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Woman's Sex Problems—A Lecture.

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"Treatment of Gonorrhea," etc.

It was with considerable reluctance and hesitation that I accepted the invitation to deliver a lecture before an audience of young women. There were two reasons for my hesitation. The first reason is that woman's sex problems are so numerous and so complex that it is impossible to treat them satisfactorily and fully in one evening. To do full justice to the subject, a course of at least twenty or thirty lectures would be required. The second reason is that I believe in speaking frankly and honestly about any subject which comes up for discussion. We are not obliged to discuss all subjects, but if we do discuss a subject we are obliged to tell the truth about it. And my ideas on woman's sex problems differ so much from the conventional, orthodox, stereotyped ideas of the subject that I am afraid my audience might perhaps be shocked. However, within the time at my disposal I will try to do the best I can and I will try to use as delicate language as possible so as not unnecessarily to offend the most sensitive.

I believe that the sex question is of paramount importance—it is the one question which touches personally every human being, male or female. And

it touches them for a much longer period than we used to think. To be more explicit, in former times it used to be thought that a woman's sex life commenced with the establishment of her first menstruation and ceased with the menopause or climacteric, that is, the cessation of menstruation. Now we know differently. We know that the sex instinct is active in girls before the beginning of menstruation, and lasts for many, many years after menstruation has ceased. We also have a different idea now of the scope of the sex instinct. It used to be thought, and by the vast majority of people it is still thought, that the sex instinct is merely for the purpose of reproduction, of perpetuating the race, of having children. We know now that the function of reproduction is merely one of the phases of the sex instinct. We know that the sex instinct is much more than that, that it is much more complex and that it deeply influences our entire life, our thoughts, our feelings, our actions.

The sex question is second in importance only to the economic question; but in some respects it is even of greater importance than is the economic question. The economic question is the more basic,

*Delivered before the New York Women's Protective Association.

more fundamental question, but on the other hand it is much simpler, and strange as the statement may seem to some, much easier of solution; while the sex question, by which we understand the entire love life of the individual, is extremely complex and for its proper solution we must call to our assistance a thorough familiarity with biology, anthropology, physiology and psychology. We have millions of men and women for whom the economic question is solved, who do not have to worry about their bread and butter, who have steady jobs or permanent incomes, and who, nevertheless, suffer and are unhappy because their sex life or their love life is not satisfactory.

As most of the world's misery is due to ignorance, so most of the world's sexual misery is due to sexual ignorance. And the cause of our sexual ignorance is the secrecy with which everything pertaining to the sexual instinct has been surrounded for almost two thousand years. In ancient Greece there was nothing shameful about the human body or about the sexual organs, and the sex instinct was treated as it should be, as a normal, necessary and beautiful thing. With the advent of Christianity, the sex instinct began to be looked upon as something unclean, filthy, something to be ashamed of, something to be chastised, punished and repressed. Asecticism has been one of the great scourges of the human race, and sexual repression has led to untold misery and agony. Both the sexual organs and the sexual function were looked down upon as the work of the devil, and those perverted views have survived to the present day, particularly so in everything concerning the sex life of woman.

Take for instance, a simple, natural function like that of menstruation. Not only primitive races, but people living today entertain the most crazy, most bizarre notions about it. They all emanate from the belief that a menstruating woman is under some evil influence. In

some places in Africa a menstruating woman cannot drink milk, because if she does, the cows will die. In many places both in Europe and America a menstruating woman is prohibited from churning butter. It is supposed that the butter will be of bad quality. In olden times it was believed that if a menstruating woman touched seeds, they became sterile, that vines would wither. If pregnant animals were touched by her they were apt to miscarry and dogs would go mad if they touched her or the menstrual blood. In Galela at the present time the menstruating women cannot enter the tobacco fields; in Sumatra they are barred from the rice fields; in Saigon they are not allowed in any opium factory; in Syria they are prohibited from helping in salting or pickling things, and in Brunswick they must not assist in killing a pig. In some places in France it is still believed that if a menstruating woman enters a sugar factory during certain stages of the refining process, the sugar will turn black.

Intercourse with a menstruating woman was considered one of the most terrible things that could happen, and if it coincided with an eclipse of the sun by the moon, it was almost sure to result fatally. This superstition to a great extent persists to the present day.

