

SEX IN LIFE.

YOUNG WOMEN.



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PAMPHLET

Published by
BRITISH SOCIAL HYGIENE COUNCIL,
Carteret House, Carteret Street, London, S.W.1.

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THE BRITISH SOCIAL HYGIENE COUNCIL,

Carteret House, Carteret Street, London, S.W.1.

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OPEN LETTER TO YOUNG WOMEN.

DEAR —,

Like most young people you probably sometimes dream about the future and of what life holds for you. Will the career you have chosen be a successful one? Will happiness really come your way? Will you, when age comes, look back on a life that has been thrilling and full of adventure. Amongst these dreams will be some connected with marriage, home and children. You sometimes, perhaps, think of the time when you will be engaged and you may already have formed a picture in your mind of the kind of man you would like to marry and even of the kind of home you will have when you can arrange things as you like. The picture you have in your mind will probably include children who will be laughing, happy youngsters full of health and vigour. Some of you may already know some particular man who figures as husband and father, and thoughts of this kind lead you rather naturally to questions about sex—what it is—how it works—and what its place is in life.

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This pamphlet is an attempt to give an answer to such questions, which are important, because sex has so much to do with health, happiness and character.

All living creatures are alike in that they perform certain activities, of which perhaps the most important are feeding, growth and reproduction. By reproduction is meant the carrying on of life from generation to generation, and we know that for many thousands of years living creatures have passed on their life to their offspring and that there are millions of different kinds of creatures in the world to-day. As examples we may think of living things so small that they can only be seen under a very powerful microscope, and on the other hand of human beings with all their varied powers, activities and interests. The smallest creatures reproduce in very simple ways, sometimes by dividing into two, sometimes by throwing out a tiny bud of their own substance, sometimes by breaking up into a number of smaller particles. The human being reproduces by means of an act involving the union of male and female parts and by the provision

of a safe growing place within the Mother for the undeveloped child.

All living things, then, pass on their life to offspring, but—as has been said—there are different ways by which they do this. Some, like the little creatures I have already mentioned, just divide into two, each of which is then complete. In higher forms of life the beginning is the same, but the divided parts do not move away from each other to lead complete and separate lives, but each part divides again and again, all the new divisions keeping together and in relation to each other, and so the very complicated bodies of animals and human beings with which we are familiar are built up. As the divisions and combinations of new-formed cells proceed, different kinds of cells are produced and all the varied kinds of organs and structure which make up a complete fish, bird or human baby are the result. All these new little babies are like their parents. Why and how is this?

It is because, in these higher and more complicated creatures, the first dividing is not the beginning of the story; before the tiny mass of substance which will

eventually grow into a salmon, for instance, splits for the first time it is joined by and becomes one with another particle. Why is the joining of these two particles necessary? The answer to this question leads us to the story of sex, since one particle is the sperm or male cell and the other the egg or female cell; a male creature is one within whose body the sperm cells develop, and a female creature one wherein are found the eggs. The egg cell is often called the ovum (plural ova), and, as its name suggests, has the shape of an egg. This ovum or egg varies in size, being sometimes so small that it cannot be seen except under a microscope, and sometimes large, as in the case of the hen. The male cell, the sperm, is very much smaller than the ovum and has a tail which helps it to move rapidly. Before an ovum can grow into a new creature (plant, fish, bird or baby) like its parents, a male cell or sperm must be joined with it. When this has happened it is said to be fertilised, and only then can it begin to divide and re-divide and grow at last into a new plant, bird or animal.

Sometimes fertilisation, or union between ovum

and sperm, takes place outside the bodies of the parents, as, for example, in the case of the salmon. The salmon lays her eggs in a quiet pool and the male salmon swims over them depositing sperm cells, some of which fertilise the ova. Something of the same kind happens in the mating of male and female frogs. In birds, mammals (or animals that suckle their young), and human beings, however, fertilisation takes place within the female body, and therefore by some means or other the sperm cell has to be introduced into it. In mammals, including human beings, not only does fertilisation take place within the body of the female, but the offspring spends a considerable part of its earlier life in a special organ within the mother's body, known as the uterus or womb.

