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The Double Standard of Morals —and— The Social Diseases

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The Presbyterian Church in Canada
436 Confederation Life Building
TORONTO**



The Double Standard of Morals

—and—

The Social Diseases.

“The social evil” really means prostitution and its consequences, and prostitution by women is the practice of offering their bodies to indiscriminate sexual intercourse for hire. The practice depends, of course, on that lust in men which induces them to hire the bodies of women for such use.

Prostitution always brings about the moral and physical ruin of the women who pursue that trade, and also frequently produces in the men who resort to prostitutes one or both of two terrible diseases, syphilis and gonorrhoea.

These diseases are highly contagious; and though they may be apparently cured, they are liable to break out again in the once-cured individual, even after years of apparent health. They are contagious not only in coition, but through the contact of syphilitic or gonorrhoeal discharges with the abraded skin or mucous membrane of a well person. Thus, a syphilitic sore in the mouth may infect another person through an abrasion on the lips or face. The fact that these diseases may long remain latent increases their malign influence. Thus, a man who has suffered from either of them can never be sure that he may not infect his innocent wife on or after marriage.

Both diseases are transmissible to children through an infected mother; and both are such pervasive diseases that, when inherited, they may affect the whole constitution, and are liable to cripple children in a great variety of shocking ways. Only physicians understand these horrors. It is impossible to exhibit to an assemblage of ordinary men pictures or photographs of the sores, distortions, and malformations produced in children by inherited syphilis without making many of them sick with disgust and fear.

It used to be supposed that although syphilis was a terrible disease, gonorrhoea was but a trivial disorder; but medical science has now demonstrated through the development of bacteriology that the consequences of gonorrhoea are quite as formidable as those of syphilis.

Thus, *blindness* in the new-born is now known to be a gonorrhœal infection; and more than half the inmates of the blind asylums are said to be victims of that infection.

Much *misery* in families and many *divorces* are due to gonorrhœal or syphilitic infection of the wife by the husband. Medical science has also succeeded within recent years in tracing with much more accuracy than formerly the consequences of syphilitic infection.

The general *paralysis* which now sends many patients to asylums for the *insane* is usually traced to syphilis. Physicians who see much of the insane attribute to syphilis twenty to thirty per cent. of all cases in the insane asylums.

Since surgery has been enabled by anesthesia and asepticism to treat with some success the *diseases peculiar to women*, it has become known that a large proportion of these diseased conditions are due to syphilitic or gonorrhœal infection.

In short, the amount of human agony and degradation due to the diseases of profligacy is unimaginable and incalculable, and the annual toll of misery is not diminishing.

All these woes are primarily due to the sexual vices of men. If most men should become as chaste as most women are under present conditions, there would result a great diminution of these abominable evils. If the same true standard of chastity should be effectively applied to men and women, they would gradually disappear.

Within the past twenty years the conduct of civilized communities in regard to the *ordinary contagious diseases* and the occasional *pestilences* has changed much for the better. A modern city or state now undertakes to prevent the free transmission of scarlet fever, diphtheria, or smallpox through the whole body of the population. It isolates more or less thoroughly cases of such diseases. It provides hospitals to which the sufferers from these diseases can be promptly carried; and it provides for the registration of every such case. In carrying out such measures for the protection of the community as a whole, the health authorities invade private houses, separate sick persons from their families, prevent children who have been exposed to contagion from going to school, and provide at public expense vaccines and antitoxins.

In striking contrast to the habitual treatment of other contagious diseases is the practice of American cities in regard to the *venereal diseases*. With

insignificant exceptions, there is no provision of public hospitals for the treatment of the miserable victims of these diseases; no effort is made to isolate and register the sufferers; and the brothels or low hotels in which prostitutes are kept are tolerated by the police authorities—no consistent efforts being made either to prevent women from living in them, or to prevent men from resorting to them. In certain streets or quarters of a city and in certain public resorts prostitutes ply their trade without effective interference by the police, or with only spasmodic interference at long intervals. The sufferers from venereal disease are often able to walk about, and even to do a day's work or a part of a day's work.

The disease is habitually concealed; and in many cases it can be concealed for long periods. Accordingly many men and women suffering from these diseases are walking about the streets, working in shops and factories, travelling in crowded cars, drinking in frequented saloons and eating in public restaurants, besides living in close contact with their families and their associates. Every infected person, male or female, is a dangerous source of contagion.

The medical profession co-operates with their patients in concealing all cases of venereal disease, whether they occur in private practice or in the out-patient departments of hospitals.

There is no public discussion of the evil; and as a rule the newspapers and magazines preserve an absolute silence on the subject.

Parents say nothing to their children about these dangers. Schools give no instruction about either the normal processes of reproduction or the cruelties and horrors of licentiousness.

The churches are silent on the whole subject, except in the secret whisperings of the confessional.

To this silence the good tendency of mankind to say little about the most intimate and tender things, undoubtedly contributes.

