

## An Article that should be read by Every Parent

# THE ARGUMENTS FOR INSTRUCTION IN SEX HYGIENE

A Remarkable and Frank Statement by F. Martyn Renner, the Hon. Secretary of the White Cross League, which exists to help our Youth in the battle for Purity, in which the urgent necessity for instruction in the vital facts of sex is clearly demonstrated. Mr. Renner's article is one that no parent who feels the responsibility that has been entrusted to her should miss reading. The Editor of "The Ladies' Mirror" invites comment from readers.

I HAD hoped to be able to devote this article almost entirely to what I consider should be the right type of instruction in Sex Hygiene; but, in view of the conflicting evidence given in various parts of New Zealand before the Mental Defectives and Sex Perverts Commission, I find myself constrained to clear the ground, so to speak, before carrying out my original idea.

It is a remarkable fact that there are some people who still consider that Instruction in Sex Hygiene is quite unnecessary. They advance all sorts of arguments in support of their contention, but they quite forget that many things not considered necessary twenty or thirty years ago are absolutely essential nowadays. There is evolution in everything. Education, manhood, the world, everything progresses: and these critics, who judge what is necessary and what it not necessary in this year of grace, 1924, are the Rip Van Winkles of the year 1894 or 1884. The social conditions of the present day are vastly different from those of thirty or forty years ago. We have to face new problems, political problems, and above all, sociological problems with which the study of sex hygiene is most intimately concerned. Life in the twentieth century is a much more complex business than was life in the nineteenth century: and it is our plain duty, we who are teachers or parents, or indeed, citizens, to fit our children for new conditions and a new environment, to strengthen them against social evils that existed only in a comparatively modified form when we were children. One of the outstanding features of modern life is the advance of woman. She has left her household domain and now competes with man in activities and vocations that were once deemed peculiarly his own. She has proved a worthy rival. With her advent into man's sphere, much of the old restraint between the sexes has disappeared; and this freedom from restraint between the sexes has manifested itself in the attitude of boys and girls to each other in the present day. People with Mid-Victorian ideas of what is proper are holding up their hands in horror at the things young people do nowadays. Well, there is some justification no doubt for their attitude. Personally, I am not a prude, and I like to see a healthy, frank boy and girl comradeship. What I do say is this. If you are going to tolerate this condition of things, then you will have to take precautions to prevent the young people from shipwrecking their lives. The girl will have to be taught what she, in a life of comparative seclusion, might never have found it necessary to know. The boy will have to learn the meaning of chivalry in a deeper and finer sense. She, who was once hidden away and had to be awakened with a kiss, is no longer the sleeping princess of the fairy tale. In both of them, *"Nature crescent does not grow alone In thews and bulk, but, as the temple wares, The inward service of the mind and soul Grows wide withal."*

Are you going to give the young people some advice to help them in their altered relations to each other, or are you going to wait until your advice comes too late?

### Civilisation Entails Responsibility

Every step we take along the road to a higher civilisation brings with it a fresh responsibility. This is true. Education, even the mere knowledge of reading and writing, has brought responsibility with it. The moving picture shows and theatres have their responsibility, too. The child of to-

day reads the daily paper, and is even encouraged to do so; it reads the posters and the placards on the bill-boards. In other words, the modern children, because of the spread of education, can obtain a closer acquaintance with what is sordid and suggestive. The gross details of a recent scandal in a small New Zealand town, the full-page advertisement dealing with the latest type of dance in connection with a moving picture play, are read by old and young alike. If there is in New Zealand no public body that can compel the authorities to prohibit the publication of gross details and suggestive advertisements, then it is high time that we protected our children by educating them so that they may adopt the right attitude to what is called the sex question. From my own experience as a teacher, I know what harm can be done by allowing the young adolescent to glean his knowledge of sex from prurient or filthy-minded sources. Once again I ask the question, "Will you let such a state of things continue, or will you give the young people just as much knowledge of themselves and their bodies as will protect them against the harmful influences that they have to face so early in life?" Are you going to be responsible for swelling the cry that rises day after day, "Oh God, why wasn't I told!"?

