

HOW GIRLS CAN HELP
TOWARDS SOCIAL
HYGIENE,

By MARY B. DOUIE, M.B.

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• By *MARY B. DOUIE, M.B.*

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT THINGS IN LIFE IS HEALTH, WHETHER PUBLIC HEALTH OR PERSONAL HEALTH, AND WORK FOR SOCIAL HYGIENE OR PUBLIC HEALTH IS A VERY IMPORTANT UNDERTAKING.

WE are all called to help towards it in any way we can, and I wish, so far as I am able, to help girls to some understanding of the special help they can give.

Everyone ought to think of the securing of personal health, so far as it lies in one's own power, as a public duty. A great philosopher said: "The preservation of health is a duty; few people recognise that there is such a thing as physical morality." This means that everyone ought to know something about the body and its functions, that is, the work it has to do, and what it needs in order that its work may be successfully done. For example, it is wise to know

something about respiration, circulation and digestion, about muscular action, and the action of the brain, and the conditions for their healthy activity; the kind of food that will best help towards growth and energy, the clothing that will give both warmth and freedom of movement, the amount of exercise and rest that is desirable, the need for wholesome occupation for both brain and muscle, the proper proportion of work and of recreation, and the due amount of sleep. But it is not enough to know about these, which we may call the personal or individual functions of the body, those which make for the preservation of personal life and health. There is an even more important function than any of these, what is called the racial function, the power every living thing has of passing on life, or creating new life. For the right use of this power many things are needed: it is a great trust, and should be used as such.

Motherhood.

The right to motherhood only belongs to those who realise the responsibilities of motherhood. Any girl who hopes one day to be a mother is more than ever bound to try to be as healthy as possible, in order

that she may pass on to her child the great gift of health. She must also realise that her choice of a husband will very naturally make or mar her child's health and happiness as well as her own. Every child born into the world has the right to a good home, and to the love and care of a good and healthy father and mother. For a girl to choose a husband for life almost as casually as she would choose a companion for a walk or a partner for a dance is to court disaster for herself and her children.

To-day, more than ever in the past, women and girls are called to face their responsibilities. You have many responsibilities in common with men. You have also special responsibilities as women. If you are to fulfil these you must take life seriously as well as happily; the one does not contradict the other as too many people seem to think. You are called to service for your country, and that does not mean something vague and far off, but service just for that special bit of the country in which you live, service for your town or village, service for the street in which you live, service for your home. You must be honest in your work and wholesome in your recreations, and ready to give a helping hand when and where help is needed, either for a cause or a person.

These are common responsibilities, the call on men and women alike for service. But there is a special responsibility resting on the younger women of the country, which even girls, those just passing over into womanhood, will do well to recognise, and that is responsibility for the children of the country and the homes of the country. Most girls as they grow up think of the possibility of marriage, some almost unconsciously, some as a thing greatly to be desired. I have doubts as to whether the greater number think also of the responsibilities of marriage, not only in its great relationship of husband and wife, but in its almost greater possibility of fatherhood and motherhood. Yet the realisation of this would be all to the good in the shaping of life and thought and purpose for the individual, in the building up of health and happiness and purity in the home and in the Empire.

These are some of the ways in which girls can help towards social hygiene: by the pursuit of health, the acceptance of responsibility, and the practice of purity so that they may be fit in body and soul for service, it may be for the great task of motherhood, it may be to make the world better and safer, not for their own children, but for the children of others. Whichever it be, it can only

be done by those who have so shaped their lives and characters that they are fit to serve. "Our work, be its sphere what it may, must be what we ourselves are. The only way to make others good is to be good in ourselves. Therefore, if we desire to minister to others, and for this end we were born, there is one solemn obligation which rests on us—to sanctify ourselves, to rise to the full stature of our manhood, to develop 'self' to the utmost of its capacity."

But there is a sterner side to the endeavour after social hygiene. A determined and persistent fight has to be carried on against a great enemy of the public health, an enemy which attacks men, women and children. This enemy is Venereal Disease. It can be conquered in two ways, by cure and by prevention, and the latter is the better way. It is the doctor's business to cure it, it is the business of every man and every woman—it is your business—to prevent it. But you cannot fight properly unless you know what is the evil you are fighting against and what are its causes; and the more you know of the evil the more determined will be your resistance. Therefore, if the doctors say that they cannot fight this fight without your help they know that they must tell you what you

really have to fight against. It is only by knowledge that any evil has been conquered in the past; it is only by knowledge that this evil will be conquered.