I want now to tell you something about the organs of reproduction in a woman. They are situated in the lower part of the body, well protected by the back and hip bones and by the large muscle across the front.

The egg cells themselves develop in two small organs called ovaries: close to each ovary is a tube, and these tubes lead into the uterus (or womb), one

on each side of it. The uterus is like a pear in shape and the tubes enter near the upper and broader end. It is hollow inside, and its thick walls are largely made of what we call muscular tissue, which, by stretching or contracting, makes the cavity larger or smaller as need arises. These walls are well supplied with blood vessels. The lower, narrower end dips into the vagina, which is a short tube leading to the exterior.

From the age of about 13 to 14 until the age of about 45 an ovum leaves one of the ovaries every four weeks or so, and, passing through one of the tubes, enters the uterus. If it is not joined by a sperm cell, it passes from the uterus to the vagina and so out of the body. As the human ovum is very small, only just visible to the naked eye, one is not conscious of its passage.

I have just said that an ovum leaves the ovaries about every three or four weeks, and this may have suggested to you that its development has something to do with the monthly period. You are quite right—as the ovum prepares to leave the ovary more blood

than usual finds its way to the tiny blood vessels in the wall of the uterus and the whole organ becomes slightly swollen. When there is no fertilisation and, therefore, no developing creature to be nourished, this extra blood is not required, and it passes away from the body accompanied by some of the delicate membrane lining the uterus; a new membrane then forms to replace the old one. Menstruation is something that happens to every healthy woman, is a sign that you are growing up and that one day you will be able to exercise the full powers of your womanhood. You need never be ashamed of it nor frightened; if anything about it worries you, write to the Enquiries Department of the British Social Hygiene Council, or go and see a proper doctor.

Certain ordinary rules of health are very important during this time; I will mention three of them:

1. Have a bath or wash thoroughly every day.
2. Avoid being constipated a few days before the beginning of the period.

3*. Take some exercise regularly a few days before and during the period.

You are perhaps wondering how the ovum becomes fertilised; to help you to understand this I must tell you something about the male reproductive organs.

Just as a woman has two ovaries in which the ova are formed, so the man has two small organs called the testes, and in these, from time to time, develop millions of tiny sperm cells; these travel through a series of tubes until finally they reach the male organ, or penis, and pass out of the body. In physical union between a man and woman a very large number of sperm cells are introduced by the male into the vagina, travel up the uterus, and, if an ovum happens to be there, one sperm will join with it, or, as we say, fertilise it. The fertilised ovum descends from the tube into the uterus, where for a period of nine months

* Some simple exercises are given in a pamphlet entitled "Advice to Young Women during the Monthly Period," published by Messrs. Lewis, 136, Gower Street, W.C.1, price 1d. This may also be obtained from the British Social Hygiene Council.

its cells multiply by dividing and it grows at length into a tiny, but perfectly formed human creature. During this time the developing child is being nourished through the mother's blood, and is sharing her life; you can understand, therefore, how important it is that a woman who is pregnant should live a healthy life, with proper food, rest and exercise. We know to-day that there is no truth in the idea that, if a woman sees something frightening or unpleasant, her child will bear the mark of it; most doctors are agreed that the stories about maternal impressions are not well founded. It seems, however, that the child has a better chance of healthy development when its mother is free from anxiety and is able to look forward with joy to the birth of her baby.

With the beginning of menstruation the girl enters the period of womanhood, and sooner or later will awaken to a desire for a mate, a home and children. Partly because her ovaries, which were more or less asleep in childhood, are now working, she becomes interested in the meaning of sex and its activities. Sex activity is bound up with the desire

to give expression to one's gifts and talents, and it is true to say that all creative work by men or women, whether it be trimming a hat, painting a picture, writing a book or discovering a new star in the sky, is partly due to the work of the ovaries or testes.

