

MARIE STOPES COMES TO OXFORD

Population is vexation,
Genetics are as bad;
The law of God perplexes me,
And babies drive me mad!

OSTENSIBLY to deliver a serious lecture, but actually to spread birth control propaganda, Dr. Marie Stopes came to Oxford. Her talk, which had been announced as a scientific one, soon wandered off into a maze of confusing statistics and sentimental appeal. Having tried vainly to disentangle these elements from the rest of the text, the casual observer must be forgiven for wondering whether Dr. Stopes is ever capable of either scientific or logical thought.

Dr. Stopes, who is a doctor of philosophy and not a medico, is a lively and amusing speaker, as well as a woman of considerable charm, but it is difficult to decide whether she is a sentimental scientist or a scientific sentimentalist.

Taking her audience into her confidence at the very start, Dr. Stopes, very prettily, asked them please to stop smoking, not only because it hurt her throat, 'but because,' with a slight feminine flutter, 'I just don't like smoking.' Having taken this womanly prerogative, she launched into her unwomanly subject with considerable vigour.

With a thoroughness that was somewhat breathless, Dr. Stopes sailed into the physiological and biological processes of generation and the grave patriotic duty of limiting one's off-spring, though in deference to her mixed audience, she did not give us the exact details how this was to be achieved. Though why Dr. Stopes should suddenly have felt shy, considering her previous remarks, is surprising. But the quarrel with Dr.

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Stopes is not for being appallingly frank, but for mixing medical terms with popular metaphors. If, as a scientist, she presents her facts clearly and scientifically, she is entitled to intelligent judgment; but if, as a sentimentalist, she proceeds to harangue her listeners, she deserves indignant criticism.

As for the lecture itself, there was nothing new, nothing original, and very little scientific about it. All the old threadbare arguments of the eugenicist were there, beginning with a gloomy over-population standing three deep on each others' shoulders, and ending with a sad picture of the de-vitalized human mother unfavourably compared to the more fortunate ruminating animal.

There was a plea for 'quality not quantity' in next year's babies, and several rather dreadful stories of 'hard cases' with proper melodramatic pauses after each, pauses filled by the shocked silences of the undergraduates.

On this subject of quality, Dr. Stopes became embarrassingly personal. 'You are not a beautiful enough room full to please my eye,' she smiled, sizing up our various physiognomies in this awful manner, 'what I should really like to see would be a group of really god-like men and women.' Sorry, Dr. Stopes, we can't please everybody, and even the ugliest of us seem beautiful to our mothers, and possibly Mr. Epstein. In that Utopia which is coming when men shall at last 'endeavour to breed on more rational lines,' we will doubtless do better. In the meantime, I suppose, we should be grateful to our parents for having had us at all.

People would be far happier if they could control the yearly output of babies, continued Dr. Stopes, painting a harrowing picture of the little unwanted child. On this theory, most of us would never have been born. For it is never really convenient to have

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a baby, and babies, bless 'em, have a way of choosing the most inconvenient times to appear. In fact, it is proof of the deeply rooted maternal instinct that most of us weren't drowned before our eyes were open. Yet in spite of this, and of Dr. Stopes, babies continue to get born in increasing numbers; perhaps (this is very old-fashioned) mothers may not mind having a few babies about after all.

Dr. Stopes referred several times to various books which she had written, especially '100 Cases.' Granted that the one hundred cases she mentions are all desperately hard cases, could not there be found the same number whose lives have been wrecked by the very methods which Dr. Stopes advocates? High authority in the medical profession says yes, but Dr. Stopes dismisses this opinion with a shrug and some such remark as 'O, yes, dear old Sir ——, a little old-fashioned as some of the older men are inclined to be, he is one of the few who does oppose us still. But I need hardly tell you, men of science (eighteen and nineteen year old undergraduates!) that most of the younger men are with us.'

One wonders, in reading them over, if most of the one hundred cases aren't made up of the type of people who break down under life and its responsibilities under almost any pressure. Most of us could point off-hand to one hundred splendid fathers and mothers, who under great difficulty and much sacrifice are raising large families of children into decent citizens. Perhaps it is a point of view that the modern eugenicist cannot understand, but certainly, if people do the best they can and work hard, the good God will provide some way of looking after their children.