When we speak of Venereal Disease in connection with Social Hygiene we mean only two of the venereal diseases. These are Gonorrhoea and Syphilis; they are infectious or contagious, and are therefore a danger to public health. Before I speak of the special characteristics of each, I wish to say something of the three points they have in common:—

- (1) They are contagious.
- (2) They are curable.
- (3) They attack the innocent as well as the guilty.

1. It is because these diseases are contagious that they are dangerous. If they were not contagious they would still be very dangerous to the person suffering from them, but that person would not be a source of danger to other people. At the same time there must be no exaggerated fear about them. The great danger of telling people a little about diseases of which they have known little or

nothing is that there is very apt to be a panic, especially when the word "infection" is mentioned. But you must understand that this infection is not like that of measles, or scarlet fever or small-pox.

All infectious diseases are spread by what are called germs, little seeds of infection; each disease has its own germ, and germs are carried in different ways. Some are carried through the air, so that it is not safe to be anywhere near the person who has the disease. But the germs of gonorrhoea and syphilis are not carried through the air, even through quite a short distance. You cannot be infected merely by being near an infected person in a room or workshop or omnibus. You can only be infected by direct touch, by touching not merely the infected person, but the infectious part of that person's body, or sometimes by touching something on which there is some infectious matter. I shall refer to this again when speaking of what is called "innocent" or accidental infection.

2. It is because these diseases are curable that we fight against them in a spirit of hopefulness. Their effects are so terrible and so lasting if untreated and uncured that I should hesitate to tell you of them if I could not at the same time point

to the means of cure and to its practical certainty if *begun early enough and carried on long enough.*

Treatment.

This is provided for everyone, free of expense, and is made as private as possible. As a rule it can be had at a general hospital, and at some hospitals there is a woman doctor for the women and children. There are special sessions for the treatment of these diseases. The frequency of attendance depends on the disease, but generally it

more frequent for gonorrhœa than for syphilis, and less when treatment starts early than when the disease is neglected. Early treatment means less difficulty in treatment and greater certainty of cure. Any doctor, any welfare superintendent, any nurse, knows where and when treatment is given.

The important thing is that treatment should be **BEGUN EARLY** and should be continued *as long as is necessary*; that is, *until the doctor says it may be stopped.*

3. Though immorality is the great underlying cause of both diseases, they are by no means always caused by immoral conduct. Many people suffer from them through no fault of their own.

These are what we call cases of innocent infection. Both syphilis and gonorrhœa are usually spread by sexual intercourse, and but for immoral sexual intercourse, but for wrong conduct between men and women, they would in time cease to be. But when any man or woman is infected by his or her own immoral act, then that man or woman may infect other people in different ways, and those people may in turn infect others. Thus an infected husband may infect his wife, or an infected wife her husband. The children in the house may be infected by sharing the same bed, using the same towels, drinking from the same cups. There are also some cases of accidental infection; for example, from the use of towels in public places, or of public water-closets. But these are rare, and sometimes the mention of them causes unnecessary alarm, and may cause injury to health. I heard of one set of girls who, for fear of infection, would not use the water-closets provided in their place of business, a much more certain danger to their health than the other. If water-closets are kept clean the risk is practically absent; to ensure absolute safety a piece of paper spread on the seat to prevent contact is sufficient. The use of towels already used by other people of whom nothing is known can and

should be avoided. The chief risk here is infection of the eyes.

Gonorrhœa

is the cause of a great deal of trouble in women. It may irritate the passage leading to the bladder, and make it painful and difficult to pass water. It is specially injurious to women because it infects the vagina or passage leading to the womb, and may spread to the womb itself, or even to the ovaries, causing very severe inflammation and much pain. It is the cause of a great many of the serious operations on the womb and ovaries; about half of the many operations of this kind in our hospitals are due to gonorrhœal infection. With gonorrhœa there is usually a yellowish discharge, which is often very profuse at first, though sometimes it may be very slight. Gonorrhœa is not of course the only cause for discharge from the vagina. There is a quite simple white discharge to which women are subject, which has nothing to do with gonorrhœa. But for all discharges the advice of a doctor should be sought. If the discharge is due to gonorrhœa this is especially important, for gonorrhœal discharge is dangerous to the patient, and very infectious to other people,