The ovaries form the ova, as I have already said, but they and the testes (in the man) also form valuable substances, which enter the blood and pass round the whole body ; these substances have a great deal to do with the development not only of manly and womanly physical characteristics, but also with the formation of character (or personality), and we should be uninteresting, rather colourless people if we were without them.

You may have noticed that lately you seem to be sought out by the opposite sex and to be attracted towards boys yourself. This means that, consciously or unconsciously, you are beginning to look for your future mate, although you may be interested in several men before you make your final choice. Perhaps you look on a man friend mainly as someone who will provide you with treats, amusements and

flattery, and this is, to some extent, natural, although friendship that means only this is rather a poor thing. It is well, however, that you should realise that such friendships, often of a temporary nature, are only preliminaries to the selection of a life partner, and, therefore, do not form a satisfactory basis for real intimacy. By intimacy we mean the mutual understanding arising between two people who know each other well, and on the physical side the caresses and endearments which express mutual love and which between a man and woman may lead to a desire for the full sex relationship of marriage.

Possibly you are already interested in one man only and you may both be thinking of marriage ; in other words you are courting.

Human beings are not alone in preparing for full mating by courtship. Many animals go through this stage : you have surely listened to the male bird singing to his lady love ; you may have heard the croaking of the bull frog : if you were in a wild country on a spring night, you would hear around you the cries of wild creatures calling to each other. What is

the meaning of all this, and how does it compare with courtship amongst ourselves?

We notice that amongst animals it is the male who seeks to attract the female: the brilliant plumage of many male birds, the lion's mane, the stag's horn, are all adornments whereby the male of the species tries to attract, or make himself beloved by, the female. Amongst many animals the female watches the males fight each other, and only gives herself to the victor. The female is sought out by the male, and chooses the strongest or the most beautiful, with the result that the father of her offspring is likely to be a healthy member of the species.

Marriage amongst human beings is more serious because more permanent than most animal matings. Men and women marry, not only because of the impulse to carry on the race, but also because every human being needs to be supremely loved and wanted by another, because, without some close companion, men and women are lonely, and because each possesses qualities needed by the other. When two people love each other they generally want to create some-

thing together, and most marriages are incomplete without children and the joy they bring.

Because marriage fulfils so many of our needs, human courtship is something more than a mere attempt on the part of the man to display his strength or prowess, and so attract the woman he loves. It is the great opportunity for two people who are attracted to get to know each other. You will realise, I am sure, that physical attraction is not enough. You need to understand each other's point of view, to know what you both feel about such things as religion, bringing up children, keeping your own friends when you are married, etc. You want to be sure that your lover is fit and well, as this will make the birth of healthy children more likely; you also want him to be steady and able to keep you, and he wants to know that you are the kind of person who will be cheerful, even when things go wrong, and who will not nag or scold. In fact, you both need to know each other's faults and tiresome ways as well as each other's charm and loveliness. Only when you really understand each other and feel that, knowing all, you still want to live

your lives together are you ready for marriage and all that it means.

Certain people indulge in the fullest possible form of intimacy before marriage, sometimes even in a very casual way. Why, you may ask, is there any harm in this? Why, at any rate, should two people who love each other wait for marriage before they become united? There are several reasons why intimacy outside marriage **is** undesirable, and I am going to try and explain them to you.

We must remember that the way men and women behave towards each other affects not only themselves but also the Community. Society has always claimed the right to regulate sex conduct, and you may be able to think of some reasons for this yourself; I am going to suggest two important ones.

The first reason is that an unmarried girl who has intimate relations with a man may become the mother of a child. Now every child has the right to the love of two parents and to a settled and happy home where father and mother both take part in his upbringing. Therefore society frowns on the

unmarried mother because, among other reasons, the child under these circumstances has not its full chance of proper development. Very often the mother is most sincerely attached to the child, but no girl can fully play the part of mother and father, even though she sacrifice her whole life to that one purpose. If she earns enough to keep herself and the baby, then generally she can do but little to bring up that baby, and too often the illegitimate child, although fed and cared for from the physical point of view, is starved of the one thing children most need—love—showing itself by tenderness and understanding. Although much is done to-day to help the unmarried girl and her baby, yet never can the illegitimate child have quite the same chance as the legitimate one, and I am sure you will agree that it is unfair and wrong to handicap a baby from the very moment of its birth.

