

## Sex, Science, and Race Betterment

Like moths to a flame, eugenicists were inexorably drawn to the issue of sexuality. The reproduction of the degenerate, the irrational breeding of the feeble-minded, the swamping of Canada by prolific aliens were all subjected by hereditarians to morbid analysis. But they were not content to draw up negative policies to curb the fertility of the unfit; they also sought to assist in the breeding of the fit. To generations of Canadians worried that the increase in the numbers of women working outside the home, the decline in fertility, and the rise in divorces signalled the death of the traditional family, the eugenicists brought the comforting news that such threats could be countered. In moving from the discussion of the sexuality of the “abnormal” to the sexuality of the “normal,” they took leading positions as the sex educators of early twentieth-century Canada.

The eugenically minded, in broaching what had theretofore remained taboo subjects – sex education, venereal disease, and birth control – presented themselves as progressive reformers, if not revolutionaries. They clearly did violate the sensibilities of many conservatives who opposed the public discussion of such private matters. It is also obvious that many ordinary Canadians – in being provided contraceptives to limit their fertility or prophylactics to protect them from disease – benefited in a practical way from such undertakings. But the intent of the eugenicists, in bringing sexual questions into the open, was not to give individuals the means by which they could freely gratify their passions. On the contrary, the eugenicists sought by investigation, categorization, and education to subject sexuality to greater control than had ever existed in the past. If the reformers had their way, the most private acts would become subject to the social management of experts.<sup>1</sup>

Eugenicists sought to control and direct sexuality in the first in-

stance by bringing sexual life under public scrutiny. They were among the first to argue that sexual education of children could no longer be left to chance. If ideas and attitudes might eventually affect the well-being of the race it was imperative, they reasoned, that the young be exposed only to those judged healthy and wholesome. The reformers positively exulted in their own intrusiveness. It was their boast that they would ultimately purge youth of their secrets, morbid curiosities, and hidden desires.<sup>2</sup> In an early age ministers could only brandish moral injunctions in their attempts to control the sexual impulses of the young; the eugenicists' message was that if the new generation had revealed to it the dangers posed by a perverse pleasure, a venereal infection, or a thoughtless marriage, then a far more efficient form of self-discipline could be instilled.

The fact that parents were in effect being usurped as the sex educators of the young was in part masked by women eugenicists assuming the maternal role of instructing children in sexuality. The National Council of Women, although it did have its conservative members and sensed the opposition of "ignorant and ashamed parents," was adamant in its call for the rational enlightenment of young people. The Council was of the opinion that one could never start too early to teach the facts of life properly in all their "purity and beauty" and so make youth understand their responsibilities to the race.<sup>3</sup> The same concern for "race improvement" surfaced in 1910 at the fourth annual meeting of the superintendents of training schools for nurses in a discussion centred on a paper of Dr. Jennie Gray. Such advances could only be expected, Gray argued, if children were rationally instructed in biology. She recommended as texts for such "birds and bees" pedagogy *Child Confidence Rewarded* and *What a Young Girl Ought to Know*.<sup>4</sup> In Manitoba, Beatrice Brigden, a member of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, the Women's Labor League, and the Political Equality League, was employed in 1913 by the Methodist Department of Social Service and Evangelism to provide such lectures on sex hygiene. Much of her information was drawn from Scott Nearing's *Women and Social Progress*, a compendium of progressive American eugenic thought.<sup>5</sup>

Doctors were also quick to enter the discussion of sex education. In 1911 the Sex Hygiene Council of the Vancouver branch of the British Columbia Medical Association recommended giving lectures on sexuality in the schools. In a 1916 report the Council congratulated itself on having instituted the first such program in Canada, though admitting that the terms "sex hygiene" and "social hygiene" were not employed

because they might have aroused the prudish. A few special lectures on human biology simply followed a regular science course and even those appeared to have been very discreet.<sup>6</sup>

Psychologists also offered their counsels. Peter Sandiford, in a 1922 article in *Public Health Journal* calling for a more rational approach to reproduction, provided as a model extracts from a text on sex education produced by the Teachers' College of Columbia University. He argued that the home was not an effective forum for such instruction and called on experts imbued with a "dignified frankness" to take up the challenge. Assuming it himself, Sandiford produced *Tell Your Children the Truth* (1926), which was distributed by the Canadian Social Hygiene Council.<sup>7</sup>

A host of groups and individuals in the interwar period – doctors, nurses, Protestant ministers, social workers, the National Council of Women, the Canadian Social Hygiene Council, the Canadian Girls in Training, the YMCA, the YWCA – imbued to a greater or lesser extent with the eugenic preoccupation of "race betterment," were raising the cry that parents were not providing their children with adequate information on sexuality.<sup>8</sup> But though some parents might have been cowed into believing that the experts were better qualified to instruct children in sex matters, the fact was that the eugenicists were usually parroting old moralistic maxims simply dressed up in scientific garb.

In Ontario the most active of the sex lecturers was Arthur W. Beall, whose *The Living Temple: A Manual on Eugenics for Parents and Teachers* (1933) provides a fascinating account of the sort of ideas to which several generations of schoolchildren were exposed. Between 1905 and 1911 Beall, a former teacher and missionary, lectured across the province as a "purity agent" of the Ontario Woman's Christian Temperance Union. From 1911 until the 1930's he continued his work as a special lecturer for the Ontario Department of Education.<sup>9</sup> The gist of Beall's talks was that for the child to harm his or her own body was foolish, wicked, and "unpatriotic." Healthy children, he informed his fascinated classes, were worth about \$50,000 each and so rated as "Canada's most valuable products."<sup>10</sup> It followed that the child had a duty to exercise, eat well, and shun filthy habits such as smoking, swearing, and telling smutty stories.