and should therefore be treated immediately. If a girl or woman has been exposed to infection, and notices a discharge coming on in a few days, she should go at once to a doctor. Every day's delay makes it less easy to cure. If it is not treated and cured then those more serious effects on the womb and ovaries may follow, and besides the danger to health, it very often happens that a woman who suffers in this way becomes what we call "sterile"—she is not able to have any children. This is a great tragedy for the home, and a great tragedy for the nation. Most girls look forward to a husband and a home of their own, and most husbands and wives want to have children, and it is a very terrible thing that a girl by her own fault should make this impossible, or that a husband should find that he has infected his wife with gonorrhœa, and has thus destroyed their hopes of children, because he himself was infected, perhaps years before, and was not then treated and cured.

There is another effect of gonorrhœa I must mention, because it affects the children, and what hurts the children should appeal to every girl and every woman. If a mother has gonorrhœa when her baby is born, the child's eyes may be infected at birth, and if they are not very carefully cleansed

at the time, and very carefully watched afterwards the child may lose its sight. A great deal of infantile blindness is due to this cause. Again, the mother's gonorrhœa may be passed on to her little girls, who may suffer from an inflammation of the passages which is very difficult to cure. To avoid this the greatest care should be taken by a mother with gonorrhœa to prevent her linen and towels coming into contact with her children.

Syphilis

is just as harmful in its effects as gonorrhœa. It begins with a "sore," a small hard swelling at the point of infection. Because it is usually caused by sexual intercourse, the sore is usually on the lower part of the body. If the sore is treated at once, the disease can be checked at once. If it is not treated, though the sore itself will disappear, the poison is still there, and is carried through the body by the blood, and some weeks later will appear in other parts of the body, especially as eruptions on the skin, and as sore throat. Both the first sore and these later effects are infectious, and it is in this second stage that the risk of infection to other people is greatest. For example, if the mouth is affected, then the

disease may be carried by kissing; or it may be spread through a house by using the same cups or the same towels or by sharing a bed. In this stage, too, the disease can be cured; but again it is very important that *the treatment should begin early*, and that the patient should *go on being treated so long as the doctor says it is necessary*, because even after the outward signs have disappeared under treatment the poison may still be in the body, and so long as the poison is there the person is not safe.

If syphilis is not treated, or not properly treated, the outward signs will still disappear in time, but in later years, perhaps, when it has been quite forgotten, it may become active again, and give much trouble. The skin and the bones may be affected, and there may be great disfigurement of the face, or deep ulcers on the legs; or some of the important organs of the body, such as the liver or kidneys, may be attacked, or there may be paralysis of one or more limbs. Later still syphilis may cause painful diseases of the heart, or blood vessels, or spinal cord. Worst of all it is the cause of a great deal of insanity. Our big lunatic asylums are largely filled with victims of drink and of venereal disease.

These are the disasters that syphilis can bring

on the individual man or woman, but there is one form of syphilis called CONGENITAL SYPHILIS which destroys the most innocent and helpless of all, the babies and the children. If a father or a mother has syphilis before the baby is born, and if the mother is not treated, the baby is almost sure to be infected. It may be so badly infected that it dies before it is born; it may be born diseased; it may be born looking quite healthy, and later, in a few weeks or months, it grows sickly and wastes away and dies, or, worse still, lives on, always sickly and diseased. Syphilis, like gonorrhœa, makes many children blind. Sometimes, too, syphilis makes the children deaf, and sometimes it makes them paralysed, and sometimes it affects their minds. Remember always, however, that treatment of the expectant mother, if it is begun early and is thorough, can generally prevent these disasters.

It is for the sake of the children very largely that I tell you girls and women these things, and ask for your help to fight against them; for the doctors cannot win the fight alone. They may be able to cure the disease when once it has attacked the person, but we want the help of every boy and man, of every girl and woman in Great Britain,

to keep out the enemy, because that is what the doctors cannot do alone.

I have written these things because we need your help. Probably you are asking how you can help in a difficult thing like this. You will feel, and quite rightly, that you cannot talk about these things, that you know too little, and would probably do more harm than good if you tried. We do not want you to talk about them. It is not an easy thing to do rightly, even with more knowledge than you have. But there might be a time when even by means of the little knowledge you have you might save a friend, a fellow-worker, from going astray; or if some one asked your advice, having fallen into danger, and being afraid of disease, you could tell her of possible cure and urge her to go for treatment.