### Facts that are Arguments

So far, I have touched upon two reasons why I think that in these times instruction in sex hygiene is absolutely essential. There are others. To my mind, one of the most outstanding features in the life of our Dominion is the prevalence of venereal disease and the increase in illegitimate births. I have neither the desire to go into details, nor to give facts and figures to prove my case. I will, however, mention one fact. In a little country town not far from Wellington there are in hospital six expectant mothers under 14 years of age. It seems to me that this one fact alone goes to show that we should take almost any steps to end a condition of things that would be responsible for such an outrage. Sex instruction, reverently and tactfully given, could end it; because the basis of such instruction, as I conceive it to be, is: (1) To inculcate a chivalrous respect for women; (2) to preserve the young from contamination; (3) to foster a higher tone of public opinion. "Why should we not try it?" I once asked a medical man, a determined opponent of any such instruction. "Oh," he replied, "if you give the boys plenty of sport and plenty to occupy their minds, they won't think of such things." By "such things" he meant an evil to many adolescents. I pointed out to him that in England, in Australia and in New Zealand, it had been found that most frequently the boys who were guilty of such a practice were those who were prominent in athletics and in scholarship. The "hush" policy has failed us; old methods can't fit in with new conditions—*"Autres temps, autres mœurs."*

### Where it has been Tried

I want to deal briefly now with some of the objections levelled against instruction in Sex Hygiene. I have heard it said that it was not a success in America (U.S.A.). I know it was not. The States' system is not what the New Zealand White Cross League wants. We want both teachers and parents to co-operate. In America the teaching is left almost entirely to the former. We want one talk of forty minutes to be given every two or three years by the

parents and by a specially qualified teacher. In America they have a regular course of instruction, lasting usually six months and even a whole year. On the other hand, in Ontario, where a much more modified course of instruction is given by a specially appointed lecturer, the whole system has been a wonderful success. In South Australia, where the White Cross lecturer is given the right of entry into all schools, a most notable success has been recorded. South Australia has less juvenile depravity than other Australian States. Its figures are lower than New Zealand's.

It has been stated that instruction in Sex Hygiene has been known to do actual harm. I reply that in all my 24 years as a teacher and as one closely connected with the White Cross League's work, I have not only *not* come across a single case where harm has been done, but I have been told personally of hundreds of cases where young lives have been saved from disaster. Take some of the great headmasters of the past, men like Firth Coughley, Littlejohn, etc., and read their opinions on the type of instruction given by the League's lecturer! Ask the present Principal of the Waitaki Boys' High School! I venture to say that their opinion will coincide with what I have said above. The third objection advanced, is that instruction in sex hygiene will undermine what is called the innocence of childhood, and that the child's mind will be directed to subjects about which it would otherwise have no curiosity. I ask parents to go back to their young days and try to recollect how their own questions on the matter of reproduction of life were answered; and, furthermore, what foolishly-devised falsehoods they themselves have told to their own children when the need arose. You were only silenced, not convinced, and so were your children in their turn. Can any parents, with their own experience behind them, imagine it possible that a child will not, some way or other, find out the truth? Where from? From sly peeps into books, from dirty-minded older companions, from anyone except his proper teachers—his parents. *Surely the process of reproduction and of birth is not one that we should regard as unclean!* Why not lift the subject to a high plane and make it a matter for earnest and reverent talk? It (reproduction) is the way provided by God for the continuance of the human race, and He has pronounced it good. This, the present system (no instruction) virtually denies; for, according to it, any knowledge of it will fill the child's mind with "impure thoughts." I have taken the above quotation from Dr. Arthur's pamphlet, *The Innocence of Children*, as a full and sufficient answer to the objection advanced against sex instruction.

### Assurance of Success

So far, I have stated the case for some form of instruction and have answered, as far as I can, certain objections made to me publicly and privately. My League is prepared to prove that after a few years of instruction in Sex Hygiene—of the type we advocate—there will be a rise in the birth-rate, a decline in illegitimacy, a diminution in juvenile depravity and in venereal diseases. I need not stress the fact that a good deal depends on the *type* of instruction. Any teaching lacking in tact or delicacy, or given by an unqualified or unskilled person, may quite conceivably do much harm. But given the right type of instruction, given the co-operation of the parents,