But having dismissed the girls, Beall proceeded to tell the boys that the greatest danger to life was posed by masturbation. If the "LIFE FLUID" was lost from the "LIFE GLANDS" the result was "mental bankruptcy." A boy from Perth County, Beall warned his listeners, ended up in an insane asylum because of this evil habit.

He couldn't keep his hands off the MALE PART of his body – a half dozen times a day he was playing with it, and bleeding away the precious LIFE FLUID, until one day the doctors came along and cut off the two LIFE GLANDS, just to keep the miserable dregs of a miserable existence from all being frittered away. And there [in the asylum], after all these years, useless to God or man, he still exists as a bit of mental punk, a scrap of rotting refuse on life's highway.<sup>11</sup>

Following such a harrowing account it can be assumed that Beall gained the compliance of his terrified pupils when he concluded his lesson with the injunction: "Please repeat after me: 'The more you use the penis muscle, the weaker it becomes; but the less you use the penis muscle, the stronger it becomes!'"<sup>12</sup>

What did all of this have to do with the science of eugenics? The answer has to be, very little. It is true that Beall sprinkled his stories with references to the importance of breeding. Sound fatherhood, he informed the boys, consisted of the "raising of A.1 thoroughbred live-stock." But the essential arguments against self-abuse were the old ones found in nineteenth-century texts meant for men, such as the Reverend W.J. Hunter's *Manhood: Wrecked and Rescued* (1894).<sup>13</sup> What was essentially different in twentieth-century works like Beall's was that children were now being provided with mystifying accounts of sexual matters by purported experts who implicitly or explicitly attacked the competency of parents and friends to deal with such subjects. The term "eugenics" in the title of a book such as Beall's signified little more than the claim that sexuality was to be discussed in a modern, scientific manner.

Young Canadian men and women of marriageable age were also instructed in sex matters by the eugenicists. Between 1905 and 1916 the Canadian Purity-Education Association, led by Dr. Peter H. Bryce, sponsored lectures and distributed literature on the horrors of masturbation and venereal disease.<sup>14</sup> In Ontario, Dr. J.E. Hett of Kitchener devoted a series of columns in the *Industrial Banner* of 1920 to the need for sex education. In Hett's grandiose scheme a government department would be created to deal with sex along eugenic lines. "The laws of sex should be studied," he asserted, "and virtue should be aimed at with the greatest ideals of life." It was ignorance, he implied, that led to the thousands of masturbators he had come across whose "sexual onanism" filled the asylums with lunatics and caused more ill health than syphilis and tuberculosis.<sup>15</sup> Hett also called for a "Ministry of Motherhood" that would establish maternity homes, financially com-

persuade fit women for the expense of their pregnancies, and popularize the “science of eugenics” and the knowledge of sexuality it offered. That there was a demand in Canada for such information seems apparent. Dr. J.J. Heagerty reported in 1924 that his lectures on sex education and the accompanying film he showed (produced by the American Social Hygiene Association) at times drew crowds so large that the police were required to control them.<sup>16</sup>

Such crowds were not simply a result of the reformers’ particular success in supplying information on the workings of the body. Two major preoccupations created a demand in the early twentieth century for any material that dealt with sexual practices. The first concern was the desire of countless Canadians to limit family size safely and effectively; the second was to obtain protection from the ravages of venereal disease. To deal with the second issue first, it has to be recalled that at the turn of the century the full impact of syphilis in causing sterility, miscarriages, neonatal blindness, insanity, and paralysis was beginning to be understood by physicians and made known to the public.<sup>17</sup> But the fact that syphilis could be congenitally – though not genetically – transmitted was not fully comprehended by most men and women. Eugenicists saw the value of playing up the idea of the hereditary nature of immorality and prostitution. By exploiting the fear of venereal disease they had yet another way in which to establish the argument that sexuality, if not understood and rationally controlled, could pose dangers to the nation.<sup>18</sup>

Eugenicists claimed that syphilis and its conduit – prostitution – imperilled the race. Dr. Charles Hastings, Toronto’s medical health officer, informed the 1914 Social Service Congress that venereal disease led to degeneration and depopulation, high infant mortality, and low national efficiency. It was spread by prostitutes who turned to their trade, he asserted, not out of a need for money but as a result of a natural penchant. Citing the findings of the American eugenicist Charles Davenport, Hastings reported that “Evidence is accumulating to show that the primary factor is an inherited predisposition towards an exceptionally active sexual life.”<sup>19</sup> The Alberta suffragist and police magistrate Emily Murphy similarly associated disease and deviant behaviour in noting that a third of Alberta’s prisoners had to be treated for gonorrhoea or syphilis.<sup>20</sup>

Since the eugenicists associated venereal disease more with specific types of behaviour rather than with specific types of bacteria, the solutions they called for to combat it tended to be more socially than medically targeted. Their concerns were inextricably tied to social and cultural values relating to sexuality, gender, ethnicity, and class. They

used fear of disease as a means of social control, attacking as carriers of VD those they viewed as threats – the immigrants, the feeble-minded, and the women who violated appropriate gender roles. They argued, for example, that prostitutes not be jailed for short sentences but locked up in colonies for long periods during which they could be taught the housewifely chores of “normal” women.