But leaving out of consideration such superstitions, the ignorance of simple hygiene during the menstruating period is quite appalling. There are still, for instance, thousands and thousands of women who believe that it is dangerous to take a bath or a vaginal douche during menstruation. If there is any time when a woman should take a bath or vaginal douche, it is just during the period of menstruation, for it is then that she needs cleansing more than at any other time. The only precaution to be enjoined is not to take any cold baths and to guard against chills. A warm bath and warm vaginal douche are not only not injurious, but they are decidedly beneficial.

Hygienic Neglect of the Girl.

While on this subject, I should like to say a few words about the shameful neglect which is the portion of our young girls suffering with some vaginal or uterine trouble. When a boy has some trouble with his sexual organs, some inflammation or discharge, the family physician is as a rule at once consulted. But a girl can suffer for years with itching around the genitals, leucorrhea or "the whites," and nothing will be done, and for two reasons: The first reason is that the girl herself is so ashamed that she won't let her mother know until her condition is either unbearable or can no longer be concealed, and second, the mother herself, even if knowing of the girl's condition, will neglect for months or even years to take her to a physician, both on account of false modesty and because of the fear that the required treatment will necessitate the rupture of the hymen.

The hymen, or the membrane which closes the orifice of the vagina, is still held in a superstitious reverence which is a legacy of the middle ages, and physical virginity is still prized more highly than is moral chastity. The common, ignorant people, which constitute the vast majority in every nation, do not know that a girl may be physically a virgin and yet sexually very unchaste, and vice versa, that a girl may have lost her hymen and still be sexually and morally pure.

Venereal Disease.

Every young woman should be familiar with the fact of the existence of venereal disease; she should know that gonorrhea and syphilis are among humanity's greatest scourges; she should know that thousands of men and women suffer from these diseases, are maimed and disfigured by them, driven to premature graves by them or rendered hopelessly paralyzed or insane. She should know that many thousands of cases of blindness are due to venereal

disease. She should know of the importance of this disease so that she may guard against infection and she should be pretty sure that the young man who is to be her future husband is free from them.

I trust the future is not far distant when every state will demand, as some states do now, a certificate of freedom from venereal disease from every applicant for a marriage license. But I am glad to say that even now, in the states where no such requirements exist, many young men make it a point of honor to present their brides with such certificates from competent and reputable physicians. If it should become the universal custom either to demand or to present voluntarily such certificates of freedom from venereal disease, a great deal of unnecessary sickness and disease would be prevented. The vast majority of men are not vicious, they are only ignorant. They may know that they had suffered with a disease, but if they have had no symptoms for several years they believe themselves cured and have no hesitation in getting married. The custom of a thorough medical examination for the purpose of getting a medical certificate of freedom from venereal disease would disclose many cases of sickness which could be cured after a few weeks' treatment, and thousands of wives would thus be saved from infection by gonorrhea and syphilis. If the bridegroom could bring no such certificate of freedom from venereal disease, the bride would have the option of breaking the engagement, or if for various reasons she preferred to marry she could at least guard herself against infection.

I could report hundreds of sad and tragic cases of infection following within a few days or a few weeks after marriage, but two or three will suffice.

Two Cases.

Case 1. Age twenty-eight. Married five years. Began to ail two weeks after marriage and has been an invalid

ever since. All that time she has had no treatment. For the husband happens to be a cruel, contemptible brute. He told her she did not need any treatment. It is natural for a woman to be sick after marriage, and it was no use wasting money on doctors. But finally she became so haggard looking, got so thin and feeble that her people insisted on her seeing a doctor. She came with her husband. Of course it did not take me long to find out what the trouble was. I asked for a private talk with the man, who at first strenuously denied ever having had any venereal disease; but when I told him that it was no use lying, that I could find out in a minute by examining him whether he had or not, he confessed that he had had gonorrhea, but he was sure that he had been cured when he married. I examined his urine and found it full of shreds and germs. When I told him that it was a crime to ruin a human being like that, without even trying to cure her, his excuse was that he was afraid to send her to doctors; he was afraid they would tell her what the disease was, and as his and her parents were strict Catholics, he feared there might be trouble. And so for the fear of a little unpleasantness, he risked and ruined the life of the woman whom he had promised to cherish and protect. For she will never be a healthy, normal human being. Her entire generative organs—uterus, the ovaries and the fallopian tubes—must come out if an attempt is to be made to save her life. And she may not be able to stand an operation—so weak, so anemic, so miserable she is.

