

ANNOTATIONS

POPULATION: TODAY'S QUESTION¹

THIS is an excellent little book, in my opinion the best introduction to the study of population trends and their implications since Wright's *POPULATION*, which it will largely replace, being more recent. The objective of the author has been pleasantly achieved, as set forth in the following excerpt from the preface:

People who are interested in the population question seem to fall into three groups. Some view the decline in the birth-rate with disquiet, fearing that it will lead to disaster; others welcome it as tending to reduce unemployment and to alleviate what are thought to be other symptoms of overpopulation. The third group, which is probably the largest, is made up of people who wish to know more of the question before forming a definite opinion one way or the other. It is mainly for the assistance of the third group that this book is intended. Its aim is to give an impartial account of the more important aspects of the population question as they appear at the present time.

But there are many things in this book that are new, at least to the reviewer, mainly of historical character. In the first chapter entitled, "Before Malthus," the scholarship of the author is indicated by excerpts from Goldsmith, J. S. Mill, Cotter Morison, *Genesis*, *Psalms*, Zola, Grote, Holm, Aristotle, Polybius, Bacon, Cunningham, Roscher, Schmoller, Queen Elizabeth, Colbert, Quesnay, B. Franklin, Alcock, Arthur Young, Joseph Townsend, Hansard, and Whitbread, all woven into a delightful story requiring only twenty-five very small pages.

The next chapter on Malthus is equally well done—filled with sympathetic interpretation, admirable summary, and brilliant comment, par-

¹ McCleary, G. F.: *POPULATION: TODAY'S QUESTION*. London, George Allen and Unwin, Ltd., 1938, 222 pp. \$2.10.

ticularly those on the law of diminishing returns and the optimum population.

Chapter III, "The Great Population Increase," begins with a pertinent quotation from Boswell's *LIFE OF JOHNSON*, and then summarizes and comments upon the statistical data relating to the last two centuries, a unique period in which the population of the world has increased probably twice as much as in all the centuries preceding.

Then comes a chapter entitled, "The Balance of Births and Deaths," appropriately introduced by a quotation from Kuczynski. Other chapters are entitled, "Reproduction in Europe"; "Birth Control"—an excellent chapter, largely historical, which shows that contraception has been practiced since the days of ancient Egypt; "The Desire for Family Limitation"; "Some Social and Economic Consequences of a Declining Population"—a pleasant, noncontroversial discussion, which clearly shows, however, the profound implications in present trends; "The Pursuit of Population"; and "Quality and Quantity."

Only in the last chapter, "Conclusion," does the author reveal his personal opinions. Three quotations are pertinent:

Nothing that we can do in the reduction of mortality can prevent the decline. It can only be prevented by an increase in fertility. It cannot too strongly be emphasized that we are not moving towards a stationary population. If that were so, it could reasonably be contended that there is no cause for disquiet. We are moving towards a rapid diminution in the number of our people, and it is a movement towards disaster. . . .

What are we to do about it? Two things at all events should be done. One is to make the facts of the position widely known. Nothing is more deeply rooted in the public mind than that our unemployment figures prove that there are too many people in the country, and that it is a sign of a good citizen that he should have few children or no children at all. Such ideas are held even in quarters where a more instructed view might well be expected. There is general agreement among those who have given special attention to population problems that the fall in the birth-rate has been brought about mainly, if not entirely, by the voluntary limitation of the family. It is a question of the will, and the will is powerfully influenced by the prevailing ideas of the time. One of those ideas is the fear of over-population; and until it is dispelled it is vain to expect that fertility will rise sufficiently to prevent the rapid population decline that looms ahead.

The second thing we have to do is to make a thorough study of the population question as a preliminary step towards formulating a population policy. We do not know enough to say what measures are likely to be effective in raising fertility. The experience of other countries does not encourage us to follow their example. In no country, except Germany, is there anything definite to show for the efforts that have been made; and the conditions in which the birth-rate has risen in Germany, since the coming into power of the National Socialists in 1933, are so exceptional that it would be unsafe to assume that what has been effective there would be effective elsewhere. It would be useless to embark upon a population policy until we have good grounds for thinking that it would take us where we want to go. . . .

Experience shows that it is much easier to get the birth-rate down than to get it up. We shall probably find, adapting Mill's words quoted at the head of this chapter, that when the object is to raise the fertility of a people, "small means do not merely produce small effects; they produce no effects at all."

This is a popular, yet a profound book, done in the simple readable style of the English scholar.

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THE VITAMINS

JUST six years ago a symposium on the vitamins which had appeared in *The Journal of the American Medical Association* was published in monograph form. Now a second symposium on that subject¹, after having appeared last year in the same *Journal*, is likewise published as a monograph.

The opening sentence strikes the keynote when it states: "The achievements in the science of nutrition which have developed in recent years are among the most significant of all that have been made in modern medical science." And the succeeding chapters bear out this assertion.

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¹ THE VITAMINS. A Symposium Arranged under the Auspices of the Council on Pharmacy and Chemistry and the Council on Foods of the American Medical Association. Chicago, American Medical Association, 1939, 637 pp. \$1.50.