

SEX IN SOCIAL LIFE

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SEX IN SOCIAL LIFE

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FOREWORD

I HAVE been asked to write a short introduction to this important work, and have undertaken to do so, not without some trepidation, since I am in no way an expert such as are the fifteen authors whose contributions follow. I call it an important work because it is based on objective statement of facts, and starts from biology; it proceeds through psychology to the study of individual and social relationships of all relative kinds; it never loses sight of the truth that right conduct in all matters of sex relationships is governed and decided by ethical or religious principle. Human beings are normally responsible to themselves, to their families, and to the next generation. In speaking about the misuse of sex, which has been the major cause of the spread of venereal disease, Mrs. Neville Rolfe says: "We have knowledge which, if applied effectively, can eliminate these diseases within a generation. Their removal will not, however, affect the major problems of attaching a sense of personal responsibility to the use of the sex function, of directing the vital power derived from sex to the service of personal and racial development." Dr. Crew, in the last chapter, sums up what is implicit throughout the book when he writes: "We must wait upon the rekindling of spiritual values. Men and women must come to believe in themselves and in the society they create," and again: "The individual must know that one of the major forms of service to the community and the species that can be rendered is the creation of a home and the peopling of it." In a word, man can direct his own future if, having the knowledge, he has also the power of self-discipline. Others would put it more simply by saying that man can shape his own development so long as he does not leave God out of consideration, a truth to which the present state of Europe bears witness. This whole book must be considered as a contribution made in all earnestness to individual and racial improvement, to the making of happy individual lives, and the great cause of human health and development.

I would therefore recommend this book to all those who have to advise and control other human beings in the course of their work, since, though sex may not be quite so universal and all-inspiring as some recent psychologists have in their enthusiasm represented it to be, it is certainly much more potent and influential than the taboos and repressions of the nineteenth century allowed. In the first place, clergymen and general practitioners would not rise unrewarded from

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reading these pages, nor, quite certainly, schoolmasters and schoolmistresses, who, speaking generally, have been slow to open their minds to biology and psychology, although they have had to handle young people of both sexes at the age of puberty. In the second place, magistrates, police court missionaries, and all those who have to deal with juvenile and adolescent crime and wrong-doing, should have clear views on the part which sex may play in producing irregularity, and will find some of the ensuing chapters valuable. In the third place, the book should not be without interest to directors of education, members of education and local government committees, and all indeed who have to deal with the problems arising from the social life of our great cities, particularly social workers and members of after-care committees. And probably every educated person may have something to learn, for if the motto "Know Thyself" once inscribed at Delphi has validity, much may be gathered here to help understanding of self and sympathy with others, and to clear up the course of individual lives. How many a life in old days was darkened and rendered fruitless by pure misinterpretation of physical facts and pure misunderstanding of common sexual problems?

There are statements in the following chapters, and perhaps in not inconsiderable number, which will not carry instantaneous conviction to many minds, and in some cases will be rejected; they will at any rate make people think for themselves. One can imagine the sort of criticism which might be made, for instance, by contemporaries of myself, who came of age while Queen Victoria was still on the throne. They would say that here is another book in which the high priests of modern science are pontificating, and telling us with a solemnity somewhat devoid of humour how to get on with our sweetheart and how to succeed with our wives. We read their portentous advice, and feel what miles away we are from the fine abandon of

"In delay there lies no plenty,
Then come kiss me, sweet and twenty,
Youth's a stuff will not endure."

We feel that we Victorians may have been stuffy, conventional and prim, but for all that we did not make anything like such a mess of our marriages as the bright young things of the present day do, in a period when psychologists and psychiatrists have brought the Tables of a new Law from their own Sinai with a confidence not less than that of the old Prophets, and when, if you only begin a sentence with "Science tells us that . . .," you can get away with almost any statement.

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But this, after all, is but the reactionary voice of the wrong sort of Conservatism, and ignores the change of tide and the new set of the violent currents which are sweeping humanity along. Since those peaceful Victorian days there have been two major wars, and twice the young men of the nations have been swept away from their moorings of family control, social conventions, and religious faiths. In this last war both sexes have been carried away, and there has been an exhibition of sexual incontinence and shameless conduct in our streets and lanes which must have shocked many more than just the old-fashioned Christians. There is a terrible bill of unhappiness, of child suffering and of disease, affecting innocent and guilty alike, new being paid in full by both sexes in each combatant nation. Everywhere in our picture papers, in the cinema, and in our novels, we are unable to escape from either over-emphasis or the wrong sort of emphasis upon sex. Right-minded citizens cannot but feel that something must be done, but at the same time they know that the direct attack of the Puritan is not likely to have much success. It is certain in this generation to receive the reply of Sir Toby: "Dost thou think, because thou art virtuous, there shall be no more cakes and ale?" with the Clown's addition on the top of it: "Yes, by Saint Anne, and ginger shall be hot i' the mouth, too." Can any good, then, be done by such a book as this, which presupposes in the reader a certain amount of education and a certain ability to weigh scientific evidence? Not directly, for it is never likely to be read by the great mass, and would not be understood if it were. But indirectly the mass can be effectively influenced, particularly if we start from the right sort of education.

