

CHAPTER XI

EDUCATION AND EXPRESSION

Civilization is bound up with the success of that movement. The man who rejoices in it and strives to further it is alive; the man who shudders and raises impotent hands against it is merely dead, even though the grave yet yawns for him in vain. He may make dead laws and preach dead sermons and his sermons may be great and his laws may be rigid. But as the wisest of men saw twenty five centuries ago, the things that are great and strong and rigid are the things that stay below in the grave. It is the things that are delicate and tender and supple that stay above. At no point is life so tender and delicate and supple as at the point of sex. There is the Triumph of Life.

Havelock Ellis

OUR approach opens to us a fresh scale of values, a new and effective method of testing the merits and demerits of current policies and programs. It redirects our attention to the great source and fountainhead of human life. It offers us the most strategic point of view.

244 PIVOT OF CIVILIZATION

from which to observe and study the unending drama of humanity —how the past the present and the future of the human race are all organically bound up together It coordinates heredity and environment Most important of all it frees the mind of sexual prejudice and taboo by demanding the frankest and most unflinching reexamination of sex in its relation to human nature and the bases of human society In aiding to establish this mental liberation quite apart from any of the tangible results that might please the statistically minded, the study of Birth Control is performing an invaluable task Without complete mental freedom it is impossible to approach any fundamental human problem Failure to face the great central facts of sex in an impartial and scientific spirit lies at the root of the blind opposition to Birth Control

Our bitterest opponents must agree that the problem of Birth Control is one of the most important that humanity to day has to face The interests of the entire world of humanity of the future of mankind itself are more at stake in this than in wars, political institutions,

or industrial reorganization All other projects of reform, of revolution or reconstruction, are of secondary importance even trivial, when we compare them to the wholesale regeneration—or disintegration—that is bound up with the control the direction and the release of one of the greatest forces in nature The great danger at present does not lie with the bitter opponents of the idea of Birth Control nor with those who are attempting to suppress our program of enlightenment and education Such opposition is always stimulating It wins new adherents It reveals its own weakness and lack of insight The greater danger is to be found in the flaccid, indiscriminating interest of sympathizers who are for it—as an accessory to their own particular panacea It even seems sometimes wrote the late William Graham Sumner, as if the primitive people were working along better lines of effort in this direction than we are when our public organs of instruction taboo all that pertains to reproduction as improper and when public authority ready enough to interfere with personal liberty everywhere else, feels bound

to act as if there were no societal interest at stake in the begetting of the next generation ¹

Slowly but surely we are breaking down the taboos that surround sex but we are breaking them down out of sheer necessity. The codes that have surrounded sexual behavior in the so called Christian communities, the teachings of the churches concerning chastity and sexual purity, the prohibitions of the laws and the hypocritical conventions of society, have all demonstrated their failure as safeguards against the chaos produced and the havoc wrought by the failure to recognize sex as a driving force in human nature—as great as if indeed not greater than, hunger. Its dynamic energy is indestructible. It may be transmuted, refined, directed, even sublimated but to ignore, to neglect, to refuse to recognize this great elemental force is nothing less than foolhardy.

Out of the unchallenged policies of continence, abstinence, chastity and purity we have reaped the harvests of prostitution, venereal scourges and innumerable other evils. Traditional moralists have failed to recognize

¹ Folkways p. 492

that chastity and purity must be the outward symptoms of awakened intelligence, of satisfied desires, and fulfilled love. They cannot be taught by sex education. They cannot be imposed from without by a denial of the right and the right of sexual expression. Nevertheless even in the contemporary teaching of sex hygiene and social prophylaxis nothing constructive is offered to young men and young women who seek aid through the trying period of adolescence.

At the Lambeth Conference of 1920 the Bishops of the Church of England stated in their report on their considerations of sexual morality. Men should regard all women as they do their mothers, sisters and daughters and women should dress only in such a manner as to command respect from every man. All right minded persons should unite in the suppression of pernicious literature, plays and films. Could lack of psychological insight and understanding be more completely indicated? Yet like these bishops most of those who are undertaking the education of the young are as ignorant themselves of psychology and physiology. Indeed those who

are speaking belatedly of the need of sexual hygiene seem to be unaware that they themselves are most in need of it. We must give up the futile attempt to keep young people in the dark, cries Rev. James Marchant in *Birth Rate and Empire*—and the assumption that they are ignorant of notorious facts. We cannot, if we would, stop the spread of sexual knowledge, and if we could do so we would only make matters infinitely worse. This is the second decade of the twentieth century, not the early Victorian period. It is no longer a question of knowing or not knowing. We have to disabuse our middle-aged minds of that fond delusion. Our young people know more than we did when we began our married lives, and sometimes as much as we know ourselves even now. So that we need not continue to shake our few remaining hairs in simulating feelings of surprise or horror. It might have been better for us if we had been more enlightened. And if our discussion of this problem is to be of any real use, we must at the outset reconcile ourselves to the fact that the birth rate is voluntarily controlled. Certain persons who instruct

us in these matter, hold up their pious hands and whiten their frightened faces as they cry out in the public squares against this vice but they can only make themselves ridiculous

