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THE CHILD'S RIGHT TO SEX INSTRUCTION

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The objections to the instruction of children in sexual hygiene are based upon one or two main points:

1. That ignorance on this subject is innocence. There is innocency which proceeds from ignorance. A mind, absolutely blank, may be said to be innocent.

But ignorance does not mean absence of all facts. More often it means facts perverted, misapplied, unrelated. In the old-time Fourth of July celebrations, many a boy knew enough of the power of explosives to blow out his eyes—or his life. It was impossible to prevent the boy's love of noise and adventure to find out that gunpowder would explode, but ignorance of proportion and situation meant disaster and death.

At the very dawn of intelligence children begin to inquire into all sorts of problems, and of no one of them so insistently as of the question of sex and life. Absolute, total darkness on the subject is impossible with very rare exceptions.

What follows when primary facts of sex-life are learned through distorted and perverted channels—a grain of truth with a pound of evil? The mere question suggests all the horror of a young imagination, peopled with perverted sex images, and ready to feed upon others that follow. Such ignorance not only blinds the eyes, but destroys the moral sense and power of control.

Many a child, before it reaches the years of puberty, is already a pervert—not because of the truth it knows, but because of what it does not know. Others who miss the perilous path in childhood come to it a little further on.

The untaught girl meets another—of her own—perhaps of the other sex, and ruin follows. The untaught boy enters a circle of other boys, a little older, and he speedily becomes a moral pervert, a physical wreck, and a social danger.

2. The second error is based on the proposition that knowledge on the subject suggests evil.

Is that true? Does suggestion come of our knowledge of facts, or does it come through ignorance? Is there not conflict between right and wrong whenever knowledge faces evil suggestion? Is not knowledge a guard and a defense when evil is suggested?

The suggestion of evil in sex matters—as in anything else—does not feed upon true knowledge, but upon perverted facts, filtered

in from the sewer—from the slush-novel, the vile print, the vicious show or dance hall, or the ignorant and vicious companion.

Two other questions follow. And upon them many of the best people seriously differ:

1. The first is **WHEN?**

To this question I have one answer—**NOW.**

There is no period in a human life when the facts of life should be hidden. They may be presented improperly, or out of season; that is true of any set of facts. To cram a child's mind with chemistry, geography, or any study in advance of its age, does harm instead of good. But as the child-mind develops, so as to inquire of facts in nature—be it the song of birds, the play of lambs, the birth of a kitten, or the coming of a baby—every question should be welcomed; there should be no forbidden question.

I do not mean that a child may not be put off to a more convenient season, but I do mean that the door should never be closed upon the subject as a forbidden one.

Once let a child lose confidence in mother, or father, as the true sources of first-hand knowledge, on questions which its very nature prompts, and it will seek the answer at the earliest moment from some less fastidious, but wholly dangerous source.

This is just as true of a growing boy or girl as of a little child. The girl who cannot get the meaning of her changing life from mother or father will try to get it elsewhere. And the boy who finds his father as close as a clam on subjects which are burning in his adolescent mind will inquire where he will receive—not knowledge—but perverted, poisoned, unwholesome facts. And if these young people, in the dawn of their manhood and womanhood, find also that at school every question of physiology, biology, or of anatomy is closed, the moment the subject of the human race is reached, and every book treating of the subject is locked from them, they will feel that they are driven to discuss the subject in ways that are secret and places that are dark. Such youths are ripe subjects for suggestive books and advertising pamphlets of quacks, or for the still more vile prints that are secretly circulated under sealed covers.

2. Then we come to the second question. **How?**

How shall we teach race, or sex hygiene?

My answer is—exactly as we teach any other subject—frankly, simply, truthfully.

Primary facts are for primary schools, in this, as on any other subject. The primary teacher is the mother. She it is that must

instill the first truths in the mind of her child; and every sane mother can tell her child the initial facts of ordinary domestic, religious, or nature-life—up to the standard, or measure of her experience or training. She cannot do more; but this she can do and should be encouraged to do it.

Generally speaking, on other subjects mothers do this. As the child asks, mother will tell the little girl what she knows about fire and water. She will tell her that fire burns and destroys as well as warms and comforts; that a knife is sharp and will cut the fingers; that food can be cooked in several ways; that pain may be relieved by simple medicines, but that some medicines are poisonous and dangerous.

She will tell the child about God and Heaven, right and wrong, according to the measure of her own faith or training. She will tell that when summer comes and the sun shines and the rains fall, there will be grass and flowers, and trees and fruits. If she lives in the country she will tell of the birds with their young, and the kittens, and fowls, and the lambs.

What parents need most is a knowledge of the essential, initial truths, and guidance as to how to impart those truths. And what school pupils need is instruction in causes and effects, in the things that lead to a higher moral conception of the realness of life and the dignity of the race-continuing process.

Boys can be taught as boys to reverence motherhood and honor all women—that an insult to any girl should be treated by every boy as though she were his sister. They can be taught that life is from within and that the law of sex is the same in the human race as in other forms of life. They need instruction as to the dangers of certain secret actions, and the wrong of unclean thoughts and language.

