



Sex Education

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Sex Education.

By G. STUART WATTS.*

Mr. H. G. Wells has described our civilization as "a sexual lunatic"; and few thoughtful observers would disagree with him. Evidence of an unbalanced and unhealthy outlook abound, thanks to our refusal of adequate sex guidance to the young. Despite our vaunted progress in other directions, our sex code is still largely that of a barbarous and ignorant past.

Our conventional moralists excel themselves in fitting living pedsons into their Procrustes—bed of dogma, lopping off or stretching out until the standardization of death is attained. They have succeeded all too well in degrading the primal sacrament of life, love and beauty into a thing of shame and defilement; and it is not surprising that a widespread revolt against their irrational and inhuman tabus is taking place. Revolutionary periods are always times of storm and excess; but out of all the clangour and confusion a saner, healthier sex ethic is emerging—an ethic pioneered in England by men like Dr. Havelock Ellis and Lord Bertrand Russell and, in this country, by Dr. Norman Haire. In the light of this ethic, the increase of erotic feeling so loudly lamented by traditional moralists is seen to be the natural and inevitable outcome of cultural and economic improvement and the greater leisure it affords for the enjoyment of mental and material goods.

Deepened aesthetic perception, in particular, has helped to transform a simple biological function into a vast network of thoughts, emotions and actions utterly unknown to either beast or savage. It is a great gain to have erotic feeling intensified, but a tragedy when that erotic feeling is perverted into neuroticism. A hungry man can be satisfied only with food, not with make-believe; and the deep natural hunger of sex must be appeased by reality, not by counterfeits and tantalizing half-measures which automatically increase its

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urgency. Because we seek to fob off our sexuality with counterfeit satisfactions, "we become bundles of repressions; our outlook is perverted, and a sense of false shame and artificial values is engendered, things naturally clean are rendered unclean, energy is dissipated, humiliations multiply, and sex becomes a grotesque ogre that dogs our steps, perverts our imagination, and vitiates our vitality. Thus, the thing we fear yet desire battens upon us, assumes unreal and gigantic proportions, and refuses to give us any peace."¹

Psycho-analysis has made it clear that every neurosis is at bottom a sexual disorder or maladjustment; and the prevention and cure of such disorders by analysis and sane, healthy educational methods is a task of vital importance. The scientific technique employed by psycho-analysis has been devised to bring to light the buried fears, hates, repressions, etc., which cause such injury to the psyche and which, to a great extent, could have been prevented by the right kind of education.

We could, of course, emulate primitive tribes which allow free sexual play to their young children and thereby effectively prevent the development of neuroses; but comparatively few in civilised countries would be prepared to countenance such liberty. We are faced, then, with the question: What is the right kind of sex education, and how and by whom is it imparted?

Few, I imagine, would dispute the claim that the best sex instruction is given in the home, by the intelligent mother. Most psycho-analysts insist that it is rarely expedient for a father to enlighten his daughter, and never his son. The mother will give honest answers to the child's question, telling him the facts of life simply and naturally. The child's curiosity having been satisfied, at least for the time being, he will pass on to other questions such as: "What makes the grass grow?" or "Where does the rain come from?" It is a crime to abandon children to the furtive and filthy conversations of the schoolground for their first information (and what grotesquely distorted "information" it is!) about the facts of life. To the contention that sex enlightenment should take its own course, Havelock Ellis replies: "This is as much as to say that there is no need to supply sources of pure water when there are puddles in the street that anyone can drink of." It is a crime, too, to allow them to approach adolescence without any preparation for the great and

¹ Ralph de Pomerai, *The Future of Sex Relations*.

far-reaching changes which it brings. In supplying answers to the child's questions, there should be no sentiment, for his feelings are not those of an adult, and he sees no occasion for high-flown talk. If he is told what he wants to know, and if, up to, say, the age of six, he is allowed to see his parents naked, he will be free from prudence and sexual obsession. On the other hand, if he is brought up in official ignorance, he will think and talk far more about sex than the child who is accustomed to natural and straightforward discussion of it in the home. If he remains entirely ignorant, revelation of the facts is likely to inflict a deep psychic wound and render adaptation to real life difficult. Ignorance of any kind is regrettable, but ignorance of vital facts is a serious menace both to the individual and to society.