Feeble-mindedness was posited by Helen MacMurphy and others as a root cause of prostitution.<sup>21</sup> C.K. Clarke claimed that 60 per cent of prostitutes were mentally deficient.<sup>22</sup> The feeble-minded became prostitutes, it was asserted, and spread syphilis, which in turn created another generation of the feeble-minded. To break this vicious cycle, the argument went, it would be necessary to prevent the reproduction of the feeble-minded and thus eventually the spread of venereal disease. It was in this context that Dr. Margaret Patterson argued in 1914 that,

Cases of natural viciousness in either sex should be given surgical treatment. It is the only kind or safe method. When we have thus treated our cases we are in a position to help them back to a moral life and send them out as did our Master when he said: “Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more.”<sup>23</sup>

It says something of the eerie self-righteousness of Patterson that in the very midst of a plea for the forcible sterilization of the unfit she could congratulate herself on not being judgemental.

When the First World War broke out large numbers of prostitutes were summarily rounded up and jailed under the Defence of Canada Order. Their illness was their crime. In France, where eventually over 66,000 cases of venereal disease were detected, the army finally accepted the necessity of providing the troops with prophylactic packs.<sup>24</sup> Worried by the prospect of the return of the expeditionary force, the Conservation Commission of Canada published in 1917 a report on *The Prevalence of Venereal Disease in Canada*. The coercive views of the experts, led by C.K. Clarke of the University of Toronto, were reflected in its recommending the public registration and isolation of the diseased and the segregation of the mentally deficient. The latter, the report concluded, were “unfit to understand their responsibilities and it is from this class that the majority of prostitutes and moral perverts are recruited. This class should either become wards of the state, or be rendered innocuous by reverting to the logical but extreme measure of unsexing.”<sup>25</sup> The government of the day was not prepared to go so far, but it did follow up one of the recommendations of the Committee in establishing the federal Department of Health as a policing instrument.

At the war's end a National Council for Combatting Venereal Disease, later known as the Canadian Social Hygiene Council, was established in Toronto under the leadership of Dr. Gordon Bates. Its activities were mainly educational, including bringing English suffragist Mrs. Emmeline Pankhurst to Canada in 1923 for a nation-wide lecture tour. As Bates made clear, the goal of his Council was that set by Havelock Ellis in his classic text, *The Task of Social Hygiene* – the building up of the race. If only eugenic marriages were allowed and all citizens subjected to annual checkups, it was possible, argued Bates, to foresee the end of most diseases.<sup>26</sup>

What the social hygienists said very little about was the fact that Paul Ehrlich's discovery of Salvarsan in 1909 had produced a fairly effective treatment for syphilis and that the condom provided a good measure of safety against most venereal infections. Their silence on these matters was due to their concern not to appear to countenance promiscuity. It was characteristic of this approach that A.C. Jost, provincial health officer of Nova Scotia, lumped together as causes of race extinction venereal disease, drink, divorce, and birth control.<sup>27</sup> The eugenicists wanted to control more effectively individual behaviour, not provide greater licence. Preoccupied by the need to regulate public and private conduct, they viewed venereal disease as a *symptom* of more dangerous evils – irrationality, promiscuity, perversity. Eugenicists were making the old argument in favour of restraint but dressing it up in modern biological language.

Most of the discussion of venereal disease centred on the sexual practices of the unmarried, but physicians used the public preoccupation with this menace to argue that even those contemplating marriage should consult a doctor.<sup>28</sup> In 1899 the state of Michigan made venereal disease a bar to marriage, and by 1913 six other states had followed with similar laws. In Canada progress was slower, but the attempt was made to subject a broader segment of the community to surveillance. In 1909 *Canada Lancet* demanded that degenerates, criminals, epileptics, and alcoholics be denied marriage.<sup>29</sup> In 1919 Dr. A.H. Desloges wrote in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* on the necessity of requiring prospective couples to produce "sanitary testimonials" in order to end all presumably heredity-linked diseases.<sup>30</sup> The same argument was made in a report introduced by Charlotte Whitton to the 1921 Social Service Congress:

... many unhappy and nationally undesirable homes exist because of the lack of provision preventing those, physically or mentally

incapable of leading the normal family life, and procreating a normal, healthy family group.<sup>31</sup>

Despite warnings that such laws would not be enforceable or, as had been the case in Australia, simply would lead to a surge in the illegitimacy rate, Whitton's Canadian Council on Child Welfare continued to press for such legislation through the 1920's. Not surprisingly, in the West, where sterilization was enforced, eugenic measures were first applied to marriage. In Alberta in 1935, in Saskatchewan in 1936, and in British Columbia in 1938 evidence was required that prospective mates were free of syphilis.<sup>32</sup> The limited success enjoyed elsewhere in Canada by those who hoped to police marriage could be attributed to Catholic opposition, legislators' recognition of the obvious difficulties of enforcing such statutes, and the legal profession's reluctance to include the medical profession in the controlling of marriage contracts.<sup>33</sup>

Youths tempted by masturbation and young people tainted by venereal disease were the eugenicists' first concerns; only later did they turn their attention to the sex lives of "normal" couples. Married Canadians in search of reproductive knowledge but leery of quack pamphlets on self-abuse and nervous debility had to rely on American sex manuals in the pre-World War One period, particularly the eight volumes of the "Self and Sex Series" distributed in Canada by William Briggs, official publisher of the Methodist Church. Along with their warnings against masturbation and sexual excesses, they informed their readers that due to the "Law of Heredity" a host of physical and psychological taints were passed on from parent to child.<sup>34</sup> The authors of these volumes argued, however, that self-improvement was possible and could also be transmitted to future generations. In embracing the notion of "acquired characteristics" they were defending a position that most eugenicists came to regard by 1914 as very much out of date.<sup>35</sup>

