

Birth Rate Declining Among College Men

Statistics for Harvard and Yale Show Steady Decrease in Number of Graduates' Children and More Childless Marriages

A DISASTROUS state of things." That is what President Emeritus Charles W. Eliot of Harvard says of the birth rate situation in the families of Harvard graduates during the last forty years. He said it in a letter written last year to John C. Phillips, Harvard, '99, who was engaged at the time on a careful study of this birth rate and of that among Yale grad-

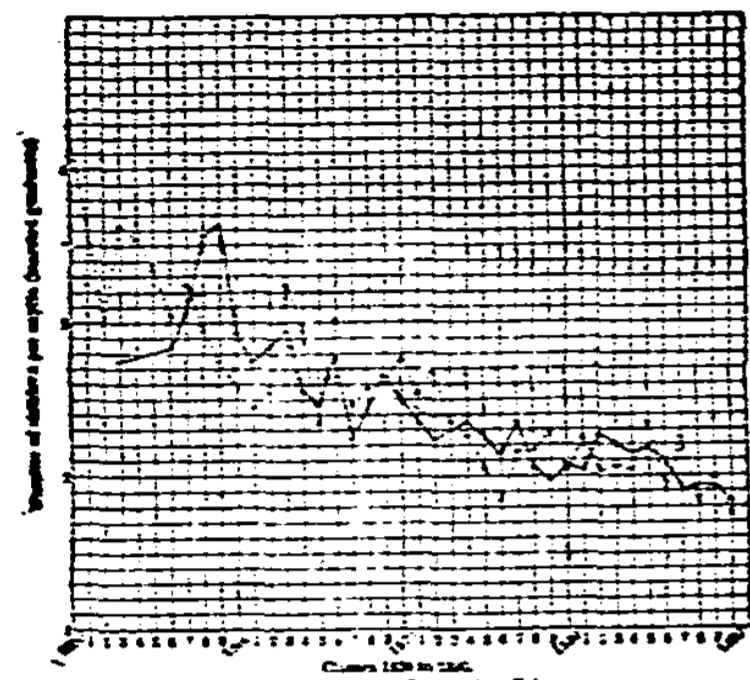


Figure 1.

uates as well. Mr. Phillips has embodied the results of his investigation in a remarkable article appearing in the Harvard Graduates' Magazine which certainly bears out the pessimistic words of Dr. Eliot.

Mr. Phillips chose as a basis for study the classes graduated from Harvard and Yale between 1853 and 1890. He found that, during the said period, there has been a steady decline in the average number of children born to each graduate, and an astonishing increase in the percentage of graduates whose marriages are childless. The percentage of men in each class remaining unmarried, Mr. Phillips also found, has greatly increased. As a result, classes of Harvard and Yale men are falling lamentably short in the task of perpetuating their race.

What Mr. Phillips's research proved may be seen easily by glancing at the diagrams and table reproduced on this page.

Figure 1 shows the birth rate for each Harvard and Yale class between 1853 and 1890. In spite of sporadic increases, it will be seen that this decline has been persistent. Figure 2 is even more striking. It shows the decrease in the birth rate per decade between 1853 and 1890. From this diagram the sporadic improvements in the birth rate, just mentioned, are eliminated, and the steadiness of the decline is more clearly shown. It will be noted that the birth rate in the families of Yale graduates is a trifle higher throughout than among Harvard graduates, but the decline is no less evident.

The only encouraging feature brought out by his investigations, Mr. Phillips tells us, is that the decline during the first part of the period under investigation was sharper than in the second part, as shown by the "flattening" tendency of the curve indicating the decline.

A glance at the table (Figure 3) reproduced on this page affords equally startling proof of the altered conditions among Harvard and Yale graduates of today, in so far as marriage statistics are concerned, as compared with a few decades ago.

The average number of men from Harvard and Yale classes who marry after leaving college has remained practically the same during the last forty years—roughly, it may be said to be about 75 per cent. of the members of each class. But when we come to the average number of children born to graduates in each decade the figures show a noteworthy decrease.