It is bad enough for a boy to be left in ignorance; but it is far worse for a girl. It should never be forgotten that a child's ignorance of the basal facts of sex is not primary, but is based on repression and the forgetting of earlier knowledge or speculation in childhood.¹ "In a research undertaken by two competent American observers as to the success of marriage in the case of 200 husbands and wives, one of the most notable results was their discovery of the importance of early sex instruction to the very young girl. The character of the physical sex relations in married life was much more markedly satisfactory where sex knowledge had been imparted naturally and without embarrassment on the part of the parents—in *the very early years.*"²

Dr. Katherine Davis's investigation of married women also demonstrates the value of an early and natural sex education in after life. "When I divided into two groups of those who regarded themselves as happily or unhappily married, 57 per cent. of the former were found to have received some sort of sex education in early life, but only 43 per cent. of the latter. Undoubtedly, were they available, the figures given by patients applying for help on the score of some sexual difficulty would be still more convincing. Ignorance provides an excellent soil for neurosis, and although statistics cannot be produced, it is no exaggeration to say that three out of every four men treated for impotence state that they had no sex education at all, or else that they were brought up to believe

¹ See Ernest Jones, *Papers on Psycho-Analysis*.

² R. C. Johnson, *A Christian View of Marriage*, p. 4.

that all sex manifestations were shameful or evil.”³ In home sex instruction children should be told whatever they want to know, e.g., that sex occurs outside marriage as well as within, and that the theory and practice of adults in sex matters are often at variance. There are facts which should not be obtruded upon a child, but if he asks about them, he should be told the truth. There is no excuse for deceiving him. When, as so often happens in conventional families, he finds that his parents have lied, he loses confidence in them and feels justified in lying to them. Virtue based upon a false view of the facts is spurious. If we desire to prevent excessive and unwholesome thinking about sex on the part of the child, complete frankness is the only way to achieve it. I should like to emphasize, whilst dealing with the home, the importance of the child's sleeping in his own bed. From the age of six months or one year at the latest the child should never sleep in the same room as his parents. In an extremely large number of cases, young children are vaguely excited by witnessing or overhearing parental embraces, often with harmful results.

The elementary, fundamental knowledge imparted at home should be supplemented by more scientific knowledge at school. Quite a few teachers, however, would challenge this contention. An English schoolmaster, e.g., writing a few years ago against sex instruction in schools, protested that “the bloom of innocence should not be wiped off even by the wisest and best intentioned of teachers.” Surely this schoolmaster is confusing innocence with ignorance, unless, which is unthinkable, he is warning wise and well intentioned teachers against deliberate corruption of the young. There is no moral value in innocence which is the product of ignorance; moral value is acquired only in association with knowledge. Commenting on this attitude in his work on *Coeducation*, L. B. Perkin says the suggestion is “that with the acquisition of sexual knowledge something precious has been lost; on the contrary, nothing but ignorance has been lost and that is always well lost—while something very precious has been found; the opportunity to use sexual knowledge well.”

Sex instruction at school should be given in the ordinary biological lessons. Here, as in the instruction at home, the keynote is naturalness. There should be no long lingering over the reproduc-

³ Dr. Kenneth Walker, *The Physiology of Sex*, Penguin ed., pp. 148-9.