In the interwar period Canadians in search of sex instruction still relied to a great extent on foreign authors. The Canadian Social Hygiene Council continued to recommend the works of such British authors as Maude Royden, Edward Carpenter, and Havelock Ellis. American influence was also unavoidable. In 1925 W.F. Harrison of the Canadian Publishers Association bewailed the fact that American magazines on sexy subjects with such alluring titles as *Spicy Stories*, *Snappy Stories*, and *The Pepper Pot* were penetrating Canada.<sup>36</sup> But they were accompanied by more wholesome treatments of sexuality, including Dr. M.J. Exner's *The Rational Sex Life of Man* and *The*



*Question of Petting*. The high tone of the latter work – distributed by the YMCA and the American Social Hygiene Council – was captured by a passage in which the young reader was warned that the degenerative effects of promiscuity blighted the possibility of a happy marriage in the same way that an early addiction to jazz rendered a person incapable of enjoying a symphony.<sup>37</sup>

In the 1930's the two most thorough marriage manuals produced in Canada were both heavily weighted by eugenic concerns: Dr. Morris Siegel's *Constructive Eugenics and Rational Marriage* (1934) and A.H. Tyrer's *Sex, Marriage, and Birth Control (Lifting the Blinds on Marriage)* (1936). Siegel, a Hamilton physician, called for the restriction of the marriage of the alcoholic, the feeble-minded, the epileptic, and the tubercular, but acknowledged the dangers of overly repressive measures.<sup>38</sup> His main concern was with "constructive" as opposed to "restrictive" eugenic methods. With the breaking of the old system of arranged marriages and the pursuit of individual sexual pleasure, marriage had become "reckless, nonselective, and irrational."<sup>39</sup> But doctors had brought down the rate of infant mortality and if given the power, he argued, they could similarly lower the level of degeneration: "What the paediatrician has done for babies, the eugenicist may do for the young adults contemplating marriage."<sup>40</sup> The creation of a Federal Eugenic Department policing marriages would, he believed, radically improve the health of the nation.

The Jewish race, according to Siegel, provided an example of how a tradition of arranged marriages permitted the maintenance over countless generations of high levels of intellectual success and morality.<sup>41</sup> He did not suggest that this was due to innate superiority. Indeed, he argued that most eugenicists were unduly pessimistic in assuming that only the established class and ethnic elite had good germ plasm. Civilization benefited, according to Siegel, as the aggressive lower orders fought their way to the top.

With hindsight, it might seem surprising that a Jewish doctor – no matter how critical he was of the extravagances of the eugenicists – should range himself alongside those in favour of "improving the race." Siegel was not unaware, as he noted in *Population, Race, and Eugenics* (1939), that many eugenicists were in fact anti-Semites.<sup>42</sup> His hope, nevertheless, was that eugenics could purge itself of its racism and concentrate on the main issue of advancing the concept of "rational marriage." This hope was shared by Rabbi Maurice N. Eisendrath, who also was active in pushing for the sterilization of the feeble-minded and in calling – as he did in a 1936 talk at the Holy Blossom Temple in Toronto – for happier marriages made possible by greater access to

birth control. The fact that Jews in Canada and elsewhere were actively involved in eugenics was one more indication of the success with which the movement presented itself as an objective science, not as a racist cause.<sup>43</sup>

Maurice Eisendrath contributed a blurb recommending Tyrer's *Sex, Marriage, and Birth Control*, which provided a far more practical discussion of married love than Siegel's book. Chapters dealt with the issues of monogamy, repression, male and female sex organs, the art and frequency of intercourse, pregnancy, the dangers of abortion, and birth control. Tyrer's depiction of sexuality, including as it did an emphasis on love play and the importance of clitoral stimulation, seemed worlds away from the moralistic messages produced by eugenicists earlier in the century. But if the style was new the message was familiar. Tyrer began his study by citing sources that asserted that the "generally irresponsible classes," "the lower fourth" of the population, produced more than half of the next generation.<sup>44</sup> The population problem, he claimed, could only be solved if the birth rate of the unfit was curbed; if birth control to save the family from such evils as "sexual disharmony," divorce, and abortion was provided; and if government benefits to encourage the breeding of the professional classes were made available. "As soon as a social system is evolved that will remedy all this and take away from parents the fear that more children may mean more distress and poverty," wrote Tyrer, "we shall find the birth-rate among the best citizens increasing."<sup>45</sup>

Tyrer had retired from the Anglican ministry in 1929 and in his sixties turned his attention to the issues of sex education and birth control.<sup>46</sup> In the winter of 1931-32 he was contacted by another eugenicist interested in contraception, the Kitchener businessman A.R. Kaufman. Kaufman supported Tyrer's efforts and ultimately established in 1933 his own Parent's Information Bureau to distribute contraceptives across Canada. By 1942 he had over fifty nurses working for him across the nation and had sent out more than 120,000 contraceptive packages. More importantly, he had in 1936-37 successfully defended in court his right to do so.<sup>47</sup>

Birth control had found its first few defenders in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries among either the socially conservative Malthusians on the right or the sex radicals on the libertarian left. The real breakthrough in the popularization of the idea of the legitimacy of contraception occurred in the 1920's when Marie Stopes in England and Margaret Sanger in America exploited the emotional notion that only freedom from fear of unwanted pregnancies would permit the happy sex life essential for domestic stability. Both Sanger and Stopes

had their followers in Canada, but a native, nation-wide birth control movement only began to emerge in the 1930's as a result of the efforts of Tyrer and Kaufman.<sup>48</sup> The significance of their activities was that they defended birth control on eugenic grounds. In doing so they were reversing the argument advanced by earlier Canadian eugenicists, who opposed contraception on the grounds that it was employed by the very families who should have been encouraged to reproduce. It thus contributed directly to the differential birth rate – the unfit having large families and the fit having small families – which was the very menace that forced the eugenicists to broach the sex question in the first place.

