

From Our Readers

The Editor is glad to be able to publish below two of the many letters received regarding the articles on "The Maternal Mortality Question" and "Teaching Sex Hygiene in Schools." Further opinions from our readers are welcomed.



TEACHING SEX HYGIENE IN SCHOOLS

A REPLY TO MR. MARTYN RENNER

By MARGARET M. MARTINS

MR. RENNER has put his case well, and he is so obviously earnest and sincere in his arguments that they are bound to carry weight. I am quite in agreement with Mr. Renner when he says that children should be taught Sex Hygiene; but I disagree with him most strongly when he advocates its teaching in schools, by teachers, to individuals or to classes, and say most emphatically that such a sacred duty belongs to parents alone.

I know that very few parents give any definite instruction to their children on sex matters. They fail in a most astonishing degree in what is a very serious and important duty—a duty made more and more urgent by present-day conditions. Their failure is due, I think, to an excess of shyness, and to a deplorable and amazing lack of knowledge of the most elementary physiology.

Therefore it is the parents who should receive the instruction in Sex Hygiene. It could not possibly do them harm—mentally, morally or physically; indeed, it would be of immense benefit to them, and they would be better able to regulate their own lives, and to give their children the necessary instruction.

The instruction to parents could be given in the form of lectures by the school medical officers, or, preferably, by a specially trained and qualified doctor who would devote to it his whole time. The lectures could be given to men and women separately, if need be, and would raise the general moral standard, besides serving the further purpose of checking the spread of venereal disease.

Another point in Mr. Renner's presentment of his case is most surprising and is, to my mind, its most serious weakness. He says "the basis of sex instruction 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." Surely all these things follow on and after a knowledge of God and of His right to our reverence, love and service. Obedience to God's commands and the desire to please Him are the first and highest reasons for purity,

and should be emphasised before all others. If these motives were placed before the child, and impressed more strongly under the heading of Moral Instruction already given in our schools, it would not be necessary for teachers to give instruction in (to use Mr. Renner's own phrase) "the vital facts of sex."

If a child's conscience and moral sense of right and wrong is trained and developed he will not fall into bad sexual habits any more readily than he will steal or tell lies. It is absolutely wrong in principle to teach him to avoid doing certain things because they bring disease or unhappiness. They are wrong, primarily, because they are an offence against God. The moral offence against Society or the individual, and the physical calamities which follow it, are secondary reasons against impurity. Parents and teachers must recognise this fact. Until and unless you can get this principle fixed in the human mind, this belief that he is directly responsible to God for all his thoughts and actions, no training in Sex Hygiene will stand before temptation. The instruction will simply amount to a lesson in personal hygiene, and will have no moral value. This fact was well illustrated during the War. Very definite and direct instruction in Sex Hygiene was given to soldiers. Did anyone pretend that it served any purpose but safety from contagion?

I do not suppose that any generation has had such a clear knowledge of "the vital facts of Sex" as the present one, yet evil does not diminish. The fact is that we are overburdened with Sex. It is everywhere presented to us, and to the children. Books, newspapers, bill boards and posters, motion pictures and many forms of dancing are tainted with suggestiveness of it. Sex is exploited for money-making purposes in every conceivable way. Satan himself could scarcely devise more subtle means of degrading it. Immorality, illegitimacy and abortion flourish. Mr. Renner suggests that the lack of training in Sex Hygiene is at the root of all these evils. I think we must go deeper still for the reasons. There are several, but they are all bound up in one thing—failure to acknowledge God and to obey Him.

The great majority of grown-up men and women in this country do not say any prayers. They have not sufficient decency towards God to make them go down on their knees once a day to acknowledge His sovereignty, or to thank Him for His blessings. They are less spiritual than the Kaffirs, and more pagan than any savage, though they may pride themselves on their intellectual superiority. They scarcely know the meaning of the word "self-sacrifice." They indulge themselves in food, clothes and pleasure, and naturally cannot say no to temptations. What wonder that evil flourishes? It is the social outcome and expression of spiritual failure.

Further, marriage is no longer considered a sacrament, or a sacred union of the sexes in which God has a part. The highest body in the land has decreed that it is merely a civil contract terminable as such, and that sanctity in connection with it is merely an old-fashioned "frill" or superstition. Divorce is regarded as the lawful prize for inconstancy.

In view of all this degradation of Sex, can we reasonably look to the teaching of Sex Hygiene as the remedy? I do not think we can. We must get down to bed-rock in order to raise the moral standard. We must teach our children that God must be revered and obeyed. We must protect them from all the evil influences which surround them, and oppose with all our forces everything that tends to destroy their innocence and purity. In this connection there are several ways in which all decent people can help. We should not read immoral or suggestive books, or allow them in our homes; we should refrain from attending the lurid and suggestive type of motion picture and from telling improper stories or listening to others telling them. Also we should cultivate a little more rigidity of backbone when it comes to making an active protest against indecency wherever it manifests itself.

If we grown-ups did all these things, lessons in Sex Hygiene would not be necessary. We would ourselves be giving our children the most powerful lesson of all—the Moral Hygiene of personal example in Purity.