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## AMERICAN METHODS OF INTRODUCING EUGENIC IDEAS INTO ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS.

By MRS. MACCOY IRWIN, *Lecturer for the American Society for  
Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis.*

THE need of popular instruction in the physiology and hygiene of sex has in recent years become recognised as imperative by many earnest physicians and educators. Says Prince A. Morrow, M.D., founder of the American Society of Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis : " The idea has begun to penetrate the social consciousness that the ' Conspiracy of Silence ' in regard to sex instruction and hygiene is the most terrible failure of civilisation. It is a matter of congratulation to those interested in the eugenic idea that the sex problem has begun to emerge from the fog of asceticism and prudery which has so long enveloped it, and to take its rightful place among the subjects deemed most worthy of scientific study. Sex is not only the cardinal fact in the individual life, but the most vital of all facts in the racial life. ' Viewed rightly,' says Canon Lyttelton, ' the subject of sex, the ever-recurrent miracle of generation and birth, is full of nobleness, purity, and health.' "

In America, this " Conspiracy of Silence " is now being broken in various ways. The subject of sex enlightenment is being agitated by addresses from eminent physicians, by carefully written and wisely distributed literature, and by legislation of a deterring and protective nature. We have found all this, and much more, necessary to prepare the way of approach to our great school system.

It was seen at an early time that in this effort, as in all matters of reform, public sentiment must be aroused before any lasting good could be accomplished ; this is particularly true in

matters of sex education, owing to the fact that since time immemorial the question of the true relation of the sexes has been relegated, not only to the realm of mystery, but covered with a sevenfold veil of shame.

In the early ages of the world in all the primitive races, sex was one with its religious life. To these primitive peoples the mysteries that surrounded life's beginnings figured as one with the source of all Life, the Infinite Creator; but with the growth of the race, and what we are pleased to call civilisation, this intimate connection has been long lost sight of, and nearly all vestige of the purity and innate holiness of the relationship has been forgotten. How then could the subject be raised from the depths into which it had fallen? How could it be presented to the mind of the growing child, in such a manner as to enlighten and protect? America has sought the solution of this question in a practical way.

The American Society of Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis, with headquarters in New York City (now numbering in its membership about a thousand physicians and educators), devised methods whereby this might be done. In conjunction with the Public Education Association and the New York City Mothers' Club, a Committee was appointed to visit the principals of the various schools, asking them to call together the mothers of their children to listen to a lecture upon "The Moral Training of the Child." In most instances the response was favourable, owing to the fact that admittedly, in well-nigh all the schools, both public and private, this problem was a very serious one. Phases of sex precocity were constantly arising, with which the teachers and those in charge had not the knowledge to cope.

In New York City nearly all the elementary and middle schools have Mothers' Clubs or Parent-Teachers' meetings monthly. Before these clubs and meetings, went carefully chosen lecturers to address the parents. First they were shown the necessity, and then the method, of instructing their children in things of sex, and how to answer the questions of the growing child, when asked as to its coming into the world.

It was my privilege to be chosen as one of several to do this work. Up to this time I had regarded the mother's allowing

her little boy and girl to go from the home with no instruction as to the pitfalls for its unwary feet, almost criminal. Knowing how deep is the mother-love for the child I could not account for this lack of protection. In my earnest desire to understand this I came to see some reasons for the great neglect.

In the first place, the mother herself had never been taught anything by her parents when she was a child; her mother's mother had never been taught, and so on, *ad infinitum*. In the second place what knowledge the mother had gained as a child had been picked up either in schoolroom or street, from older children or ignorant servants. This had been of such a character that it invariably brought a sense of shame to her young mind. So deep had been this early impression upon the mother, conjoined with her own often bitter experiences in later life, that the whole question lay in her mind as something to be avoided, a thing she could not impart to her little child, lest its innocence be tainted with knowledge of evil. Always confounding innocence with ignorance she thought thus to protect her child.

The first thing therefore necessary to be done before the mother could be induced to answer her children's questions truly and wisely was to change the mother's attitude of mind towards the whole nature, use, and meaning of sex. This was no easy task. And here let me say in passing that in the choice of a lecturer mere technical knowledge on the part of the speaker will not suffice. Something more than a knowledge of physiology or pathology is required here. Before you can get the open ear of the mother the question must be lifted into the realm of the ethical and spiritual, else she will have none of it.

In America we call this "the Children's Age"; we are beginning to see that the children of to-day are the citizens of to-morrow, and in this whole question of social purity and sex hygiene we have been made to realise that the child is our objective point of instruction. But we are compelled also to realise that between us and the child stand the parents and the teachers. We recognise that the natural and proper teacher of the child in a thing so intimate as sex, at least in its earlier years, is the mother. No matter how good a father a man may be, or how willing to do his part, his relation to the child can

never be so intimate as that of the mother; upon her therefore devolves the teaching of the child. Hence the necessity of winning her mind to the idea of the innate purity of the creative act.

