

POPULATION

# Differential Birth Rate Ascribed to Birth Control

## Professor Pearl Reports No Evidence of Biological Inferiority Among Intellectual and Wealthy Parents

**T**HE STORK visits the homes of the very poor and the ignorant with much more frequency than he lights on the homes of the educated and wealthy. This discrimination may be laid directly at the door of birth control and the American habit of postponing marriage, new scientific research has revealed. This research is published in a new book *The Natural History of Population* (Oxford).

Analyzing an intimate study of more than 30,000 mothers, the author, Prof. Raymond Pearl, biologist and student of population of the Johns Hopkins University, found no evidence of any biological inferiority among the wealthy to account for their diminishing families. Neither does religion play any important part in these differential birth rates.

If it were not for the effect of birth control efforts, Prof. Pearl said, and the practice of criminal abortion, together with habits of postponing marriage, there would apparently be little or no significant differential fertility between economic, educational or religious classes of urban American married couples.

### Half Practice It

Nearly half (43 per cent.) of the American white women studied by Prof. Pearl practice birth control. The practice is much more frequent among older women with a large number of children than among young wives. Since his study includes only women giving birth to a child, Prof. Pearl estimates that the proportion may run somewhat higher in the general population. He puts it roughly at between 55 and 60 per cent.

Yet, obviously, efforts at birth control did not result in childlessness for these women. For many these efforts are intermittent or are unsuccessful either because of ignorance or because they planned for and wanted a child.

By figuring the time lag between arrival at child-bearing age and the actual birth of the first baby, and by other complicated statistical procedures, Prof. Pearl was able to estimate the effect that birth control does have on reducing the natural growth of the population. It has

much less effect than has sometimes been claimed.

Negro mothers, like white mothers, are having smaller families. Yet birth control is not widely practiced among Negroes. Of the Negro mothers included in Prof. Pearl's study, 83 per cent. had never practiced any birth control method.

Much more important than its effect on the fertility of American mothers, is the effect of birth control on reducing the numbers of the "better classes" as compared with the economic and social unfortunates.

The rate of births is just about 66 per cent. higher for very poor mothers than it is for well-to-do and wealthy mothers. But among those who practice no birth control no such disparity exists. The rate for all economic classes is on very much the same level except for a slight lowering of the rate for those in moderate circumstances.

Among those using birth control, on the contrary, the rate of births goes steadily down with increasing wealth, just as it does for the whole population.

The proportion of women making use of birth control methods varies with the amount of their wealth. It ranges from a little more than 30 per cent. of the very poor to more than 80 per cent. of the well-to-do and rich.

Prof. Pearl is not hopeful that any attempt to control size of family either by propaganda or legislation will have much effect upon this tendency. Desire for motherhood and the sex relations are extremely personal affairs, he points out. In this matter, at least, humans are most likely to have self-government.

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ARCHAEOLOGY

## 'Potato Spirit' Believed Ancient Indian God

**C**ALLING a man "Old Potato" may be all right in this country. But in Peru, where the Irish potato got its start, a spud was no joking topic, if there is fact behind strange theories of Dr. Redcliffe N. Salaman, a physician and bot-



### SPIRIT OF THE POTATO?

*Dr. R. N. Salaman says prehistoric Indians symbolized in such vases as this the actual sacrifice rite of marrying human faces, all to get a big potato crop.*

anist, member of the Cambridge University faculty.

He is convinced that these Indians had a potato religion, revered a potato spirit. He even believes that they sacrificed human life to the potato spirit, later substituting a gruesome mutilation of human faces with the deadly serious intent of impressing the potato spirit, and getting a big crop. Indians in Central America and farther north had religious rites surrounding the corn crop. Why not a potato religion in Peru?

The potato was first tamed, Dr. Salaman concludes, because prehistoric Indians at some distant, unknown time in South America drifted west and found themselves clear out of the jungle in the bleak highland country of Peru and Bolivia. Taming the wild potato, they managed to stay there. It was safer than the tropical rain forest. Farther west still, on the coast of Chile, another prehistoric potato belt was developed.

That Indian potato growers worshiped a potato spirit, and sacrificed to it, is deduced by the British scientist from the quantity of potato vases found in Indian graves along the Peruvian coast. Chimu Indians of that region had a custom of making funeral vases in such varied shapes that they show the plants, animals, and customs (*Turn to Page 159*)