Feeble-mindedness as investigations and statistics from every country indicate, is invariably associated
with an abnormally high rate of fertility. Modern conditions of civilization, as we are continually being reminded, furnish the most favorable breeding-ground for the mental defective, the moron, the imbecile. ‘We protect the members of a weak strain,’ says Davenport, ‘up to the period of reproduction, and then let them free upon the community, and encourage them to leave a large progeny of ‘feeble-minded’: which in turn, protected from mortality and carefully nurtured up to the reproductive period, are again set free to reproduce, and so the stupid work goes on of preserving and increasing our socially unfit strains.’

…

Nor do we believe that the community could or should send to the lethal chamber the defective progeny resulting from irresponsible and unintelligent breeding.

But modern society, which has respected the personal liberty of the individual only in regard to the unrestricted and irresponsible bringing into the world of filth and poverty an overcrowding procession of infants foredoomed to death or hereditable disease, is now confronted with the problem of protecting itself and its future generations against the inevitable consequences of this long-practised policy of LAISSER-FAIRE.

The emergency problem of segregation and sterilization must be faced immediately. Every feeble-minded girl or woman of the hereditary type, especially of the moron class, should be segregated during the reproductive period. Otherwise, she is almost certain to bear imbecile children, who in turn are just as certain to breed other defectives. The male defectives are no less dangerous. Segregation carried out for one or two generations would give us only partial control of the problem. Moreover, when we realize that each feeble-minded person is a potential source of an endless progeny of defect, we prefer the policy of immediate sterilization, of making sure that parenthood is absolutely prohibited to the feeble-minded.

…

At the present moment, we are offered three distinct and more or less mutually exclusive policies by which civilization may hope to protect itself and the generations of the future from the allied dangers of imbecility, defect and delinquency. No one can understand the necessity for Birth control education without a complete comprehension of the dangers, the inadequacies, or the limitations of the present attempts at control, or the proposed programs for social reconstruction and racial regeneration. It is, therefore, necessary to interpret and criticize the three programs offered to meet our emergency. These may be briefly summarized as follows:

(1) Philanthropy and Charity: This is the present and traditional method of meeting the problems of human defect and dependence, of poverty and delinquency. It is emotional, altruistic, at best ameliorative, aiming to meet the individual situation as it arises and presents itself. Its effect in practice is seldom, if ever, truly preventive. Concerned with symptoms, with the allaying of acute and catastrophic miseries, it cannot, if it would, strike at the radical causes of social misery. At its worst, it is sentimental and paternalistic.
(2) Marxian Socialism: This may be considered typical of many widely varying schemes of more or less revolutionary social reconstruction, emphasizing the primary importance of environment, education, equal opportunity, and health, in the elimination of the conditions (i.e. capitalistic control of industry) which have resulted in biological chaos and human waste. I shall attempt to show that the Marxian doctrine is both too limited, too superficial and too fragmentary in its basic analysis of human nature and in its program of revolutionary reconstruction.

(3) Eugenics: Eugenics seems to me to be valuable in its critical and diagnostic aspects, in emphasizing the danger of irresponsible and uncontrolled fertility of the "unfit" and the feebleminded establishing a progressive unbalance in human society and lowering the birth-rate among the "fit." But in its so-called "constructive" aspect, in seeking to reestablish the dominance of healthy strain over the unhealthy, by urging an increased birth-rate among the fit, the Eugenists really offer nothing more farsighted than a "cradle competition" between the fit and the unfit. They suggest in very truth, that all intelligent and respectable parents should take as their example in this grave matter of child-bearing the most irresponsible elements in the community.

From Chapter 5

CHAPTER V: The Cruelty of Charity

``Fostering the good-for-nothing at the expense of the good is an extreme cruelty. It is a deliberate storing up of miseries for future generations. There is no greater curse to posterity than that of bequeathing them an increasing population of imbeciles."

Herbert Spencer

The last century has witnessed the rise and development of philanthropy and organized charity. Coincident with the all-conquering power of machinery and capitalistic control, with the unprecedented growth of great cities and industrial centers, and the creation of great proletarian populations, modern civilization has been confronted, to a degree hitherto unknown in human history, with the complex problem of sustaining human life in surroundings and under conditions flagrantly dysgenic.

....

Even if we accept organized charity at its own valuation, and grant that it does the best it can, it is exposed to a more profound criticism. It reveals a fundamental and irremediable defect. Its very success, its very efficiency, its very necessity to the social order, are themselves the most unanswerable indictment. Organized charity itself is the symptom of a malignant social disease.