This can only be done by helping her dissociate in her mind the use and abuse of sex, helping her to understand that there is nothing greater than the conceiving and proper rearing of children, and nothing more deplorable than the use of the life-giving function for degrading and sensual purposes. When this is done and she sees for herself the dignity which belongs to motherhood, even though in her own life she is unable to realise this ideal, the whole question will have been lifted into a realm of native purity. From that point of view you may then approach her as to the method of enlightening her children in matters of sex.

Again, the mother's instinct that it is not fit for her little child to know anything of sex should be admitted as a correct instinct. Sex, in children, is rudimentary, and in a normal child only becomes active as the age of puberty is approached. Other things being equal, this is the proper time for sex instruction. The mother must be shown, however, that it is her privilege to answer truly the early questions of her child lest, unprotected by right knowledge, it be led into misunderstanding and vice before the age of sex maturity and judgment is reached.

When this "spade work" is properly and tactfully done by the lecturer the gratitude of the mothers is without bounds. It is a matter that has lain heavily on every true mother's heart, and she rejoices that now her way is made somewhat clear. At first she did not know when, or where, or how, to teach her children; but now direct instruction has been given her, and the proper books for reading and study recommended. Even though she may be somewhat crude in her attempts to enlighten, her own attitude of mind has been so entirely changed that purity rather than impurity of sex concept furnishes a finer atmosphere for the growing child.

Hundreds of these lectures have been given in New York City alone; teachers are being trained to look after the growing needs of the child when through lack of the parents' knowledge

the child has come from the home untaught. In several instances we have been permitted to go to the Assembly Halls of the older girls, and to speak directly to many hundreds, ranging from twelve to fifteen years. Many of these girls were about to leave the school to earn their own living in shop and factory life. The manner in which the knowledge given them was received left no doubt as to the great impression for good made upon them, and their faces opened up like flowers to the sun in gratitude.

Tens of thousands of pamphlets published by the Prophylaxis Society, written by our leading medical men and scientists, are being distributed among the colleges and universities of our country, showing our young men that a chaste life is entirely compatible with vigour of mind and body, and warning them of the fearful risks and danger of immoral living. Sex-Hygiene Societies, backed by the most eminent of the medical profession, have been founded in great cities from California to conservative old Massachusetts, all working in the direction of enlightening the people by means of that threefold trinity of all reforms, agitation, education, and legislation.

These Societies are composed of men and women, professional and lay college presidents, biological teachers, philanthropists, and men of business. In Massachusetts, President Emeritus Eliot of Harvard University is active with both voice and pen in the furtherance of this work.

In the great city of the West, Chicago, there is a great woman, Ella Flagg Young, who, as Superintendent of the schools of that city, has introduced instruction in sex-hygiene into the older classes, "testing out" to what extent this can be wisely utilised for the benefit of the high school pupils.

The Board of Education of the State of Washington has made sex-teaching mandatory in all the normal schools of that state; no student in one of these schools can apply for a certificate or diploma who has not completed a full course in this department.

In 138 schools and colleges in America, personal and sex hygiene is systematically taught—required in fifty-five, elective in fifteen. In eighty-eight schools classes are separate, in twenty-three mixed.

In Boston, Chicago, and New York City great Child Welfare Exhibits have been held, where among other departments was one of sex-hygiene, illustrating in various ways the disastrous effects of sex vices on this and future generations.

During the exhibit in New York teachers came bringing whole classes of their boys to the sex-hygiene department, letting them see, read, and digest for themselves the results of an impure sex life. All this and much more in the way of education.

Already in three of our states a statute has gone upon the books that the hopelessly criminal and the imbecile shall by a simple and harmless operation be kept from propagating their kind. In the State of Indiana this law is in full force—and in many instances at the request of the criminal himself. The Boards of Health of several large cities have passed resolutions making venereal diseases reportable, and “in many social circles this formerly forbidden topic is now discussed with a frankness and candour which have never been known before in social history.”

In the great body of New York City's Federation of Women's Clubs, representing fifty thousand of our earnest and intelligent women, this question finds its way in some form to the floor for discussion at nearly every session; resolutions are sent to lawmakers for their consideration and action, and in a thousand ways that time will not permit me to speak of here the whole question is being in America threshed out to a wise solution.

All these things tend to the making of that all-powerful agent, public opinion, and it is only through an aroused and enlightened public opinion that the question of Eugenics, with all that it implies for the bettering of the race, can find its way, in any practical sense, into the ideals of elementary schools, everywhere.

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