Case 2. Aged twenty-six. Married four years. Three months ago gave birth to a child, after a very difficult labor. The child was afflicted with gonorrheal ophthalmia and is now completely blind in one eye. Only after the greatest care and attention was the other eye saved. Since giving birth to the child she has been a very sick woman, running a temperature of 101 to 103 degrees and losing flesh rapidly. She

has had no intercourse since. Examination showed the presence of an abundant acrid discharge, containing numerous germs. There can hardly be any doubt that she became infected soon after marriage, but the discharge was of a mild, dormant character, as it often is in women; but as is also often the case, pregnancy and labor stirred up the activity of the germs, the numerous raw surfaces offered a favorable soil for their growth, and she got a severe acute infection. From local the infection soon spread through the system and she died of gonorrhea of the heart.

Exaggerations in Venereal Peril.

As you see I do not at all underestimate the terribleness of venereal disease. If you will permit a personal reference, I will say that I was the first one to call attention to the importance of venereal disease in married life in my little collection of stories "Never Told Tales," which is now in its eleventh edition. But nevertheless, there is such a thing as overstating a case, there is such a thing as foolish exaggeration, and I am afraid that some of the lecturers on sex subjects are apt to exaggerate things, paint them in too lurid colors and give their audiences wrong ideas of things as they exist. The result is that many young women become panicky and hysterical, see in every young man a gonorrheic or a syphilitic, get a fit at the sight of a little pimple or a mild eczema, which in their ignorance they mistake for a syphilitic eruption, and the result is that they become despondent, hypochondriac, and are either afraid to marry at all, or if they marry they do so in fear and trembling.

To give an example: One of the best known of our sex lecturers and writers made the statement that there is more venereal infection among innocent, respectable wives than among prostitutes. I asked him how that could possibly be when he himself made the statement that every prostitute without exception

is diseased; and if one hundred per cent of the prostitutes were diseased, there could not be any more disease among respectable wives. But he never answered that question. Now, such a statement is silly and untrue and does much more harm than good. We should try to keep a level head and try to guard against exaggerations of any kind, even if the exaggerations are in a good cause. I believe that there isn't more than five, or at the most ten per cent of venereal infection in married life. But this is terrible enough, it is terrible enough to make one shudder without any foolish and false exaggeration.

Another foolish statement is that between eighty and ninety per cent of all young men suffer at one time or another from venereal disease and that of these about sixty per cent. remain uncured. Those that make that foolish statement overlook the fact that if this were the case the human race would practically have died out long ago. Exact figures are of course impossible, but in my opinion not more than twenty or twenty-five per cent of men suffer with gonorrhea, and not more than two or three per cent, or at the most five per cent are sufferers from syphilis. And I repeat these figures are horrible enough as they are.

And apropos of this subject, I might add that the statement made that all prostitutes without exception are diseased, is also untrue. It may be true of the very lowest class, but the better class have learned to take very good care of themselves, their health is necessary to their livelihood, and many of them ply their trade for ten or twenty years without ever contracting venereal disease.

Ante Marital Chastity in Men.

This is rather a delicate subject, but like all subjects dealing with sex it must either not be handled at all or if handled must be done with frankness and honesty. Practically all sex lecturers have told you or will tell you that women should demand strict chastity in her

prospective husband; that just as a man expects his wife to be a pure virgin, so the wife should demand that her husband should have had no previous sexual experience before going to the marriage bed.

I do not care to go into a detailed discussion of the double standard, of the differences in man's and woman's sex instincts, a difference which is one not only of degree but of kind, the differences of intensity, the differences of the periods of manifestation, etc. But I will merely say that such advice is foolish because it is absolutely impractical. Statistics taken at different times in various parts of Central Europe, showed that out of every one hundred men, ninety-nine indulged in sexual intercourse before marriage. The percentage of chastity among men amounted to just one per cent! We will assume that we Anglo-Saxons are much purer and chaster than are our European brethren. But even if so, the percentage of men who have had no sexual experience before their marriage can surely not be higher than ten per cent.