The venom with which eugenicists attacked the spectre of the fertility differential was perhaps best manifested in Watson Kirkconnell's writings of the early 1920's. Kirkconnell, a professor of literature at Wesley College (later to become the University of Winnipeg), an active Baptist, and a rabid anti-Communist, is worth reappraising. Because of his work with Maurice Eisendrath and Claris Silcox on the Board of Jewish-Gentile Relationships and his defence of eastern European immigrants, he has been presented as a benign pioneer of multiculturalism.<sup>49</sup> It comes therefore as somewhat of a shock to find in his *International Aspects of Unemployment* (1923) Canada described as a country afflicted with:

an ever-increasing plague of useless and inefficient citizens doomed to worthlessness even before their unconsidered births. . . . In the severe competition of primitive life they would have been speedily eliminated by their very unfitness; but in the modern State they have been preserved, often in greater comfort than the hard-working unskilled labourer, and given every chance to increase after their kind.<sup>50</sup>

To end "the physical engendering of undesirables" Kirkconnell called for their segregation in forced labour colonies where they could be "made available for scientific treatment" and "special disposal and care on the part of the State."<sup>51</sup> Some might be "regenerated," but Kirkconnell envisaged that most would be:

maintained in life-long segregation, not as a matter of punishment but for the preservation of society; and for the same profound and fundamental reasons they should be prevented, through surgical sterilization, from reproducing their worthless kind. The blessing which would be thus bestowed on a nation, by draining off from its germ-plasm those elements through which dishonesty, intemper-

ance of conduct, violence, laziness, perversion, and all of the most darkly antisocial qualities are inevitably perpetrated in its inheritance, is beyond computation.<sup>52</sup>

Birth control, which Kirkconnell defined as the “social program whereby the fitter elements of a community forgo normal parenthood and leave the future of the race to the teeming progeny of the unfit and improvident,” had to be necessarily condemned as a “dysgenic gospel.”<sup>53</sup>

The *Dalhousie Review* carried an article in 1925 that echoed these concerns.

The licence society allows at present to the criminal, the insane and the feeble-minded to multiply at pleasure, and to have their worse than worthless offspring cared for at the public expense, or rather at the expense of those who feel too heavily taxed to produce children that would yield better returns to the community – that is, after all, something of a social oversight.<sup>54</sup>

The problem was that though the eugenicists could suggest a variety of ways to curb the fertility of the unfit, they found it difficult to envisage ways to encourage the breeding of the fit. They certainly could not hope to coerce the middle class into having larger families.

Beginning on an emotional level, eugenicists’ first response was to attack the patriotism of the healthy members of the middle class who, in refusing to bear more than one or two children, were in effect “sterilizing” themselves. Thus in 1918 Dr. W.A. Lincoln of Calgary upbraided middle-class women because, in his words, “the shifting of their maternal duty to the weary shoulders and the work-racked bodies of their less ‘well-placed’ sisters; or to the too carelessly prolific immigrant lays these women open to the charge of national disregard.”<sup>55</sup> Helen MacMurphy chimed in with the argument that “Those who marry but voluntarily refuse parenthood are robbing themselves of their greatest joy, and are failing to serve the highest interests of their country and their generation.”<sup>56</sup>

Feminism was singled out by a number of commentators as exacerbating the situation inasmuch as it lured healthy women away from their natural duties as wives and mothers and toward the professional world of men. University women, the readers of *Dalhousie Review* were informed in 1930, were generally “infertile.”<sup>57</sup> In a different essay in the same journal William D. Tait, professor of psychology at McGill University, asserted that it was necessary to veto the “feminist cry of birth control”.

Nature makes it plain . . . that to produce great variations we must have large numbers from which to select. To insure the greatest possible number of great minds, there must be the possibility of selection from a great number. Birth control would forbid this possibility.<sup>58</sup>

Tait accused the women who employed birth control – a leisured, selfish, effete elite – of attacking “the source of all our racial existence.”<sup>59</sup> An editorial in *Social Welfare* for September, 1923, agreed that those who supported birth control were, “so far as we can learn . . . mainly mistaken faddists and selfish, unnatural women who put world pleasures before the joys of motherhood.”<sup>60</sup>

Eugenics-minded doctors also waded into the debate with assertions that birth control was both a threat to the race and a danger to the individual. In 1924 Dr. J.J. Heagerty, director of the Social Hygiene Division of the Department of Health, lashed out at contraception as being a consequence of cowardice and the cause of immorality, prostitution, illegitimacy, and crime.<sup>61</sup> His colleague, Dr. Helen MacMurchy, opposed birth control throughout her long career. Her last major statement on the subject in *Sterilization? Birth Control? A Book for Family Welfare and Safety* was that “It is unnatural. It is contrary to one’s higher instincts. It is repugnant to a member of the medical profession whose work and whose desire is to promote health and happiness . . . . It should not be undertaken or carried on except for clear, definite and grave reasons of a medical nature and under medical advice.”<sup>62</sup> Doctors, having declared that they should decide who could marry, were now proceeding to assert that they should also monitor how the married carried out their sexual relations.