tion of mammals. Tucker and Prout, in their *Sex Education in Schools*, quoted by Kenneth Walker, state that in some classes in which this system was followed, "as soon as the reproduction of mammals was reached, there was a noticeable lack of ease, usually on the part of the teacher, and a consequent unrest or stiffening of the children." It is not surprising that the teachers were so embarrassed, since they themselves were reared in the days when an open reference to sexual processes caused shame and confusion. Walker mentions an answer given by an instructress in biology to the direct question, "Do babies grow in the same way as seeds when they are not yet born?" The teacher blurted out, "Oh, no, babies grow more like chickens hatch, only it is not nearly such a beautiful process."¹ It cannot be too strongly asserted that it is better to have no supplementary sex instruction in school at all if the teachers are not competent to impart it. Any instruction coloured by the sense of guilt and shame does untold harm. It should be imparted naturally and scientifically, yet not in the same way that nutrition and excretion, for instance, are discussed, for sex is so very much more than a biological function. It is not only the indispensable means for the continuation of life but the mainspring of all creative activity and the foundation upon which all dreams of a new and better world must be built. In other words, the psychology of sex must be emphasized, along with a careful and accurate presentation of its physiology. When psychology is taught in our high schools by qualified persons (and I am convinced that it should be), social sex instruction will be given even to mixed classes, provided that a solid foundation has been laid in previous instruction. In such classes, sex will be dealt with in aspects other than the purely physical—the importance of mental affinity, no less than physical attraction, will be stressed; and questions relating to marriage, the art of love, birth control, venereal disease, abortion and prostitution will be discussed in a clean and healthy way. Children try to find out about such things: why not give them facts instead of the lies and half-truths they will otherwise encounter? Adults reared in the tradition of mock modesty will be shocked by such a programme; the children will not. Consider the scourge of V.D., which has reached alarming proportions. The "hush-hush" policy of our pious humbugs, more than anything else, is responsible for its rapid spread. When I started my anti-V.D. campaign at Grafton Anglican Synod in September, 1942, messages poured in from all over Australia, ex-

¹ *op. cit.* p. 150.

pressing wholehearted sympathy with and support for the crusade; but a number of religious people sent letters (anonymous or with initials only) bitterly condemning the "indecent" of public discussions of sex matters. I say it is far more indecent to allow innocent people to contract and transmit these dread diseases, as they may so easily do; and that any attempt to keep people ignorant of the worst enemy that threatens civilization to-day is a crime against humanity. I say, further, that the "hush-hush" attitude illustrates, more forcibly than anything else, the need of sex education, for sunshine and health are the natural environment of the educated mind. Recently the Director-General of Social Hygiene in N.S.W. warned us that, in addition to the alarming spread of V.D., syphilis in an acute form has been brought in from overseas. About 46½ per cent. of the syphilis notified in June, 1943, was of the acute, highly infectious kind. "But so far," Dr. Cooper-Booth continues, "we haven't got one of the sources of infection. Prostitution is a lucrative profession nowadays. I know of a mother and two daughters who have earned £500 in one week around King's Cross. But the amateurs do more damage than the prostitutes, because there are more of them." Later, the Director-General again warned the public of the increase in acute cases of syphilis, 691 cases having been reported in N.S.W. from January to July of last year, an increase of 33 on the same period in 1942. The situation is so serious that a Commonwealth-wide educational campaign, together with adequate preventive and curative measures, should be inaugurated at once. In every high school lessons should be given and films shown, supplementing the parents' instruction at home, and lectures by medical men and psychologists should also be arranged. Full use of the Press and wireless should be made in this great crusade of enlightenment. No hint of morbidity should be allowed to creep into the lectures and addresses, whose aim would be to impart information scientifically and naturally without any attempt at preaching. V.D. should never be presented as sinful or as a divine judgment on sin, as some of my very angry correspondents have described it in very lurid language; on the contrary, it should be dealt with as an infectious disease which may be contracted by anyone, however exalted his own ethical code may be. The whole of the anti-V.D. educational crusade should be the dispelling of the sense of guilt and false shame and the strengthening of the people's determination to stamp out a disease which ruins life and destroys love and beauty, and which could be

effectively wiped out all over the earth in a few generations, granted the intelligent co-operation of people in public positions. Educators must realize a truth well known to psychologists: when a person's sex life is normal and happy his outlook on life is sane and wholesome; and they must strenuously resist the efforts of dogmatists and obstructionists to keep the minds and bodies of people in the Dark Ages of disease, ignorance and unhappiness. Some day, perhaps, educators will be ashamed of the sadism which inflicts compulsory examinations, with all the attendant mental drudgery and physical strain, on children during the stormy, unsettled period of adolescence.

