

What Mothers Should Tell Their Daughters

WHATEVER it is essential for a girl to know in order to fortify and preserve her character, safeguard her reputation, or protect her honor, her mother should tell her. Yet I am sure I am not far wrong when I estimate that not half of our Canadian mothers ever refer to those topics (in either their physical or moral aspect) which have relation to the sexual nature of their daughters. In fact, they rigidly taboo anything that might lead to a discussion of this nature. If a girl asks a quite natural question she may be severely reprimanded and made to feel that she is immodest, or lacking in reserve.

It is for those mothers who, from conscientious if mistaken scruples, from not appreciating the necessity, or from sheer carelessness, neglect this duty to their daughters that this article is written. I appeal to all mothers to be faithful mentors to your daughters in all matters pertaining to their well-being. To be their trusted confidantes and teachers and most absolutely in regard to all sexual matters, which *only* a mother should discuss with them. Remember all her curiosity is perfectly natural and legitimate and she has a God-given right to ask her mother to explain anything and everything that puzzles her. Who should be her teacher, if not her mother? So no matter how the question is put, even if the bold statement shocks your conventional mode of thought, remember that a child knows nothing of conventionalities, and take infinite pains to find out just what the difficulty is and give definite, truthful facts—not a fairy tale that later will be found by the girl to be false and misleading.

"I didn't know," or I "didn't understand," has been the reason given in nearly every case that has come under my personal notice, for the motherhood forced on girls whose shame and heartbreak were caused through lack of wise and timely counsel.

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Then, too, I notice that even those mothers who feel that they owe explanation of physical facts to their daughters, seem to think that only as the girl is approaching womanhood should any such information be given. Very often, even then, the subject is approached in a shrinking, shamefaced way—the facts adverted to in such a vague manner, in veiled or misleading terms that the poor girl, half child, half woman, is left with the impression that something shameful is about to happen to her. Her conjectures and her mental unrest may prove a serious danger to her awakening sexual instincts, and to her delicate, nervous organization, which is also being stimulated to special activity at this critical period.

All this, if the girl is as "innocent" as her mother believes her to be. Now, understand, I am not blaming mothers. I am only trying to point out what an awful mistake is made by trying to keep a girl "innocent," which means ignorant of facts and conditions, that it is absolutely essential for her to know, if she is to reach womanhood, pure in mind and body, and consciously holding all her powers in reverent trust, for the working out of her high destiny, as one of the God-endowed mothers of the coming time. Such a woman, because she has always, from childhood up, realized at first dimly, but more and more fully as the blossoming springs followed each other, all the truth that was needed at each stage of her growth concerning herself will grow to maturity as naturally as the flowers do. She could always go freely with every question to mother, who was always interested, always ready for a heart-to-heart talk, always told her everything about herself so naturally, so plainly and so truthfully and reverently, and

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whose neverfailing welcome was: "All right little daughter, what is it? We'll see if you and mother can't find out all about it."

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In contrast with the self-reverent girl who knows, take the case of the girl who is "ignorant," whose mother has kept her "innocent as a baby"—has kept her from coming in contact with evil in any form. Let us suppose that she reaches the age of fifteen without any knowledge of sexual matters good or bad. She is then told as fully as may be of the facts in connection with the entering of womanhood. Will this girl have the same self-control and conscious dignity as the other, cited above? Is she as well equipped to do her part well and worthily in a world full of surprises and temptations? Most girls have a great deal of freedom about this time. Parental control is relaxed and oversight lessened. Has this girl's training fitted her for this freedom? Is there not grave danger that her very innocence



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and lack of knowledge will leave her terribly defenceless against dangers of which she is ignorant, but which, nevertheless, are around her on every side?

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But let me assert here, and from a wide experience in teaching and practicing medicine and from knowledge obtained in Girls' Homes and Orphanages, that very few girls arrive at puberty, or even at a much younger age, "innocent" or ignorant of such matters. Even the tots in the kindergarten are often "wise beyond their years." Many mothers would be astonished and shocked could they listen to the conversation that their supposedly innocent daughters listen to or engage in. Why not? Mother doesn't tell them—perhaps she doesn't know. There are other things that mother has said "Oh, I don't know" when asked about. As we remarked before, the child has no conventionalities to shock, no experience as a guide and no warning from mother that nasty stories should never be listened to. So when some wise little "Miss Precocity" has "heard things" and is anxious to distribute the knowledge, your little daughter, mother who reads, may be one of the eager listeners. Under a promise of profound secrecy little Miss re-tells what she has seen, overheard or been told. And how is this knowledge gained and imparted? In the worst possible way. As something that is forbidden and shameful, some fact of the sexual function or relation is told in bold, coarse or foul terms, with embellishments that only the imagination of a child can conjure up. Not only this, but as children are as imitative as monkeys they often proceed to put what they have heard

into "play." This defiling half-knowledge may work infinite harm. The child's natural curiosity is first aroused. Then before even the sense of wrong comes, the childish mind may be contaminated and even vicious habits formed. But even when the child realizes that it is wrong the same old story is true: "Stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant." So partly in obedience to the oft-repeated warnings of associates, "Don't tell," partly from elation over knowing what it is not supposed to know, but largely from a growing craving for the unclean thing and worst of all, and saddest of all, from the fact that mother is not told, the child becomes sly and old in a perverted knowledge of sexual things.

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Do you say that the instinct of an innocent child should protect it? Instinct is an *animal* endowment and curiosity is one of the strongest. Hence instinct acts rather as the door-keeper to the citadel of Nature, ready to give entrance to any influence that appeals only to animal activities. If the child is not taught the truth reverently, it will just naturally imbibe the impure knowledge if brought into contact with it, because during the most impressionable years of early youth, its nature as an animal is more active than its nature as a moral and spiritual being.

Must we not fear that girl exposed to such influences, will ever after think of sexual things with less purity of thought than is essential to the perfect exercise of all her powers, physical, mental, moral and spiritual, because of this canker at the very root of her being, this tainted thought in youth, this dwarfed and twisted childish soul? Poor little wronged human creature! Set on such a devious way of life, with sweet-voiced playmates tempting you into filthy and disabling bye-paths, and no strong, clear light of the True and Right held up before the tender feet and young impressionable soul; with mother's loved and trusted voice saying: "This is the way, come play and walk and live with mother."

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But how comes it that any child in a respectable community, gains this knowledge and so becomes a disseminator of half-truths, infinitely worse than lies, or no knowledge at all?

Ah, parents! parents! Careless in speech and act, "Thou art the man! Thou art the woman!" Deny it some of you to your own soul and to God, if you dare! Has your child's eager ears never heard from your lips the unclean story, the obscene innuendo, or the filthy name thrown at another in passion. Are your acts, in the intimacies of the home, always seemly and without reproach, before your children? These unclean thoughts, words and acts that you throw off so carelessly, so recklessly, into God's good world, enter not only into your child's ears, but into its consciousness, and mix with the very fibre of its moral and spiritual life. So you are fouling the spring and fountain of its being. What chance of sweet waters of purity in thought and deed, springing from such a source? Your little daughter may go out from such a home and re-tell what she has seen and heard to other little girls whose parents may be ignorantly trusting in their innocence, because these parents have been careful to speak only "whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are of good report."

Have I said enough to convince mothers, that if you would be *sure* of excluding the impure, the half-true, but wholly misleading knowledge of sexual things, you must from the earliest years satisfy the childish mind by the truth, simply told at first, but increasing the knowledge