For who are the "great mass" in any nation? Perhaps more than half of any people, the men and women who are not even readers, much less students, and are incapable of profiting by any but the most elementary academic training. A recent enquiry in the United States conducted by Harvard University has placed the percentage of the population which is capable of managerial and directive control as not more than ten per cent., the percentage capable of acquiring a high degree of skill as not more than twenty-five per cent., from which it follows that the unskilled number sixty-five in every hundred. Let us put the number in Great Britain at sixty per cent., and realise that it is now proposed under the Butler Act to give to all these a secondary education in the sense that all the children are to be kept at school in an appropriate course of study continued to the end of what will be eventually the sixteenth year. This is not the place in

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which to discuss the tremendous problem of what are to be the curricula best suited to the needs of this non-academic mass, but it is at least clear that they must be trained in the main for the business of living healthy, happy, and useful lives and for the exercise of citizenship. It seems to follow that they must acquire some conception of science, and yet that it is unlikely that they can, or will, gain much from the study of either chemistry or physics. Is it not obvious that the study of biology is the right basis of their general science training and the right foundation for the whole business of living? In this way the whole mass of the nation would pick up important truths about sex and hygiene in a perfectly natural way, and would appreciate both the point of view which is taken in a book such as this, and the line of thought which is followed. Is it too much to hope that they would at least gain the habit of looking for facts? How great an advance that would be can be estimated by those older people who remember how false or exaggerated were the "facts" with which moral advisers of unexceptionable motives sought to frighten them in former days, and how baseless were those other "facts" with which the weak were accustomed to deceive and to defend themselves. There is much to be said for an education which is based on biology and the New Testament.

It will be said, not without a certain amount of truth, that "homo sapiens" is a misnomer, that man is not governed by reason, but by the emotions, and nowhere so absolutely as in the realm of love and of passion. All this must be admitted, since, if man were rational, there would be no more war, no more crime, and no more broken homes. This book is not and does not claim to be a substitute for religion, nor for the appeal of the moral law, nor is it meant to enlist the emotions. But it does give the facts, and it tries to give all the facts. It does recognise the facts that in practically all normally healthy human beings there is this strong sexual urge seeking satisfaction and making itself felt often almost irresistibly through the stages of puberty and adolescence, that it is present, though its potency is usually less, through the fully adult period as well, and that it is apt to take violent revenges for the complete repressions that are often attempted. It also recognises the fact that the conventions surviving from the past cause many ill-adjustments between individuals and the society of which they form a part. Its purpose is to bring it about that on neither side shall these maladjustments continue so far as they are capable of being removed in the daylight of knowledge. The fact of life which this book faces is that which is

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put very clearly by H. G. Wells in his Autobiography: "In the secret places of my heart I wanted a beautiful body and I wanted it because I wanted to make love with it, and all the derision and humour with which I treated my personal appearance in my talking and writing to my friends . . . did not affect the profundity of that unconfessed mortification. Each year I was becoming much more positively and urgently sexual, and the desire to be physically strong and attractive was intense. I do not know how far my psychology in these matters is exceptional, but I have never been able to consider any sort of love as tolerable except a complete encounter of two mutually desirous bodies—and they have to be reasonably lovely bodies. The circumstances must be beautiful or adventurous or both. I believe this is how things are with nine people out of ten: as natural as hunger and thirst."

Yet under the misuse of hunger lies ill-health, under the misuse of thirst drunkenness, under both death. And so it is with the misuse of sex, and yet it can be the finest thing in life: this book is meant to show how.

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Oxford.

December, 1946.

(The book was finally published in 1949.)

EDITOR'S NOTE

This book was planned in 1937 and was ready for publication at the outbreak of war. An apology is due to all contributors for the double work involved for each in bringing the material up-to-date. The editor's thanks are due to them for their willing co-operation.

Four of the leading scientists summarise current knowledge in each of their own biological sciences, while those of wide experience in different branches of social work indicate practical ways in which this knowledge can be applied.

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January, 1947.

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