Mere moral injunctions being recognized as futile in eliciting larger families of the fit, the eugenicists’ second response was to argue that the fit had to be rewarded for reproducing. Nellie McClung, although writing in the midst of the First World War, was of the opinion that Germany, with its Repopulation Society, League for the Protection of Motherhood, and League for Infant Protection, provided a model for Canada in the ways the reproduction of the healthy could be sponsored. “Our whole attitude towards the bringing of children into the world,” she wrote, “has been vague and dreamy. We have left everything to all-wise Providence, shirking our responsibilities in that way.”<sup>63</sup>

Manitoba led the western provinces by beginning in 1916 to provide mothers’ pensions for the poor. The extension of the provision of such support for fit women, argued Watson Kirkconnell in 1923, would be a way of removing them from the masculine world of labour and

returning them to “their more important work” of breeding.<sup>64</sup> J.J. Heagerty suggested prolific families be given pensions, scholarships, and tax support.<sup>65</sup> The popular journalist Hilda Ridley, in a 1929 article entitled “A Revaluation of Motherhood,” asserted that the new “race consciousness” would eventually manifest itself in three policies: the education of the public on the “vital importance of good stock” in breeding; the teaching in high schools of heredity and eugenics; and the endowment of mothers who “could show ‘clean bills’ in the matter of their family histories, of which of course, they would have made a special study.”<sup>66</sup> The fact that by 1930 all the provinces from Ontario to British Columbia had some form of mothers’ allowance scheme was, of course, not simply due to the effectiveness of the eugenic campaign. A recognition of the burden of female labour in the home and a real concern for the alleviation of poverty motivated many who campaigned for such state support of parenting. Nevertheless, the fact that almost every participant in the discussion of such schemes spoke in terms of race betterment revealed the success eugenicists enjoyed in setting the terms of the debate.<sup>67</sup>

The conservative eugenicists remained true to the notion that birth control was a danger to the race. The more progressive began in the 1920’s to face up to the fact that there was no hope of turning the middle classes away from the pursuit of fertility control as popularized in Britain by Marie Stopes and in the United States by Margaret Sanger.<sup>68</sup> Once that was conceded it followed that the fertility differential could only be overcome if birth control devices employed by the elite were also made available to the masses. This was an argument that Stopes and Sanger increasingly employed and one to which the eugenicists were slowly drawn.

Charles J. Hastings, medical officer of health in Toronto, was the first well-known hereditarian to concede the importance of contraception. In a 1924 article he cited a bevy of experts, including William Beveridge, H.G. Wells, and Dean Inge, to back up the argument that birth control was not contrary to, but an essential part of, eugenics.<sup>69</sup> On the occasion of the American anarchist Emma Goldman’s talk on birth control in Toronto in 1927, Hastings again declared that although the reproduction of the “subnormal type” was his main concern he had no objections to birth control as long as it was provided under medical supervision and not by “promiscuous dispensations.” “The sane solution of the problem,” he declared, “is not a wholesale birth control, but an intelligent birth control which should be under the control of the medical profession, the legal profession, and the clergy.”<sup>70</sup> In 1927 few shared his opinion. A reporter for the *Toronto Star* found that the

representatives of the churches, the Ontario Medical Association, and the Social Hygiene Council would not even discuss the subject.

The *Star* reporter was unaware – as were most Canadians – that two attempts had already been made by eugenicists at launching birth control movements in Canada. In Vancouver a Canadian Birth Control League resulted from the interest engendered by Margaret Sanger's visit to the city in July, 1923. The League, though led by the socialist A.M. Stephens and composed largely of left-leaning men and women, advocated during the few years of its shadowy existence both the establishment of birth control clinics and the sterilization of the unfit.<sup>71</sup>

The fact that Stephens's small West Coast group was dominated by socialist feminists deprived it from the very start of the support of the respectable. Moreover, Dr. Lyle Telford, like Stephens an advocate of birth control and a member of the Socialist Party, in speaking in 1928 to University of British Columbia students on "companionate marriage" – which entailed legalized birth control and divorce by mutual consent – brought down on the radicals a rain of abuse. University president L.S. Klinck deplored the talk and the UBC senate called for the vetting of all future campus speakers. The Vancouver *Sun*'s editorial entitled "Companionate Hokum" asserted that "companionate marriage" as originally formulated by Judge Ben Lindsey of Colorado was no more than "legalized harlotry" and "sex madness." Sigmund Freud must have had a part in such a perverse concept, the editor continued, because "bolshevism is the philosophy of the socially unfit. And Freudianism is the philosophy of the oversexed." Emily Murphy concurred, warning the readers of *Chatelaine* that contraceptives could kill and in any event a marriage in which there were no children was no more than "an agreement between a flirt and a philanderer."<sup>72</sup>

In the East the Ontario Birth Control League was established in March, 1925, and, like its Vancouver counterpart, linked neo-Malthusian and eugenic concerns. The Ontario group was led by Dr. O.C.J. Withrow, who during his long and eventful life was constantly embroiled in what he perceived as the key struggle of the century – the improvement of the race. Graduating from the University of Toronto in 1902 he had initially practised medicine in Thunder Bay, but in 1912 he returned to Toronto where he began to work with Clarence Hincks and C.K. Clarke at the Social Services Clinic. The concern for hereditary complaints that he shared with Hincks and Clarke was complemented by a preoccupation with venereal diseases, which he studied when overseas with the Canadian army in 1916. In 1918 he was appointed secretary for sex education by the National Council of the YMCA, lecturing coast to coast and distributing a reported 750,000

pamphlets. Upon returning to civilian life Withrow pursued his new obstetric and gynecological interests. He was thus well qualified to chair the organizational meeting of the Ontario Birth Control League that met at the Foresters' Hall on March 5, 1925.<sup>73</sup>

Aside from Withrow the only other notable at the meeting was Robert MacIver, professor of political economy at the University of Toronto. "I support birth control," he later explained, "from the point of view of political economy, to prevent over-population and the recruitment of the population from its feeble-minded elements. It is not a matter of doing anything. It is just that the knowledge, which the upper classes already possess, should be made available for the less educated and poorer. Under present conditions population is recruited most largely from the poorest classes."<sup>74</sup> It was the view of MacIver and Withrow that improved health would result if all groups controlled their fertility, but social degeneration was threatened if only the elite limited family size.