Among Harvard graduates of the

classes between 1851 and 1860, for instance the average number of children per capita per married graduate was 3.13. It dropped steadily in the ensuing decades until it reached 2.06, between 1881 and 1890—more than one child less per capita per married graduate than in 1851-1860.

Among Yale men the average dropped from 3.32 children in 1850-1859 to 2.04 in 1881-1890.

The average number of children per capita for the total number of graduates from each of the two colleges under investigation, concerning whom records were available, also showed a decline both in Harvard and Yale, falling from

The only encouraging feature, as Mr. Phillips points out, is that the decline of the birth rate and increase in the percentage of childless marriages have tended to be less abrupt.

Regarding these phenomena, Mr. Phillips writes:

No one of thoughtful tendencies can fail to view with alarm the lowered birth rate of Americans and the spread of a standard of living among the upper and middle classes which is based on comfort and luxury rather than on education and culture.

And he quotes from another letter addressed to him by Dr. Charles W. Eliot, in which the latter declares that one of the causes of the phenomenon in question was "a preference on the part of

"no proof of it." On this Mr. Phillips comments: "My tables show that Dr. Eliot's surmise is right, at least in a relative sense, and there is ground for hope that it will soon be true in an absolute sense."

Analyzing his figures further, the Harvard investigator seeks to show how the declining birth rate will affect the total number of descendants of Yale and Harvard graduates as the years go by. He calculates that, from a total of 5,618 graduates investigated, there will be, at

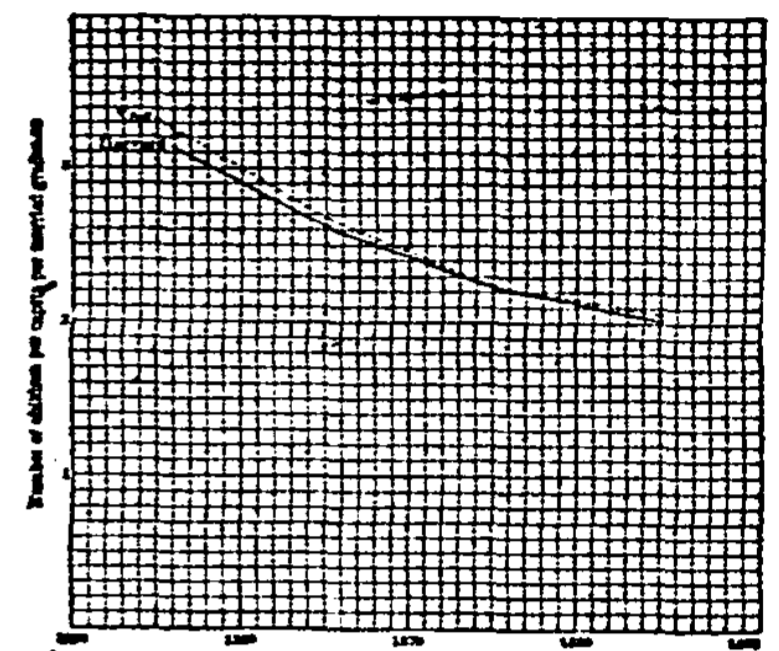


Figure 2.

the end of 200 years, only 852 direct male descendants. He continues:

Sprague (Journal of Heredity, April, 1910), calculated that among American stock of the East the families must average 3.7 children. "For every mother who demonstrates an ability to bear offspring." According to him, every married woman bearing children must bring three to a marriageable age. He says that 15 per cent. of the stock he studied (New England) did not marry or married too late, and that 20 per cent. of marriages produced no children.

We have seen that 22 to 25 per cent. of Harvard and Yale graduates never marry, and that 19 to 23 per cent. of marriages are infertile; therefore, on Sprague's basis, every married graduate having children must average a little more than three surviving children to perpetuate the stock.

Another way of looking at the question, as follows: Allowing for 25 per cent. who never marry and 21 per cent. who contract childless marriages, we have left 54 per cent. of fathers to supply the succeeding generation. Therefore, 46 per cent. of children should be added to the two surviving children that each graduate must leave to fill the place of himself and his wife. This gives us 2.92 surviving children for each father in order barely to continue the race.