The second reason is the possibility of contracting disease. There are certain diseases (the venereal diseases) which are mainly acquired through sexual intercourse with someone who is already infected. The

chief venereal diseases are Syphilis and Gonorrhœa, and both these are serious. Syphilis is caused by a small germ rather like a corkscrew which may enter the body through some tiny crack in the skin : it multiplies very rapidly and may form a small local sore or ulcer. The ulcer may not seem serious, but very quickly the germs reach the blood stream and may cause great damage. If a girl has a relationship with a man who is already infected with Syphilis it is extremely probable that he will pass on some of the germs to her, and as the membrane lining those parts of her body is very delicate, a small crack through which they may enter her body is quite likely to occur. The effects on her own health may be serious, for the germs get into the blood stream and the disease may cause blindness, heart trouble or even insanity : worse still, however, the disease may affect her children, since while a new life is developing in the uterus it may be infected by its mother ; it sometimes happens that men and women who have been careless before marriage find that, when children come, they are born diseased. Such children may

become blind, deaf or mentally defective and are thus a misery to themselves and a burden to the community. It would be terrible, would it not, to feel that a child was suffering through one's own fault ?

These results may be prevented by proper medical treatment, and I am going to say more about this presently ; I want you to realise at once, however, that if an expectant mother suffering from syphilis has regular treatment before the child is born, then there is every likelihood that her baby will be healthy : even a child born with syphilis can be cured if treated early enough.

Gonorrhœa is also a serious disease. It is caused by a small germ of the shape of a coffee bean, and usually an unpleasant discharge is the first sign that a person is infected with it. If not treated gonorrhœa may become chronic and, by causing inflammation of the tubes leading to the uterus and even by damaging the ovaries, may render a woman unable to have children. The disease sometimes injures the male organs of reproduction also, and many childless marriages are due to untreated, and therefore un-

cured, gonorrhœa in the husband. It is also a cause of rheumatism and of some forms of arthritis (a crippling and painful disease of the joints). It may cause blindness in newly born babies, since if a woman is suffering from gonorrhœa some of the discharge may find its way to the baby's eyes during birth, and if not immediately treated will set up an acute inflammation so damaging to the eyes that sight may be completely lost. This is one of the reasons why to-day great care is taken to deal immediately with any signs of eye inflammation in newly born babes. A midwife will always summon a doctor if such symptoms are present, and if the doctor suspects ophthalmia neonatorum, as the disease is called, he is obliged to notify the case to the Medical Officer of Health. Many children owe their sight to-day to prompt treatment at birth.

You may be told, perhaps, by some man who is trying to persuade you to allow these intimacies that infection with venereal disease and pregnancy can be avoided if some contraceptive appliance is used. Many tragedies have occurred because girls

have believed what has been told them in this way for too often these appliances are completely unreliable.

Now about treatment. Both these diseases are curable, and the earlier treatment is begun the more likely is it to be completely successful. Because it is so very important that people suffering from either should be treated at once, and because the drugs used are expensive, the Government, through the local authorities, now provides treatment by fully qualified medical men and women quite free of charge and under conditions of secrecy. There is no reason to-day why any man or woman suffering from gonorrhœa or syphilis should remain untreated. Those who have become infected, whether in the way I have suggested or, as very occasionally happens, through an accident, e.g., use of infected towel or sheet, etc., have a most serious duty to carry out ; they must, both in their own interests and in the interests of the community, visit either their own doctor or a special clinic and undergo treatment until cured. The name of the local clinic will be found in most public lavatories and can always be obtained by writing confidentially to the local Medical Officer of Health or to the Medical

Secretary, British Social Hygiene Council, Carteret House, Carteret Street, London, S.W. 1.