The Ontario League seems to have accomplished very little and, in any event, Withrow's activities came to an abrupt end in May, 1927, when he was found guilty of performing an abortion that resulted in the death of a young woman.<sup>75</sup> He served close to three years in Kingston penitentiary and was only readmitted to the medical profession in 1933.<sup>76</sup> By that time the depression had hit and the fear of the unemployed had driven many who had previously spurned the ideology of birth control into embracing it.

In 1931 Tyrer, along with Maurice Eisendrath, Florence Huestis, vice-president of the Social Hygiene Council, and Dr. D.M. Lebourdais of the National Committee on Mental Hygiene, established what became known as the Birth Control League of Canada.<sup>77</sup> Support was quickly offered the movement by Protestant church leaders. Already in 1930 the Reverend Lawrence Skey of Toronto's St. Anne's Anglican Church had echoed Dr. Charles Hastings's defence of the social necessity of birth control clinics. In 1931 he and Tyrer established the Marriage Welfare Bureau, which began to send out birth control information.<sup>78</sup> The Bureau's avowed purpose was to improve marriages and thereby strengthen a society racked by economic tensions. Skey's colleague, the Reverend W.G. Nicholson of St. Clement's, explained that "intelligent control" was necessary to counter the "rapid growth in the number of the inefficient and unemployable; in the increase in the numbers of insane and in the perpetuation of human suffering from disease."<sup>79</sup> The fact that contraception could prevent the reproduction of "a stunted humanity" was likewise cited in its favour by the Board of Evangelism and Social Service of



the United Church of Canada in its 1932 tract, *The Meaning and Responsibilities of Christian Marriage*.<sup>80</sup> At the beginning of the century, ministers had declared it a sin for a woman to limit her fertility; in the depths of the depression, pastors interested in eugenics were saying it was a sin if some did not.

Science has come to her aid [wrote the Reverend Morris Zeidman] and if she does not avail herself of the opportunities offered by science and eugenics, she sins against her own body and against her own children who are entitled to all the love, care and upbringing which are a child's birthright; and she sins against the nation, which expects quality rather than quantity.<sup>81</sup>

Similar eugenic arguments were offered by a number of women's groups to explain why they were now rallying to the birth control movement. Emily Murphy, the Alberta magistrate who had condemned contraception in the 1920's, swung to its defence in the early 1930's. Quoting the Reverend Nicholson, Murphy argued that the country's social problems could only be successfully dealt with if contraception was employed thoughtfully.<sup>82</sup> The notion that birth control might be part of a radical, pluralistic approach to sexuality was what underlay the hostility of social conservatives to the earlier activities of Stephens and Telford. Once convinced that fertility control could be a force for stability rather than change, the respectable came out in its support.

The symbolic breakthrough of the birth control movement in Canada came in 1937 when the prosecution of one of A.R. Kaufman's workers was successfully defended and the legitimacy of such activities thereby established.<sup>83</sup> The trial, which took place in the small Ottawa Valley town of Eastview, has been presented by some as an important milestone in the struggle by Canadians for reproductive freedom. That might well have been one of its results, but an analysis of the trial transcripts reveals that it certainly was not the *intent* of the eugenicist A.R. Kaufman. He was drawn to birth control because he saw it as the only means by which the social elite could hope to shape Canada's population profile. Only the provision of cheap contraceptives to the masses would, in his words, limit "the unintelligent and penniless who unfortunately constitute an increasing percentage of the total population."<sup>84</sup>

In discussing his activities with Clarence Gamble, an American philanthropist also involved in birth control work, Kaufman made it clear that the bogey of the fertility differential was his chief preoccupation.

I think one of the reasons the self-supporting classes are limiting their families is because they have to pay for rearing other people's children and . . . cannot afford to raise more than two of their own and give them a decent education. You know as well as I do that if we breed from the bottom instead of the top we are courting disaster. Any farmer has more sense when it comes to breeding animals. We cannot be as arbitrary with human beings in controlling reproduction, but I know from experience that the inefficient and underprivileged will have small families if they know how to accomplish it and have the brains to exercise contraceptive methods. However, our observation is that about five to ten percent of the cases we contact lack the calibre to practice contraception and should be sterilized.<sup>85</sup>

Kaufman was no libertarian. He accepted the necessity of using any and all means to improve the race.<sup>86</sup>

