

## CHAPTER X

### CONTRACEPTIVES OR ABORTION?

**S**OCIETY has not yet learned the significance of the age long effort of the feminine spirit to free itself of the burden of excessive childbearing. It has been singularly blind to the real forces underlying the cause of infanticide, child abandonment and abortion. It has permitted the highest and most powerful thing in woman's nature to be hindered, diverted, repressed and confused. Society has permitted this inner urge of woman to be rendered violent by repression until it has expressed itself in cruel forms of family limitation, which this same society has promptly labeled 'crimes' and sought to punish. It has gone on blindly forcing women into these 'crimes,' deaf alike to their entreaties and to the lessons of history.

As we have seen in the second chapter of this book, child abandonment and infanticide are by no means obsolete practices. As for

abortion, it has not decreased but increased with the advance of civilization. The reader will recall that one authority says that there are 1,000 000 abortions in the United States every year, while another estimates double that number.

Most of the women of the middle and upper classes in America seem secure in their knowledge of contraceptives as a means of birth control. Under present conditions, when the laws in most states regard this knowledge howsoever it be imparted, as illicit, and the federal statutes prohibit the sending of it through the mails, even the women in more fortunate circumstances sometimes have difficulty in getting scientific information. Nevertheless, so strong is their purpose that they do obtain it and use it correctly or incorrectly.

The great majority of women, however, belong to the working class. Nearly all of these women will fall into one of two general groups — the ones who are having children against their wills, and those who, to escape this evil, find refuge in abortion. Being given their choice by society — to continue to be overburdened mothers or to submit to a humiliat-

ing, repulsive, painful and too often gravely dangerous operation, those women in whom the feminine urge to freedom is strongest choose the abortionist. One group goes on bringing children to birth, hoping that they will be born dead or die. The women of the other group strive consciously by drastic means to protect themselves and the children already born.

Our examinations, says Dr Max Hirsch, an authority on the subject, 'have informed us that the largest number of abortions (in the United States) are performed on married women. This fact brings us to the conclusion that contraceptive measures among the upper classes and the practice of abortion among the lower class, are the real means employed to regulate the number of offspring.

Thus a high percentage of women in comfortable circumstances escape overbreeding by the use of contraceptives. A similarly high percentage of women not in comfortable circumstances are forced to submit to forced maternity, because their only alternative at present is abortion. When accidental conception takes place some women of both classes

resort to abortion if they can obtain the services of an abortionist

When society holds up its hands in horror at the "crime" of abortion, it forgets at whose door the first and principal responsibility for this practice rests. Does anyone imagine that a woman would submit to abortion if not denied the knowledge of scientific, effective contraceptives? Does anyone believe that physicians and midwives who perform abortions go from door to door soliciting patronage? The abortionist could not continue his practice for twenty-four hours if it were not for the fact that women come desperately begging for such operations. He could not stay out of jail a day if women did not so generally approve of his services as to hold his identity an open but seldom betrayed secret.

The question, then, is not whether family limitation should be practiced. It *is* being practiced, it has been practiced for ages and it will always be practiced. The question that society must answer is this: Shall family limitation be achieved through birth control or abortion? Shall normal, safe, effective contraceptives be employed, or shall we continue to force

## 122 WOMAN AND THE NEW RACE

women to the abnormal, often dangerous surgical operation?

This question, too, the church, the state and the moralist must answer. The knowledge of contraceptive methods may yet for a time be denied to the woman of the working class, but those who are responsible for denying it to her, and she herself, should understand clearly the dangers to which she is exposed because of the laws which force her into the hands of the abortionist.

To understand the more clearly the difference between birth control by contraceptives and family limitation through abortion it is necessary to know something of the processes of conception. Knowledge of these processes will also enable us to comprehend more thoroughly the dangers to which woman is exposed by our antiquated laws, and how much better it would be for her to employ such preventive measures as would keep her out of the hands of the abortionist, into which the laws now drive her.

In every woman's ovaries are imbedded millions of ovules or eggs. They are in every female at birth, and as the girl develops into

womanhood, these ovules develop also. At a certain age, varying slightly with the individual, the ripest ovule leaves the nest or ovary and comes down one of the tubes connecting with the womb and passes out of the body. When this takes place, it is said that the girl is at the age of puberty. When it reaches the womb the ovule is ready for the process of conception — that is, fertilization by the male sperm.

At the time the ovule is ripening the womb is preparing to receive it. This preparation consists of a reinforced blood supply brought to its lining. If fertilization takes place, the fertilized ovule or ovum will cling to the lining of the womb and there gather its nourishment. If fertilization does not take place, the ovum passes out of the body and the uterus throws off its surplus blood supply. This is called the menstrual period. It occurs about once a month or every twenty-eight days.

In the male organs there are glands called testes. They secrete a fluid called the semen. In the semen is the life giving principle called the sperm.