You yourself may one day hear of a girl who perhaps through having contracted one or other of these diseases finds herself in difficulty or is destitute ; if you do, remember that such a girl can often obtain treatment at a special Venereal Disease Hostel, where she will be lodged and cared for free of charge. Never hesitate to advise anyone who thinks he or she may have run the risk of infection to go to a doctor and have the proper tests ; it is always worth while making sure that everything is as it should be, and if there is something wrong then treatment will help to put it right.

Before leaving this subject I want you to understand that sometimes a woman may have a discharge which has nothing to do with gonorrhœa and also that not all cases of blindness, heart trouble or insanity, etc., are due to the venereal diseases. There are many other causes of the troubles and sometimes we cannot guard against them. We have, however, a special responsibility where the venereal diseases are concerned, since no one is bound to indulge in irregular sex relationships, and if young men and

women could learn to control their impulses in this respect syphilis and gonorrhœa would soon disappear from our midst.

I have tried to explain why Society demands that men and women should only exercise their sex impulses within marriage and then under due control. Are there some more personal reasons for accepting the restraint which this implies ? The answer to this depends largely on one's whole outlook on life. If you believe in the power and the joy of love in its true sense, *i.e.*, a love based on a desire that the loved one shall be happy, then you will understand that a satisfaction of physical desire alone will never make a lasting bond between you and the man you care for. Love implies and includes friendship, *i.e.*, companionship of mind as well as body, and sexual intimacy at its best is a sign or visible manifestation of this love ; to enter into such intimacy lightly and with no desire for permanence may prevent one from fully realising its power. Personality is developed through the expression of all that is fine and noble in each individual, and expression of one's best and real self always means some control of natural and certainly of purely selfish impulses. Love of any

kind, but particularly love between man and woman and between parent and child, is the force above all others through which we learn to master our own impulses, selfish or otherwise, and to find joy in the happiness of others.

You may agree to all this, and yet feel that things are difficult for you because the man you are fond of is trying to persuade you to allow intimacies, and you hate to refuse every time. I think we always have to remember that men and women are rather different in this way. A girl often loves to be caressed, petted and made much of, but shrinks from further intimacy; while the man, when he is in love, longs for the closest possible union, and finds it difficult to control his passion when it is roused by the very caresses the girl loves. This means, surely, that the girl must show understanding; she is right to want to reserve complete union for marriage only, but, if this is so, then she must do all in her power to help her man friend.

She may have to forgo some of the caressing she herself longs for in order to make things easier for him; more especially she must not purposely excite him in order to show her power, and then madden

him by a show of coldness or indifference. If she does, she is deliberately making control difficult and is spoiling their whole relationship; she is showing her worst, because her most selfish side, and is bringing out the worst instead of the best in him. Believe me, it is worth while waiting until you are married to express the fulness of your love for each other, and, unless this love is a reality, you should not think of marriage nor of physical intimacy.

Apart from these higher reasons, sex relations before marriage are a constant cause of anxiety for what may have happened (especially for the girl), and it robs courtship not only of its anticipations but also of much of its romance and joy.

I should like to end this letter by telling you what a great man and a first-rate scientist, Sir Arthur Thomson, said about marriage. He told us that it is built on three foundation-stones—physical fondness, kindred tastes, and a common purpose. If you see to it that your own marriage, when it comes, rests on these foundation-stones, then you and the man you choose will be entering on a great adventure, during which you will ever learn to know and understand each other more fully; towards the end of your

journey you will look back and see that your sufferings and your joys, your triumphs and disappointments have all helped to bring you nearer to each other, and have knit you together in a bond not even death can break.

I have once or twice suggested that you may one day want some help or information either for yourself or a friend: if you ever do, write to the Enquiries Department,

British Social Hygiene Council,
Carteret House,
Carteret Street,
London, S.W.1.

The Department will always be glad to help you if it can.

Yours very sincerely,

VIOLET D. SWAISLAND.