Girls can be taught the meaning of their changing physical life, and the functions and sacredness of motherhood. They can be taught that the body is a holy temple of generation, and that to tamper with it, or neglect it, is to demoralize and destroy it.

Under the question of "How to Teach?" nothing is perhaps so important, in relation to this subject, as the inculcation of right mental and moral attitude.

This is the first essential thing in the premises: If the attitude is right, average parents will not pronounce themselves incapable of giving initial and essential facts to their own children.

After all it is not so much scientific knowledge that is needed, but simply the use of common knowledge.

Can a woman be a mother and not know enough to answer her little girl's simple, primary questions on the subject as those questions naturally arise?

Can a man be a father and not possess sufficient knowledge to explain to his boy that a union or marriage of two sexes is necessary to generation and birth, that just as the birds must mate, and the boy's pet dog must mate, so man and woman mates, or marries, for offspring?

Shall we perpetuate the social lie, that it is perfectly right to teach the commerce of sexes among stock on the farm, or of domestic pets in the home, but the extreme of impropriety to apply the lesson to human beings? Change the attitude from a conspiracy of silence, to one of open, simple truth, and the problem of sex education will be half-way solved.

Ample and efficient scientific teaching is for the specialist, and cannot be too efficient. But to the masses—the millions—this is impossible. It is as impossible for all of us to be physiologists as it is for all of us to be chemists or astronomers.

Young people should be taught that nature calls for the assimilation of all her secret forces for the building up of the human body, and that self-restraint and control are the very essentials of good physical manhood and womanhood, as well as of moral purity.

Such light as this, thrown upon the canvas that our youth may see it, will prepare them for manifestation of the race-continuing functions, so that they will neither be puzzled nor frightened, nor misled by ignorant or vicious agencies.

So shall we develop a race of men and women who shall perpetuate the wealth, the virtue, and the glory of our nation.

BOOKS ON SEX INSTRUCTION

In connection with the article by William Burgess we give a short list of books, selected from the many on the subject, which should be useful in the family:

FOR MOTHERS

FOR GIRLS AND MOTHERS OF GIRLS. *Mary G. Hood.* (Bobbs-Merrill, \$1.00.)

THE THREE GIFTS OF LIFE. *Nellie M. Smith.* (Dodd, Mead, 50c.)

THE RENEWAL OF LIFE. *Margaret W. Morley.* (A. C. McClurg, \$1.25.)

GIRL AND WOMAN. *Caroline W. Latimer.* (D. Appleton, \$1.50.)

FOR PARENTS

PLAIN FACTS ON SEX HYGIENE. *Wm. Lee Howard.* (E. J. Clode, \$1.00.)

BOY PROBLEM. *Educational Pamphlet No. 2.* (American Society of Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis, 10c.)

INSTRUCTION IN PHYSIOLOGY AND HYGIENE OF SEX. *Educational Pamphlet No. 4.* (American Society of Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis, 10c.)

RELATIONS OF SOCIAL DISEASES WITH MARRIAGE AND THEIR PROPHYLAXIS. *Educational Pamphlet No. 3.* (American Society of Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis, 10c.)

HOW SHALL I TELL MY CHILD? *Mrs. Wood Allen Chapman.* (Revell, 25c.)

TRAINING OF YOUNG IN LAWS OF SEX. *E. Lyttelton.* (Longmans, 75c.)

CHRISTIAN APPROACH TO SOCIAL MORALITY. *R. C. Cabot.* (National Board Y. W. C. A., 50c.)

FOR SCHOOL TEACHERS

EDUCATION IN SEXUAL PHYSIOLOGY AND HYGIENE. *Philip Zenner.* (Robt. Clarke, \$1.00.)

TEACHING HYGIENE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS. *E. B. Lowry.* (Forbes Co., 50c.)

EDUCATION WITH REFERENCE TO SEX, PARTS I AND II. *8th Yearbook National Society for Scientific Study of Education.* (Univ. of Chicago, 50c. and 75c.)

FOR BOYS

WHEN A BOY BECOMES A MAN. *H. Bisseker.* (Revell, 25c.)

BUILDING YOUR BOY. *Kenneth H. Wayne.* (McClurg, 50c.)

FROM YOUTH INTO MANHOOD. *Winfield S. Hall.* (Y. M. C. A., 50c.)

HOW MY UNCLE THE DOCTOR INSTRUCTED ME IN MATTERS OF SEX. *Max Oker-Blom.* (Society of Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis, 10c.)

LIFE'S BEGINNINGS. *Winfield S. Hall.* (Assn. Press, 25c.)

SEX CULTURE TALKS TO YOUNG MEN. *Norman E. Richardson.* (Eaton & Mains.)

FOR GIRLS

THE GIRL IN HER TEENS. *Margaret Slattery.* (S. S. Times, 50c.)

HERSELF. *E. B. Lowry.* (Forbes, \$1.00.)

THE CHANGING GIRL. *Caroline W. Latimer.* (Revell, 25c.)