Taught upon the basis of conventional and traditional morality and middle class respectability based on current dogma and handed down to the populace with benign condescension, sex education is a waste of time and effort. Such education cannot in any true sense set up as a standard the ideal morality and behavior of the respectable middle class and then make the effort to induce all other members of society, especially the working classes, to conform to their taboos. Such a method is not only confusing but, in the creation of strain and hysteria and an unhealthy concentration upon moral conduct, results in positive injury. To preach a negative and colorless ideal of chastity to young men and women is to neglect the primary duty of awakening their intelligence their responsibility their self reliance and independence. Once this is accomplished, the matter of chastity will take care of itself. The teaching of etiquette

must be superseded by the teaching of hygiene. Hygienic habits are built up upon a sound knowledge of bodily needs and functions. It is only in the sphere of sex that there remains an unfounded fear of presenting without the gratuitous introduction of non essential taboos and prejudice. unbiased and unvarnished facts.

As an instrument of education the doctrine of Birth Control approaches the whole problem in another manner. Instead of laying down hard and fast laws of sexual conduct instead of attempting to inculcate rules and regulations, of pointing out the rewards of virtue and the penalties of sin (as is usually attempted in relation to the venereal diseases), the teacher of Birth Control seeks to meet the needs of the people. Upon the basis of their interests, their demands, their problems, Birth Control education attempts to develop their intelligence and show them how they may help themselves, how to guide and control this deep rooted instinct.

The objection has been raised that Birth Control only reaches the already enlightened, the men and women who have already attained

a degree of self respect and self reliance
Such an objection could not be based on fact
Even in the most unenlightened sections of the
community, among mothers crushed by pov-
erty and economic enslavement there is the
realization of the evils of the too large family,
of the rapid succession of pregnancy after
pregnancy of the hopelessness of bringing too
many children into the world Not merely
in the evidence presented in an earlier chapter
but in other ways, is this crying need ex-
pressed The investigators of the Children's
Bureau who collected the data of the infant
mortality reports, noted the willingness and
the eagerness with which these down trodden
mothers told the truth about themselves So
great is their hope of relief from that mean-
ingless and deadening submission to unpro-
ductive reproduction that only a society pruri-
tly devoted to hypocrisy could refuse to
listen to the voices of these mothers Re-
spectfully we lend our ears to dithyrambs
about the sacredness of motherhood and the
value of better babies —but we shut our eyes
and our ears to the unpleasant reality and the

252 PIVOT OF CIVILIZATION

cries of pain that come from women who are to day dying by the thousands because this power is withheld from them

This situation is rendered more bitterly ironic because the self righteous opponents of Birth Control practise themselves the doctrine they condemn. The birth rate among conservative opponents indicates that they restrict the numbers of their own children by the methods of Birth Control or are of such feeble procreative energy as to be thereby unfitted to dictate moral laws for other people. They prefer that we should think their small number of children is accidental rather than publicly admit the successful practice of intelligent foresight. Or else they hold themselves up as paragons of virtue and self control, and would have us believe that they have brought their children into the world solely from a high stern sense of public duty—an attitude which is about as convincing as it would be to declare that they found them under gooseberry bushes. How else can we explain the widespread tolerance and smug approval of the clerical idea of sex now reenforced by floods of crude and vulgar sentiment which is

promulgated by the press, motion pictures and popular plays?

Like all other education, that of sex can be rendered effective and valuable only as it meets and satisfies the interests and demands of the pupil himself. It cannot be imposed from without handed down from above, superimposed upon the intelligence of the person taught. It must find a response within him, give him the power and the instrument where with he may exercise his own growing intelligence bring into action his own judgment and discrimination and thus contribute to the growth of his intelligence. The civilized world is coming to see that education cannot consist merely in the assimilation of external information and knowledge but rather in the awakening and development of innate powers of discrimination and judgment. The great disaster of 'sex education' lies in the fact that it fails to direct the awakened interests of the pupils into the proper channels of exercise and development. Instead, it blunts them restricts them hinders them and even attempts to eradicate them.