Those vast, complex, interrelated organizations aiming to control and to diminish the spread of misery and destitution and all the menacing evils that spring out of this sinisterly
fertile soil, are the surest sign that our civilization has bred, is breeding and is perpetuating constantly increasing numbers of defectives, delinquents and dependents. My criticism, therefore, is not directed at the "failure" of philanthropy, but rather at its success.

These dangers inherent in the very idea of humanitarianism and altruism, dangers which have today produced their full harvest of human waste, of inequality and inefficiency, were fully recognized in the last century at the moment when such ideas were first put into practice. Readers of Huxley's attack on the Salvation Army will recall his penetrating and stimulating condemnation of the debauch of sentimentalism which expressed itself in so uncontrolled a fashion in the Victorian era. One of the most penetrating of American thinkers, Henry James, Sr., sixty or seventy years ago wrote: "I have been so long accustomed to see the most arrant deviltry transact itself in the name of benevolence, that the moment I hear a profession of good will from almost any quarter, I instinctively look around for a constable or place my hand within reach of a bell-rope. My ideal of human intercourse would be a state of things in which no man will ever stand in need of any other man's help, but will derive all his satisfaction from the great social tides which own no individual names. I am sure no man can be put in a position of dependence upon another, without the other's very soon becoming—if he accepts the duties of the relation—utterly degraded out of his just human proportions. No man can play the Deity to his fellow man with impunity— I mean, spiritual impunity, of course. For see: if I am at all satisfied with that relation, if it contents me to be in a position of generosity towards others, I must be remarkably indifferent at bottom to the gross social inequality which permits that position, and, instead of resenting the enforced humiliation of my fellow man to myself in the interests of humanity, I acquiesce in it for the sake of the profit it yields to my own self-complacency. I do hope the reign of benevolence is over; until that event occurs, I am sure the reign of God will be impossible."

... 

The United States Public Health Survey of the State of Oregon, recently published, shows that even a young community, rich in natural resources, and unusually progressive in legislative measures, is no less subject to this burden. Out of a total population of 783,000 it is estimated that more than 75,000 men, women and children are dependents, feeble-minded, or delinquents. Thus about 10 per cent of the population is a constant drain on the finances, health, and future of that community. These figures represent a more definite and precise survey than the rough one indicated by the statistics of charities and correction for the State of New York. The figures yielded by this Oregon survey are also considerably lower than the average shown by the draft examination, a fact which indicates that they are not higher than might be obtained from other States.

... 

Mr. Bland further points out: ""The problem presented is one with which neither humanitarian nor religious zeal can ever cope, so long as we fail to recognize and attack the fundamental cause of these calamities. As a matter of sober fact, the benevolent activities of our missionary societies to reduce the deathrate by the prevention of infanticide and the checking of disease, actually serve in the end to aggravate the pressure of population upon its food-supply and
to increase the severity of the inevitably resultant catastrophe. What is needed for the pre-
vention, or, at least, the mitigation of these scourges, is an organized educational propa-
ganda, directed first against polygamy and the marriage of minors and the unfit, and, next,
toward such a limitation of the birth-rate as shall approximate the standard of civilized
countries. But so long as Bishops and well meaning philanthropists in England and America
continue to praise and encourage `the glorious fertility of the East' there can be but little hope of
minimizing the penalties of the ruthless struggle for existence in China, and Nature's law will
therefore continue to work out its own pitiless solution, weeding out every year millions of pre-
destined weaklings."

CHAPTER VI: Neglected Factors of the World Problem

While the gravest attention is paid to the problem of hunger and food, that of sex is neglected.
Politicians and scientists are ready and willing to speak of such things as a ``high birth rate,'' in-
fant mortality, the dangers of immigration or over-population. But with few exceptions they
cannot bring themselves to speak of Birth Control. Until they shall have broken through the
traditional inhibitions concerning the discussion of sexual matters, until they recognize the
force of the sexual instinct, and until they recognize Birth Control as the PIVOTAL FA-
cTOR in the problem confronting the world to-day, our statesmen must continue to work in
the dark. Political palliatives will be mocked by actuality. Economic nostrums are blown
willy-nilly in the unending battle of human instincts.