And if young women insisted absolutely upon the antemarital chastity of their future husbands, there would be mighty few marriages taking place; or it would simply lead to a tremendous increase in hypocrisy and the men would be forced to lie and prevaricate. As it is, the number of old maids is getting larger and larger—if such a requirement of antemarital chastity became universal, we would have nothing but old maids. And what is more, the ten per cent who would marry the pure, chaste young men, would not be happy either. For strange as it may seem, all sexologists agree—and when I say sexologists I mean the real men who make an unbiased study of the sex instinct in its manifestations, and not those ignorant clergymen or equally ignorant laymen, who instead of giving a lecture on sex give you a sermon in disguise—I said, all sexologists agree that the men who remain chaste until their marriage do

not always constitute the most desirable class of men. A small percentage of men do remain chaste from moral principles; but the larger percentage remain chaste either on account of a weak sexual instinct, on account of impotence, or on account of timidity—none of them very desirable qualities in a man.

A demand for male chastity before marriage would be justifiable if men could get married at the age of twenty, twenty-two or twenty-five; but when we take into consideration that the male sex instinct is fully awakened at the age of fifteen, and that a very large number do not get married before the age of thirty or thirty-five, then the demand is seen in all its foolishness. To demand that men should remain strictly abstinent during the fifteen or twenty years when the sex instinct is at its highest point, is not only to demand the impossible, but it is an outrage against hygiene, physiology and psychology. The men who for religious or moral reasons try to live up to this demand, generally have to pay dearly for it in nervous disease and in various sexual disorders.

All that the wife has a right to demand is that the husband should come to her sexually strong and free from venereal disease. The demand of ante-marriage chastity is one formulated by old maids of both sexes and by men who have become senile and have forgotten that they were once young, or by men who never were young.

Birth Control.

There is one kind of information without which no girl, particularly no girl of the working classes, has a right to get married; I refer to the knowledge of how to prevent conception. And I emphasize that it is not only every woman's right to possess the knowledge but that it is a crime not to possess it. It is a crime to herself, to her future husband, and to society at large. I am not going to enter into a detailed discussion of the Malthusian theories, I am not going to prove to you that with unlimit-

ed breeding the earth would eventually get so full that there would be no standing room for every human being and that there would not be enough food to go around in spite of all improvements in chemistry and agriculture; I am not going to discuss all that, because that is a matter of the distant future, and you and I are interested in the present.

I am advocating the necessity of the knowledge of how to prevent undesirable pregnancy, for every woman, particularly for every woman of the working classes, because lack of that knowledge leads to untold misery all around. It exhausts and prematurely ages the mother, it is an injustice to the children themselves, because when a mother has more children than she can properly attend to, all of them are neglected and are improperly fed, all are improperly brought up, and the result is that infantile mortality increases fearfully. It has been shown many times that in families with a large number of children the mortality is proportionately two and one-half times as large as in families with few children. You remember perhaps, the day following the big Carnegie Hall Birth Control Meeting that some papers featured a family in Brooklyn, O'Neill by name, that had nineteen children, and the heading was, "No Race Suicide for the O'Neill's." But it was real race suicide, for out of those nineteen children thirteen had died. And just think of the unnecessary misery, suffering and expense involved in the death of thirteen out of nineteen children!

If anybody, be it priest, minister, or rabbi, tells you that the voluntary regulation of the number of children is immoral, or against religion, tell him plainly that he is not telling the truth. There is nothing immoral in having only as many children as you can properly bring up. And there is no religion so cruel, so heartless, so inhuman, which would enjoin upon a woman to breed indefinitely, to bring diseased and crippled offspring into the world, to breed

for the purpose of increasing the vast armies of hopeless wage slaves, paupers and criminals.

Some of the most conservative moralists and theologians, when confronted with the misery of unrestricted breeding, of bringing into the world more children than the mother's health and the family's finances can stand, acknowledge the truth of our arguments, but say that there is an easy means of avoiding an excessive number of children. All that is necessary to do is for the parents to abstain from sexual relations. But it has been shown times without number that the advice to married people to refrain from sexual relations is as foolish as it is unfair; because it cannot be followed, and where an enormous amount of will power is used and it is followed for a greater or lesser period, it leads to nervous disorders, to irritability, to disease, to coolness, and not infrequently drives the husband into the arms of prostitution.