This has been the great defect of sex educa

254 PIVOT OF CIVILIZATION

tion as it has been practised in recent years Based on a superficial and shameful view of the sexual instinct, it has sought the inculcation of negative virtues by pointing out the sinister penalties of promiscuity, and by advocating strict adherence to virtue and morality, not on the basis of intelligence or the outcome of experience, not even for the attainment of rewards, but merely to avoid punishment in the form of painful and malignant disease Education so conceived carries with it its own refutation True education cannot tolerate the inculcation of fear Fear is the soil in which are implanted inhibitions and morbid compulsions Fear restrains restricts, hinders human expression It strikes at the very roots of joy and happiness It should therefore be the aim of sex education to avoid above all the implanting of fear in the mind of the pupil

Restriction means placing in the hands of external authority the power over behavior Birth Control on the contrary, implies voluntary action the decision for one's self how many children one shall or shall not bring into the world Birth Control is educational in the real sense of the word, in that it asserts this

power of decision, reinstates this power in the people themselves

We are not seeking to introduce new restrictions but greater freedom. As far as sex is concerned, the impulse has been more thoroughly subject to restriction than any other human instinct. 'Thou shalt not' meets us at every turn. Some of these restrictions are justified, some of them are not. We may have but one wife or one husband at a time, we must attain a certain age before we may marry. Children born out of wedlock are deemed illegitimate—even healthy children. The newspapers every day are filled with the scandals of those who have leaped over the restrictions or limitations society has written in her sexual code. Yet the voluntary control of the procreative powers, the rational regulation of the number of children we bring into the world—this is the one type of restriction frowned upon and prohibited by law!

In a more definite, a much more realistic and concrete manner, Birth Control reveals itself as the most effective weapon in the spread of hygienic and prophylactic knowledge among women of the less fortunate classes. It carries

with it a thorough training in bodily cleanliness and physiology, a definite knowledge of the physiology and function of sex. In refusing to teach both sides of the subject in failing to respond to the universal demand among women for such instruction and in formation maternity centers limit their own efforts and fail to fulfil what should be their true mission. They are concerned merely with pregnancy maternity child bearing the problem of keeping the baby alive. But any effective work in this field must go further back. We have gradually come to see, as Havelock Ellis has pointed out that comparatively little can be done by improving merely the living conditions of adults that improving conditions for children and babies is not enough. To combat the evils of infant mortality, natal and pre natal care is not sufficient. Even to improve the conditions for the pregnant woman is insufficient. Necessarily and inevitably we are led further and further back, to the point of procreation beyond that, into the regulation of sexual selection. The problem becomes a circle. We cannot solve one part of it without a consideration of the entirety.

But it is especially at the point of creation where all the various forces are concentrated Conception must be controlled by reason by intelligence, by science, or we lose control of all its consequences

Birth Control is essentially an education for women It is women who directly and by their very nature bear the burden of that blindness ignorance and lack of foresight concerning sex which is now enforced by law and custom Birth Control places in the hands of women the only effective instrument whereby they may reestablish the balance in society and assert not only theoretically but practically as well the primary importance of the woman and the child in civilization

Birth Control is thus the stimulus to education Its exercise awakens and develops the sense of self reliance and responsibility, and illuminates the relation of the individual to society and to the race in a manner that otherwise remains vague and academic It reveals sex not merely as an untamed and insatiable natural force to which men and women must submit hopelessly and inertly as it sweeps through them and then accept with abject hu

258 PIVOT OF CIVILIZATION

mility the hopeless and heavy consequences. Instead it places in their hands the power to control this great force to use it, to direct it into channels in which it becomes the energy enhancing their lives and increasing self expression and self development. It awakens in women the consciousness of new glories and new possibilities in motherhood. No longer the prostrate victim of the blind play of instinct but the self reliant mistress of her body and her own will the new mother finds in her child the fulfilment of her own desires. In free instead of compulsory motherhood she finds the avenue of her own development and expression. No longer bound by an unending series of pregnancies, at liberty to safeguard the development of her own children she may now extend her beneficent influence beyond her own home. In becoming thus intensified motherhood may also broaden and become more extensive as well. The mother sees that the welfare of her own children is bound up with the welfare of all others. Not upon the basis of sentimental charity or gratuitous welfare work but upon that of enlightened self interest such a mother may exert her

influence among the less fortunate and less enlightened

Unless based upon this central knowledge of and power over her own body and her own instincts, education for woman is valueless. As long as she remains the plaything of strong, uncontrolled natural forces as long as she must docilely and humbly submit to the decisions of others how can woman ever lay the foundations of self respect self reliance and independence? How can she make her own choice, exercise her own discrimination, her own foresight?

In the exercise of these powers, in the building up and integration of her own experience in mastering her own environment the true education of woman must be sought. And in the sphere of sex the great source and root of all human experience, it is upon the basis of Birth Control—the voluntary direction of her own sexual expression—that woman must take her first step in the assertion of freedom and self respect