I should like to think that the reign of obscurantism was coming to an end in our treatment of auto-erotic phenomena, particularly masturbation. In my psycho-analytic work I have treated lads whose nerves have been hideously tangled and twisted by their seniors' attitude to this practice. Sanity comes with the recognition of the inevitableness of auto-erotic practices under the severe restraints of civilized life, and of their harmlessness when not indulged in to excess. Our expressions of horror lead not only to furtiveness, but to the artificial manufacture of greater evils, as Havelock Ellis has reminded us in his *Psychology of Sex*.

The whole business of education, it may be said, is to wean the child psychically from his parents. We must be careful lest, by over-indulgence or harshness, we sidetrack the sexual development of our children into abnormal channels. Because each of us is the offspring of male and female parents, there is something of the opposite sex in everyone. While the primary and secondary characteristics of the particular sex are clearly marked in the overwhelming majority of cases, every male body contains a certain number of female hormones, and vice versa; and when the normal course of development is interrupted, it is possible for the sex glands and the secondary sexual characters to "shift towards an inter-sexual type, who in one way or another physically, psychically, or both may approximate to the opposite sex."¹

Let us see how it can be interrupted. The closest human bond is that which unites a mother and her son. The mother is the son's first love-object, and it has been found that most men unconsciously tend to select for their wives women who in some ways remind them

¹ Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

strongly of their mothers. In normal development, this mother-fixation yields considerably to an interest in one's own sex, and this in turn at puberty gives way to interest in the opposite sex. If a boy is mollycoddled by his mother, he may never get beyond the two earlier childhood stages—preoccupation with his mother and with his own sex. He may so identify himself with his mother that he, as it were, looks out upon life through her eyes. His mother, with whom all women are identified, is on a pedestal; she and they may be revered, but not touched. (The torture of Baudelaire's sex life, for example, was due to this kind of arrested development.) He has never been weaned from his mother, and therefore shrinks back from the strange and mysterious world of relations with the opposite sex, or, as with Beaudelaire, with any woman who represents his infantile ideal of his mother's perfection. Psychically he has never grown up. Unlike the congenitally homosexual, he can be cured, in many instances, by the psycho-analytic technique. The pervert, the exhibitionist, the eonist (the person who wears the clothes of the opposite sex), the narcissist, should be dealt with by psychologists, not policemen; and those who itch to cast stones at them should remember that they themselves passed through those stages on their road to a normal sex life.

Dr. Ernest Jones, most eminent of British psycho-analysts, declares that the right kind of psycho-analytic treatment of homosexuals produces a large number of cures. Much depends, of course, on the invert's *desire* to be cured. Frequently, when a homosexual complains that one rarely hears of cures, it is because the fear which is uppermost in his psychology prevents his making inquiries. This fear is nurtured by our harsh and brutal laws against inverts. Doubtless, when we have more rational and humane laws on the subject, more of those who have been successfully treated will speak about it. It is surely significant (to quote Dr. Kenneth Walker once again) "that in France during the old Monarchy when a homosexual, as the law then stood, was liable to be burnt at the stake, inversion was both fashionable and conspicuous, whereas in modern France, under the Napoleonic code, homosexuality is looked down upon and very little in evidence. The mere fact that there are harsh laws against an activity may lead to a glorification of it." All psychologists, I should hope, will agree with Dr. Stekel (who, incidentally, emphatically denies the inborn character of homosexuality) in deploring the

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interference of the law except as a safeguard against seduction. I believe it would be an immense help to the educator if every child were freed from the dead hand of past fears and phantasies by undergoing a complete psychological analysis.

In trying to indicate the lines along which wholesome sex education would proceed, I am acutely conscious of the patchwork character of all such reforms in our existing social order. Only in a scheme of social reconstruction will the sex problem find its solution; and, whilst pressing for special reforms, we should never lose sight of the ideal which includes and guarantees them—an ideal which could be realized within the next 20 years by honest, courageous thought and determined action.