However, something must be done, says Dr. Stopes, to make the mothers want quality, not quantity, and she has laid elaborate plans to keep us from having to stand in that undignified manner on each other's

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shoulders. But alas, there are two forces which stand between Dr. Stopes and her plan for a happier and brighter land. These are the politicians and the Church.

‘The politicians want more babies because they want more soldiers for cannon fodder,’ wails Dr. Stopes, wringing her hands. O, Dr. Stopes, cannon fodder went out with the Raemaeker cartoons and the Socialist soap box orator.

Hand in hand with the politicians, jowl to jowl, so to speak, stands ‘that repressed minority, the Roman Catholic Church,’ ‘at least,’ added Dr. Stopes hastily, ‘the minority in England.’

‘When we know how to breed animals, why should we let the theologians and the politicians tell us that we should have a rotten civilization?’ she demanded. Why indeed, my dear madam, especially as this is also the vicious aim of the Pope!

‘They are so appallingly well organised,’ sighs Dr. Stopes, ‘and as you know, the average Englishman is not well organised.’ No, Dr. Stopes, it is that insidious foreign influence, with headquarters in Rome, which, grinding down the faces of the poor, prods them on with threats of hell fire, to write to their respective M.P.’s telling them how to vote. This troublesome minority flood Parliament with letters, with petitions and with documents, and some of them actually stand in the corridors waiting to poke the members in the ribs with their umbrellas and walking sticks. Fully ninety per cent. of the nation (these are Dr. Stopes’ figures, not mine) want birth control, yet this narrow bigoted little group are willing to stand between the nation and happiness. It might be added in all seriousness, that what this little group are really doing is to stand between the nation and race suicide!

‘You may live in a mystic world if you choose,’ says Dr. Stopes broad-mindedly, ‘but you have no right to

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try and impose your views on others.' And why not? Why haven't I the perfect right of disputing the scatter-brained theories of a woman who in one breath tells me that 'if people obey the Church, they will have a child every sixteen years,' and in the next, deplores the number of Catholic babies? By just what mental processes Dr. Stopes arrives at these two extraordinary conclusions is a mystery, and is only one of the many examples of contradictory statements throughout her lecture.

'Love is the only excuse for marriage,' she said, and proceeded to draw a lovely romantic picture of the Buddhist ideal of passing on from one transmigration to another with one's soul mate. The one man for the one woman, this is the norm, yet a little later she refers to this as 'the narrow Christian ideal.' Divorce should be easy, which is not surprising, as all her emphasis is on the physical relationship between husband and wife, which, if not a happy one, should leave the parties free to go elsewhere. Easy divorce and slipping on into Eternity with one's soul mate does not seem very compatible, but perhaps one would have to experiment several times to discover just who were and who were not soul mates. And what happens to the children? But, perhaps, such tangible and practical questions do not arise in Dr. Stopes' Utopia.

More garbled, if possible, than the lecture, were the questions and answers which followed it. If a woman, otherwise happily married, but wanting children, finds that marriage does not fulfil this condition, she should be free to seek another mate, returning to her husband, who is supposed to welcome this arrangement. Also, Dr. Stopes said, in answer to a question, that it is better for a few young people to experiment with extra-marital relationships than that their whole future should be wrecked, 'yet,' she added seriously, 'for England at least, monogamy is the ideal . . . for the

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future will show that the social *mores* are not yet arranged to take seriously the breeding of the race.'

The chairman of the meeting, thinking probably that Dr. Stopes had got beyond the depth of her audience, to say nothing of having deviated from the subject completely, asked if she did not think that birth-control promoted immorality.

To which Dr. Stopes replied, as might be expected, 'Just what do you mean by immorality? What is immoral to-day will be moral to-morrow.'

This is quite a logical conclusion for Dr. Stopes to have reached. Having started with a false premise, it is not surprising that she should end with one.

If Dr. Stopes had delivered, as had been expected of her, a scientific exposition of her proposition, however wrong her conclusions, she would have received respectful attention, but when she mixes fact with fancy and sob stories with statistics, she deserves slight courtesy. The spectacle of a charming woman, standing up before a crowded lecture room of young men, and denouncing with one superbly sentimental gesture, all the things that women have stood for in their English family life, must have won many of her audience over to our side. So unwittingly, she has served the very people and institutions she dismisses so casually. The Catholic Church, the eminent medical authority, the University and the rest of us who oppose her aren't all utter fools!

J. SHRADY POST.