But even giving help and advice of this sort is not the chief part of your work. We want you to help us in the daily ways of daily life. Every workshop, every factory, every club is what the girls and women there make it. It is your business to see that wherever you work, wherever you go for rest and recreation, the other girls and women are the better and not the worse for your being there. It is girls who can really help other girls; the older

women can only preach, but you can practise ; and there is an old saying—as true as it is old—that example is better than precept. You never know what temptation a girl may be fighting against, but it is the girl, the woman beside you, whom you can help by what you do or by what you refuse to do. If you prove in your daily life that happiness and even fun in life can be had without foolishness or recklessness in talk or action, you are helping every girl to lead a straighter and a better life.

And you can help the men ; they are very largely what women make them, what women expect them to be. It is very specially in the relations of men and women that women and girls have a great responsibility. It is not the direct acts of immorality that cause the most widespread evil ; they are seen to be evil at once and they carry their own penalty and their own condemnation. But want of restraint in speech and conduct, too great love of fun, excitement or admiration, may lead a girl to do or say or allow things which are lowering. A girl sometimes allows a man to do or say things she does not quite like, because she is afraid she may lose his friendship if she is "too particular." A girl cannot be too particular. If a man's friendship is worth having she will not lose it by refusing

familiarity, but will make it a better sort of friendship. She will not only win his respect, but what is even more important she will keep her own self-respect. She will also set a high standard for womanhood, and for what women expect of men.

The attraction of sex, of boy for girl and girl for boy, of man for woman and woman for man, is one of the best things in life when it is rightly used, one of the worst when it is wrongly used. Make friends with men, be interested in what they are doing, interest them in what you are doing. Don't think that the best form of friendship is imitation love-making. Real love is too big a thing, too good a thing, to be spoiled by playing at it beforehand. Know your own worth, and make your men friends know it. Have courage. Don't be afraid to refuse to listen to talk that is lowering, to stop at once any familiarity in speech or action. Don't let men hold you cheaply, don't let them treat any women as cheap. Let them understand that the men girls are willing to know, are willing to have as friends, are willing to take as husbands are the men who respect women and lead clean lives. In this way you will not only make your own life safe, you will make the world safer for other women. If you are going to have a home and a husband, see that it is

a home and a husband worth the work and worry that must be faced in married life along with the happiness. Remember too that the children are largely what their fathers and mothers make them. Their health depends on the health of their parents, they inherit the qualities of their parents, they imitate the actions of their parents. Therefore, for their sake, as well as for your own, you must choose with care the man with whom you are to share your life, the man who will be the father of your children. Choose a man whom you would be glad to see your sons resemble, a man whose type you would like them to imitate. Watch also your own thoughts and actions, so that you have nothing to remember with regret, when you have daughters for whom you wish all that is best in life. If you are going to hand on to your children the gift of life, make sure that it is a good gift so far as you are able to make it so. Marriage will then for you be the beginning of great happiness then you may hope in time for children in whom you can take pride, healthy and happy and helpful, as all children ought to be.

I appeal to you as women. For the sake of Great Britain, for the sake of the men and women of Great Britain, above all for the sake of the

children, do all in your power to make our country purer and cleaner.

This is the help we ask of you in the great campaign for health, in the great fight against wrong and disease. Your help will be of value chiefly by what you yourselves are—the life you lead, the example you set, the influence you use as workers among your fellow-workers, as friends of the men you meet, as wives in the home, as mothers with your children. It is not a dull life we are asking you to lead; it is a hopeful, and a helpful, and a happy life. I would sum it up for you in a prayer from a great author: "Keep us from cheap pleasures and mean hopes. . . . Give us courage, gaiety, and the quiet mind."

IT is the duty of anyone who suspects that he or she has contracted either of these diseases to seek medical advice at the earliest moment.

IN all large towns special treatment centres have been established for these diseases, where examination is **SECRET, FREE OF CHARGE, and CARRIED OUT BY EXPERT DOCTORS.** Anyone can obtain the address of the nearest centre by:

- (1) Reading the notice of the clinic in any public convenience; or
- (2) Applying to the local Medical Officer of Health at the Health Office, or to the Medical Department of the British Social Hygiene Council.

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DAMAGED LIVES

PAMPHLET

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