When intercourse takes place, if no preven-

tive is employed, the semen is deposited in the woman's vagina. The ovule is not in the vagina, but is in the womb, farther up, or perhaps in the tube on its way to the womb. As steel is attracted to the magnet, the sperm of the male starts on its way to seek the ovum. Several of these sperm cells start, but only one enters the ovum and is absorbed into it. This process is called fertilization, conception or impregnation.

If no children are desired, the meeting of the male sperm and the ovum must be prevented. When scientific means are employed to prevent this meeting, one is said to practice birth control. The means used is known as a contraceptive.

If, however, a contraceptive is not used and the sperm meets the ovule and development begins, any attempt at removing it or stopping its further growth is called abortion.

There is no doubt that women are apt to look upon abortion as of little consequence and to treat it accordingly. An abortion is as important a matter as a confinement and requires as much attention as the birth of a child at its full term.

“The immediate dangers of abortion,” says Dr J Clifton Edgar, in his book, *The Practice of Obstetrics* “are hemorrhage, retention of an adherent placenta, sepsis, tetanus, perforation of the uterus. They also cause sterility, anemia, malignant diseases, displacements, neurosis, and endometritis”

In plain, everyday language, in an abortion there is always a very serious risk to the health and often to the life of the patient

It is only the women of wealth who can afford the best medical skill, care and treatment both at the time of the operation and afterwards. In this way they escape the usual serious consequences

The women whose incomes are limited and who must continue at work before they have recovered from the effects of an abortion are the great army of sufferers. It is among such that the deaths due to abortion usually ensue. It is these, too, who are most often forced to resort to such operations

If death does not result, the woman who has undergone an abortion is not altogether safe from harm. The womb may not return to its natural size, but remain large and heavy, tend



## 126 WOMAN AND THE NEW RACE

ing to fall away from its natural position. Abortion often leaves the uterus in a condition to conceive easily again and unless prevention is strictly followed another pregnancy will surely occur. Frequent abortions tend to cause barrenness and serious, painful pelvic ailments. These and other conditions arising from such operations are very likely to ruin a woman's general health.

While there are cases where even the law recognizes an abortion as justifiable if recommended by a physician, I assert that the hundreds of thousands of abortions performed in America each year are a disgrace to civilization.

The effects of such operations upon a woman, serious as they may be, are nothing as compared to the injury done her general health by drugs taken to produce the same result. Even such drugs as are prescribed by physicians have harmful effects, and nostrums recommended by druggists are often worse still.

Even more drastic may be the effect upon the unborn child, for many women fill their systems with poisonous drugs during the first weeks of their pregnancy, only to decide at

fast, when drugs have failed, as they usually do, to bring the child to birth

There are no statistics, of course, by which we may compute the amount of suffering to mother and child from the use of such drugs, but we know that the total of physical weakness and disease must be astounding. We know that the woman's own system feels the strain of these drugs and that the embryo is usually poisoned by them. The child is likely to be rickety, have heart trouble, kidney disorder or to be generally weak in its powers of resistance. If it does not die before it reaches its first year, it is probable that it will have to struggle against some of these weaknesses until its adolescent period.

It needs no assertion of mine to call attention to the grim fact that the laws prohibiting the imparting of information concerning the preventing of conception are responsible for tens of thousands of deaths each year in this country and an untold amount of sickness and sorrow. The suffering and the death of these women is squarely upon the heads of the lawmakers and the puritanical, masculine minded

## 128 WOMAN AND THE NEW RACE

person who insist upon retaining the abominable legal restrictions

Try as they will they cannot escape the truth, nor hide it under the cloak of stupid hypocrisy. If the laws against imparting knowledge of scientific birth control were repealed, nearly all of the 1,000,000 or 2,000,000 women who undergo abortions in the United States each year would escape the agony of the surgeon's instruments and the long trail of disease, suffering and death which so often follows.

'He who would combat abortion,' says Dr Hirsch, and at the same time combat contraceptive measures may be likened to the person who would fight contagious diseases and forbid disinfection. For contraceptive measures are important weapons in the fight against abortion.

America has a law since 1873 which prohibits by criminal statute the distribution and regulation of contraceptive measures. It follows, therefore, that America stands at the head of all nations in the huge number of abortions.

There is the case in a nutshell. Family

limitation will always be practiced as it is now being practiced — either by birth control or by abortion We know that The one means health and happiness — a stronger, better race The other means disease, suffering, death

The woman who goes to the abortionist's table is not a criminal but a martyr — a martyr to the bitter, unthinkable conditions brought about by the blindness of society at large These conditions give her the choice between the surgeon's instruments and the sacrificing of what is highest and holiest in her — her aspiration to freedom, her desire to protect the children already hers These conditions — not the woman — outface society with this question

'Contraceptives or Abortion — which shall it be?'