Kaufman, treasurer of the Eugenics Society of Canada, chose as his defence attorney in the Eastview trial a fellow member of the Society, F.W. Wegenast. The main arguments in Wegenast's defence of the social value of birth control were drawn from the testimony of fellow believers in hereditary taint.<sup>87</sup> Claris E. Silcox – ex-minister of the United Church, general secretary of the Social Service Council of Canada, and marriage expert – testified that it was “futile to talk about equality when certain strains, economically, if not mentally and physically inferior, were breeding with utter irresponsibility.”<sup>88</sup> Dr. William Hutton, the Brantford, Ontario, medical officer and president of the Eugenics Society of Canada, was called as a public health expert. In addition to campaigning for the sterilization of the feeble-minded, Hutton was Canada's best-known medical defender of contraception. His main contribution to the trial consisted of the assertion that there was a tendency for the unintelligent to be overly fertile, a situation, he stated, that was found in Brantford where fifty “socially inadequate” families had over 250 living children.<sup>89</sup> Dr. George Brock Chisolm, a psychiatrist working at the University of Toronto, appeared for the defence as an expert on intelligence testing. He argued, as did Hutton, that a biological crisis was posed by the excessive fertility of the less intelligent. Effective methods of birth control had to be made available, stated Chisolm, both to curb the fertility of the unfit and to free the fit of fear and frustration.<sup>90</sup> A number of liberal arguments were also marshalled by Wegenast – the immorality of depriving individuals of contraceptive information, the right of women to control their reproduction, the legitimacy of non-procreative sexual pleasure – but they

were all subsumed under the broader argument that birth control would serve eugenic goals in subjecting reproduction to rational controls. When Magistrate Clayton found in favour of the defence a victory was won for both birth control and eugenics.<sup>91</sup>

Although eugenic notions pervaded the campaigns in favour of sex education and birth control, not all supporters of sex education and birth control were necessarily eugenicists. A practical concern for stemming the spread of venereal disease and providing couples with safe methods of family limitation was what clearly drew mass support. Some of Kaufman's own field workers were more motivated by a genuine appreciation of the plight of working-class mothers than by any hereditarian ideology.

It was also the case that, although in Canada hereditarian thinking was very much dominated by social conservatives, a few daring individuals on the political left argued that eugenics could be turned to sexually subversive ends. The most interesting forays in the field were made by Robert Bird Kerr and Dora Forster, an English, Fabian-Socialist couple who lived in British Columbia between 1893 and 1922. In articles submitted to English neo-Malthusian journals, American libertarian publications, and Canadian socialist papers, they argued that those seriously in favour of race improvement would have to accept the necessity of women's rights, divorce, and birth control.<sup>92</sup> Few Canadians were aware that such arguments were being penned in British Columbia at the turn of the century. Kerr and Forster did not go out of their way to make themselves known. Their attacks on existing moral standards were so daring that they only found friendly responses to their proposals in that small, cosmopolitan coterie of sex radicals scattered throughout the world.<sup>93</sup>

Though they felt isolated in Canada Kerr and Forster were not alone in believing that aspects of eugenics could be incorporated in a socialist program. Echoes of such concerns were heard in the left-wing press. During World War One the *B.C. Federationist* carried letters from readers calling for "eugenic babies" rather than sickly ones and reported J.S. Woodsworth's support of sex education and companionate marriage. In Winnipeg Ada Muir wrote in *The Voice* of her admiration of the American libertarian eugenicist Lillian Harman, while Florence Rowe provided the *One Big Union Bulletin* with articles on "Better and Fewer Babies." Violet McNaughton's opening of her column in the *Western Producer* in 1927 to the discussion of family limitation elicited a flurry of letters from prairie progressives interested in eugenics. "I hold," wrote Carl Axelson of Bingville, Alberta, "that it is essential for every person to study physiology to the extent of securing

correct knowledge of our bodies and the relation and interdependence of sex and especially information regarding reproduction." Another writer upbraided those who were fearful that "the effort to improve the human family by using more commonsense and knowledge in the choosing of a life-mate would eliminate sentiment and love." Sophia H. Dixon, who in 1933 was to be instrumental in the founding of the CCF, cited Russia as an example of a society in which such improvements of the race were being pursued.<sup>94</sup>

What these progressives imagined was a better world in which a rational, scientific, but non-coercive approach would be taken to the sex question. Access to sex education, contraceptives, divorce, and the endowment of motherhood would, they hoped, free women from the trap of loveless marriages and mindless breeding. These reformers' understanding of the laws of heredity were, of course, slim to say the least. But their better-qualified opponents who supported conservative Galtonian eugenics turned their "science" to even more transparently self-serving purposes.<sup>95</sup>

The Eastview trial capped a thirty-year campaign by Canadian eugenicists to make sexual practices the subject of national concern and debate. While this new openness did have its liberating aspects, the intentions of the conservative hereditarians were in fact repressive. They sought to turn sex education, marriage counselling, the campaign against venereal disease, and birth control to the purposes of improved social management.<sup>96</sup> Their ideas seemed so rational (who could be opposed to "race betterment"?) and were so pervasive that it is difficult to think of any sex reformer in the interwar period who did not employ them. Even the final step in the disciplining of reproduction – test-tube babies – was envisaged by some Canadians in the 1930's. In 1935 Ernest M. Best, the general secretary of the YMCA, conjured up just such a vision of the creation of an "International Burbank Society for Humaniculture." "Through our knowledge of the techniques of contraception, sterilization and artificial fertilization we have the means," he exalted, "of controlling the forces of heredity."<sup>97</sup> He admitted that it would require courage to put into force the sorts of "biologically salutary laws" required, but he was at least able to point to an existing society in which such pioneering work had begun. "Already the Nazi state has taken active steps to direct heredity, and while we do not need to accept their absurd premises of Nordicism we can see the beginnings of intelligent social action toward racial improvement."<sup>98</sup>

Indeed, Nazi Germany was the society toward which those seeking

confirmation of the practical benefits of eugenic measures increasingly turned. The most dramatic of these in the mid-1930's were the mass sterilizations of mental defectives. There were many in Canada who, while lamenting the brutalities of the Nazis, could not help applauding the boldness with which they grappled with the threat of racial degeneration.