And we who have given the subject a careful and honest study, and are free from perverted bias and mediaeval prejudice, can see nothing immoral in the use of an * * * before or after intercourse. It is simply an hygienic measure, and just as it is perfectly moral to protect ourselves against catching a disease, as it is perfectly moral for our women to protect themselves against undesired pregnancy, because undesired pregnancy, when the mother is unable to bear and bring up the child, is one of the worst of diseases. This may sound shocking, but deep in her heart every woman and every man worthy of the name of man, knows that what I say is true.

Time will not permit me to answer all the arguments which have been raised against the birth control propaganda. Besides I have done it elsewhere a number of times.*

*See the author's *Sexual Problems of Today*, and *The Limitation of Offspring by the Prevention of Conception*.

Resume' of What Every Girl Should Know.

In conclusion, I should like to give a brief resume of what every girl should know regarding sex matters.

1st—Every girl should have an idea of the structure of her sex organs; that is, she should have an idea of the anatomy of the ovaries, Fallopian tubes, uterus, vagina and vulva. She should also have an idea of the anatomy of the male sex organs.

2nd—She should have an idea of the functioning of the sex organs; to know the structure of an organ is not sufficient—it is necessary to know what part it plays in the anatomy, in other words, what it does, what it is for.

3rd—She should be given instruction in sex hygiene, that is, how to keep her sex organs clean, free from congestion, and how she should guard herself from bad, injurious habits. And she should be taught that good health is more important than foolish modesty, and that she should apply for aid either to her mother or to a physician as soon as she finds that there is something not quite normal with her.

4th—She should have an idea of the process of fertilization or impregnation. In other words, she should have a very clear idea of how children come into the world; and this knowledge is best gradually led up to by beginning the study of the fertilization in plants, insects, fishes, birds, and the higher animals.

5th—She should have an idea of the psychology of love. I believe that many tragedies would be averted if instruction in these matters were given in a plain common-sense, healthy manner.

6th—Every girl should have an idea of the nature of venereal disease, so she may guard herself against infection, knowingly or unknowingly.

7th—And last, but not least, every girl upon entering the bonds of matri-

mony should be instructed in safe and harmless means of birth control or limitation of offspring.

This knowledge, which can be imparted to girls of average intelligence

in a dozen evenings, would, I repeat, save an enormous amount of misery, for it would make healthier and happier wives, more satisfied husbands, and healthier and happier children.

The Diagnosis of the Internal Secretory Disorders.

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IV

The More Serious Organic Thyroid Diseases.

Like most organs of the body, the thyroid gland may be the subject of both hypertrophic and degenerative diseases. These exert a well marked influence upon the physiological activities of the organism, not merely due to the effects of the disease per se, but more particularly because of the wide spread effects of the resulting dyshormonism.

Thyroid Tumors--Goiter.

The usual organic disorders such as carcinoma and sarcoma are somewhat rarely found in the thyroid, though this gland is considerably more frequently the seat of a tumor growth known as an adenoma, which may or may not become malignant. It should be understood that these tumors may be present with no decided change in the internal secretory capacity of the gland, while on the other hand either a reduced or an increased functional activity may accompany the evolution of the new growth.

Quite the most common tumors of the thyroid gland are the well-known goiters, the incidence and frequency of which is well recognized, and the symptoms of which may vary from the seriously toxic exophthalmic form of goiter to the practically inactive hyperplastic condition. It is very necessary to be able to differentiate between the various forms of thyroid enlargement,

since both prognosis and therapeutics depend altogether upon the variety of pathological change that may be present. It must be remembered that at the beginning of puberty and during pregnancy, there is a normal functional increase in the work of the thyroid and frequently this is accompanied by a slight enlargement of the gland which has no pathological significance. These physiological enlargements should be watched, however, as the change from normal to abnormal is insidious and, unfortunately, quite common.

The so-called "simple goiter" may be of three distinct types: (a) Parenchymatous (increased proliferation of the thyroid structure and follicles), in which case the gland is moderately firm to the touch and regular; (b) colloid (increased production of the material in the follicles), with a comparatively large and soft tumor; and (c) cystic (a modification similar to the colloid form in which the follicular contents are fluid), in which there is a distinct fluctuation present.

With these several forms of simple goiter there are often no important general symptoms, although one must expect to find local disturbances depending upon the degree of pressure that may be exerted by the enlarged gland. It can be readily understood that the intrathyroid changes may diminish the