This junction our Harvard graduates fail to perform by 1.2 children each.

Mr. Phillips reiterates that he has no reform to suggest and that he does not seek to analyze causes, but calls attention to the seriousness of the situation in these words:

I think every one in every walk of life will agree that the college graduate should at least perpetuate himself. Many of us disagree as to the eugenic ideal, for there is no single ideal possible, but all must admit that college men are at least fair samples of American manhood.

The causes of the great decline in birth rate are almost world-wide, and they concern the economist, the psychologist, and the physician. Reform must come from within, not from without, and it will be brought about by a sterner sense of duty and a realization that the vain stampede after pleasure for pleasure's sake is leading us only to restlessness and discontent.

Harvard.

Decade	Average no. of graduates per class	Average no. married	Per cent married	Interval in yrs. between grad. and marriage	Average no. of children born	Average no. of children per capita per married graduate	Average no. per capita per graduate	Average no. of children surviving	Average no. per capita per married graduate	Per capita per graduate	Average no. of childless marriages	Per cent of childless marriages
1851-60 Av. of 6 yrs.	90.8	49.2	.68	8.9	151.8	3.13	1.68	122.5	2.52	1.36	4.3	7.8
1861-70	101.9	77.3	.76	8.5	203.2	2.62	1.98	173.3	2.24	1.69	14.2	18.6
1871-80	157.5	115.4	.75	9.0	256.4	2.23	1.63	229.8	2.0	1.46	25.9	22.5
1881-90	248.	183.	.76	8.3	372.3	2.06	1.55	345.8	1.91	1.44	43.6	23.4
Grand average	149.5	106.2	.74	8.7	245.9	2.51	1.71	217.8	2.17	1.49		

Yale.

Decade	Average no. of graduates per class	Average no. married	Per cent married	Interval in yrs. between grad. and marriage	Average no. of children born	Average no. of children per capita per married graduate	Average no. per capita per graduate	Average no. of children surviving	Average no. per capita per married graduate	Per capita per graduate	Average no. of childless marriages	Per cent of childless marriages
1850-59 Av. of 9 yrs.	98.	75.	.78	7.5	247.1	3.32	2.53	196.1	2.64	2.0	10.5	14.3
1861-70	107.6	86.4	.81	7.8	233.6	2.69	2.16	197.8	2.28	1.83	16.4	19.1
1871-80	120.6	94.6	.79	8.5	211.9	2.23	1.75	181.9	1.92	1.51	20.3	21.7
1881-90	135.9	101.7	.75	8.2	207.6	2.04	1.53	189.8	1.87	1.40	21.3	21.0
Grand Average	115.5	89.4	.78	8.	225.1	2.57	1.99	191.4	2.18	1.69		

Figure 3.

1.68 to 1.55 in the former, and from 2.53 to 1.53 in the latter.

There was a similar alarming decline in the average number of children surviving childhood. This percentage fell in Harvard from 2.52 children per capita per married graduate in 1851-1860 to 1.91 in 1881-1890. In Yale it fell from 2.64 to 1.87 within the same period.

Even more alarming than the foregoing figures are those adduced by Mr. Phillips to show the increase, both among Harvard and Yale graduates, in the number of childless marriages in relation to the total number of students in each college class.

Among Harvard men during the years between 1851 and 1860 the percentage of childless marriages was only 7.6. Between 1861 and 1870 it more than doubled, reaching 18.6 per cent. Between 1871 and 1880 it went to 22.5 per cent., and in the following decade to 23.4 per cent.

The Yale figures are equally disturbing. Between 1850 and 1859, 10.5 per cent. of the marriages of Yale men were childless. Between 1861 and 1870 there were 16.4 per cent. of such marriages, 20.3 per cent. between 1871 and 1880, and 21.3 per cent. between 1881 and 1890.

both men and women for freedom from care and responsibility, and for passing pleasures rather than solid satisfaction."

Dr. Eliot told Mr. Phillips, furthermore, that he was inclined to believe that there had been an improvement within recent years in the number of children in Harvard families, but added that he had