When the natural processes of reproduction are perverted to the uses of profligate men and abandoned women, the diseases which result from this perversion are felt to be so shameful and abhorrent that no public provision can be made for their registration, isolation, or treatment; and the infection of innocent women and children in marriage, although common and well known, must be endured in silence.

Through such a policy and such dumb endurance no widespread evil in human society ever has been, or ever can be, cured. The prophets had to

“cry aloud” before human sacrifices were done away with in the religious rites of Israel. The evils of human slavery had to be publicly discussed for generations before that great wrong could be righted. In like manner, public discussion, plain-spoken but delicate and reserved, must precede the adoption of any effective measures to eradicate the “social evil” with all its hideous consequences.

The next thing to be done in order to make head against this evil is to teach *parents to tell the truth* tenderly but plainly *to their children* when they inquire about babies and parentage. All children make such inquiries, often at a tender age. They ask where the new baby came from; and they are too often hushed, or are told that the doctor or the nurse or a stork brought it. Intelligent and affectionate parents should find in such questions precious opportunities for imparting to their children sound instruction on the methods of transmitting life, and on the sanctity or holiness of the process. The truth about the part of the mother in child-bearing will bind child to mother as no fable can.

Many parents, however, are incompetent to give this instruction to their children. They are too ignorant themselves; or they cannot express in suitable language their own best feelings on the subject. Hence, *the schools must take up the function of teaching children* what the natural processes of reproducing life are in plants and animals, and finally, in man. These lessons should begin with young children, and be carried on by the teaching of natural history and of hygiene throughout the elementary schools into the secondary schools; and before the close of the secondary school course instruction should be given concerning the diseases which accompany licentiousness. It is knowledge on these subjects which the children need and the schools should provide. The teaching of good manners in schools would contribute to the limitation of the evils under consideration. Good manners often promote and protect virtue. Thus, in the social relations between boys and girls good manners will prevent the rough familiarity which may lead unrefined boys and girls on to actual vice. Gentle manners in women and in men toward women are a real safeguard against sexual wrongdoing.

I come now to the phase of the general subject on which I was requested to write—*different standards of chastity for men and women*. Barbarous and civilized peoples alike, Buddhist, Christian, and Moslem peoples alike, have insisted strongly on chastity in women; but not one of them has ever

seemed to expect a like chastity in ordinary men. A few particularly holy men have been expected to be chaste, and the priests of some religions have been celibates and supposedly holier for that reason—a very disastrous implication; but the mass of men have not pretended to maintain for themselves the same standard in this respect which they have forced upon their women. Kings, princes, and rulers have not been expected to be continent. Good society, so-called, took no offence at young men who were dissolute before marriage; and even women spoke lightly of such conduct in youth. To yield to the sexual passion was supposed by young men to be an evidence of virility and boldness. It was commonly believed that incontinence for men was healthier than continence, particularly if marriage was long postponed; and the carrying over into the married state of the characteristic diseases of profligacy was ill understood. Young men, left by their parents and schools ignorant concerning the natural processes of reproduction, and filled by ignorant or coarse companions with false notions on the subject, fell into evil ways without deliberation, in a spirit of adventure, or almost accidentally while under the influence of alcohol.

The advantage of preventive medicine, and the far better understanding of the conditions of health and bodily vigor which obtains to-day, have put the whole subject of masculine chastity in a new light. It is *now absolutely known* that *complete continence is consistent with perfect health*, and, indeed, that *continence is necessary to the highest development of bodily strength and endurance*. It is clearly understood that the consequences to offspring of lack of chastity in the father may be just as grave as those of lack of chastity in the mother; and that the happiness and security of family life is quite as apt to be destroyed by want of purity and honor in the father as in the mother. Thus the lack of children, or the limitation of children to one or two in a family, is not infrequently the direct result of immorality in the male.

There is therefore no physical reason, and there never has been any moral reason for maintaining two standards as regards chastity, one for men and the other for women. The same virtue is needed in both sexes for the happy development of that family life on which the security of the race and the progress of civilization depend. All down the centuries modesty, chastity, and fidelity in women have been desired and honored, because these virtues were held to contribute powerfully to the welfare of the family and the race. In the light of modern science, it is plainly to be seen that

these virtues in men would have the same uplifting and consecrating effect on the family and the race. *The double standard of chastity for men and women ought not to survive the increase of biological knowledge, the improvement of ethical doctrines, and the developed sense of social obligation.*

In regard to personal purity and family affections, the teachings of the New Testament are strong and clear. What is needed now is a new conviction that they apply to men just as universally and strictly as to women.—The Gospel of the Kingdom,

The Chicago Vice Commission (1911) says:—

“The honor of Chicago, the fathers and mothers of her children, the physical and moral integrity of the future generation demand that she repress public prostitution.

Prostitution is pregnant with disease, a disease infecting not only the guilty, but contaminating the innocent wife and child in the home with sickening certainty almost inconceivable; a disease scattering misery broadcast, and leaving in its wake sterility, insanity, paralysis, the blinded eyes of little babes, the twisted limbs of deformed children, degradation, physical rot and mental decay.”