Dr. Austin Freeman has recently pointed out [3] some of the physiological, psychological,
and racial effects of machinery upon the proletariat, the breeders of the world. Speaking
for Great Britain, Dr. Freeman suggests that the omnipresence of machinery tends toward
the production of large but inferior populations. Evidences of biological and racial degenera-
cy are apparent to this observer. ``Compared with the African negro,'' he writes, ``the British
sub-man is in several respects markedly inferior. He tends to be dull; he is usually quite helpless
and unhandy; he has, as a rule, no skill or knowledge of handicraft, or indeed knowledge of any
kind .... Over-population is a phenomenon connected with the survival of the unfit, and it is
mechanism which has created conditions favorable to the survival of the unfit and the elimina-
tion of the fit." The whole indictment against machinery is summarized by Dr. Freeman: ``Mech-
anism by its reactions on man and his environment is antagonistic to human welfare. It has de-
stroyed industry and replaced it by mere labor; it has degraded and vulgarized the works of man;
it has destroyed social unity and replaced it by social disintegration and class antagonism to an
extent which directly threatens civilization; it has injuriously affected the structural type of
society by developing its organization at the expense of the individual; it has endowed the infe-
rior man with political power which he employs to the common disadvantage by creating politi-
cal institutions of a socially destructive type; and finally its reactions on the activities of war it
constitutes an agent for the wholesale physical destruction of man and his works and the extinc-
tion of human culture."
One of the principal aims of the American Birth Control League has been to awaken the interest of scientific investigators and to point out the rich field for original research opened up by this problem. The correlation of reckless breeding with defective and delinquent strains, has not, strangely enough, been subjected to close scientific scrutiny, nor has the present biological unbalance been traced to its root. This is a crying necessity of our day, and it cannot be accomplished without the aid of science.

Recent developments in the realm of science,—in psychology, in physiology, in chemistry and physics,—all tend to emphasize the immediate necessity for human control over the great forces of nature. The new ideas published by contemporary science are of the utmost fascination and illumination even to the layman. They perform the invaluable task of making us look at life in a new light, of searching close at hand for the solution to heretofore closed mysteries of life. In this brief chapter, I can touch these ideas only as they have proved valuable to me. Professor Soddy's "Science and Life" is one of the most inspiring of recent publications in this field; for this great authority shows us how closely bound up is science with the whole of Society, how science must help to solve the great and disastrous unbalance in human society. [Frederick Soddy received the Nobel Prize for his work on radioactive decay and consequent elemental transformations, e.g., \( U \to Pb \). He also wrote several books calling for a restructuring of monetary policy based on the Second Law — i.e., his objection to then current monetary theory was of a piece with Kelvin’s criticisms of Lyell’s uniformitarianism, world without end, etc. — see http://www.nytimes.com/2009/04/12/opinion/12zencey.html?r=2&ref=opinion.]

Out of the unchallenged policies of continence, abstinence, "chastity" and "purity," we have reaped the harvests of prostitution, venereal scourges and innumerable other evils. Traditional moralists have failed to recognize that chastity and purity must be the outward symptoms of awakened intelligence, of satisfied desires, and fulfilled love. They cannot be taught by "sex education." They cannot be imposed from without by a denial of the might and the right of sexual expression. Nevertheless, even in the contemporary teaching of sex hygiene and social prophylaxis, nothing constructive is offered to young men and young women who seek aid through the trying period of adolescence.

Birth Control is essentially an education for women. It is women who, directly and by their very nature, bear the burden of that blindness, ignorance and lack of foresight concerning sex which is now enforced by law and custom. Birth Control places in the hands of women the only effective instrument whereby they may reestablish the balance in society, and assert, not only theoretically but practically as well, the primary importance of the woman and the child in civilization.
CHAPTER XII Woman and the Future

Turn to Robert M. Yerkes's ‘Psychological Examining in the United States Army’ [1] in which we are informed that the psychological examination of the drafted men indicated that nearly half – 47.3 per cent – of the population had the mentality of twelve-year-old children or less – in other words that they are morons.

… Our ``overhead'' expense in segregating the delinquent, the defective and the dependent, in prisons, asylums and permanent homes, our failure to segregate morons who are increasing and multiplying … demonstrate our foolhardy and extravagant sentimentalism. No industrial corporation could maintain its existence upon such a foundation.

…

Let us conceive for the moment at least, a world not burdened by the weight of dependent and delinquent classes, a total population of mature, intelligent, critical and expressive men and women. Instead of the inert, exploitable, mentally passive class which now forms the barren substratum of our civilization, try to imagine a population active, resistant, passing individual and social lives of the most contented and healthy sort. Would such men and women, liberated from our endless, unceasing struggle against mass prejudice and inertia, be deprived in any way of the stimulating zest of life? Would they sink into a slough of complacency and fatuity? [p. 266]

No! Life for them would be enriched, intensified and ennobled in a fashion it is difficult for us in our spiritual and physical squalor even to imagine. There would be a new renaissance of the arts and sciences. Awakened at last to the proximity of the treasures of life lying all about them, the children of that age would be inspired by a spirit of adventure and romance that would indeed produce a terrestrial paradise. [p.266]