

**COUNSEL TO PARENTS ON
THE MORAL EDUCATION
OF THEIR CHILDREN IN
RELATION TO SEX**

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Counsel to Parents on the Moral Education of Their Children in Relation to Sex by Elizabeth Blackwell

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ELIZABETH BLACKWELL

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ON
The Moral Education of their Children,
in Relation to Sex.

BY
DR. ELIZABETH BLACKWELL.

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TO PARENTS.

WHEN commencing the practice of medicine, many years ago, my attention was called to a subject which seriously affected the health of the rising generation, and in order to guide the efforts of Parents in the right direction I prepared some Lectures on the Physical Education of Girls. The experience gained during a generation of active medical work has brought another subject before me of equal importance to the health of a nation, viz. the Moral Education of Youth, considered in Relation to Sex. The subject in all its bearings is so vast, and of such vital importance to the race, that only an outline can be attempted in this little work. If the principles laid down be true, their application must engage the constant and combined effort of many and abler minds.

It is with a keen sense of responsibility that I venture to lay before the wide community of

parents, a subject which must necessarily bring forward questions, not generally considered suitable for public instruction. I know however, from long medical experience, that such instruction is now needed, and ought no longer to be withheld by physicians. If not given by those authorised to give it—those who are immediately responsible for the health of the nation—it will be given by those who are not qualified to instruct, given in a wrong way and with injurious results. It is in this belief that the following work, the result of wide experience, has been prepared. It has been written with an earnest desire for that Divine aid, which alone can give the highest efficiency to human effort.

Rock House, Hastings,
1879.

COUNSEL TO PARENTS.

PART FIRST

ON THE PHYSIOLOGICAL LAWS WHICH INFLUENCE THE
PHYSICAL AND MENTAL GROWTH OF SEX; AND ON
THE SOCIAL RESULTS OF NEGLECTING THESE LAWS.

AGE after age brings forward varying phases of thought, when some particular facts of life are thrown into unusual prominence, such special development of thought serving to mould the society of that generation, giving it a special stamp, and thus advancing the progress of humanity one step forward. Of all the ideas gradually worked out and gained as the permanent possession of human society, the slowest in growth, is the idea of the true relations of the sexes. The instinct of sex always exists as the indispensable condition of life, and the foundation of society. It is the strongest force in human nature. Whatever else disappears, this continues. Undeveloped, no subject of thought, but nevertheless as the central fire of life, nature guards this inevitable instinct from all possibility of de

struction. As an idea, however, thought out in all its wide relations, shaped in human practice in all its ennobling influences, it is the latest growth of civilization. In whatever concerns the subject of sex, customs are blindly considered sacred, and evils deemed inevitable. The mass of mankind seems moved with anger, fear, or shame, by any effort made to consider seriously this fundamental idea. It must necessarily come forward however, in the progress of events, as the subject of primary importance. As society advances, as principles of justice and humanity become firmly established, as science and industry prepare the way for the more perfect command of the material world, it will be found that the time has come for the serious consideration of this first and last question in human welfare, for the subject of sex will then present itself as the great aid or obstacle to further progress. The gradually growing conviction will be felt, that as it is the fundamental principle of all society, so it is its crowning glory. In the relations of men and women, will be found the chief cause of past national decline, or the promise of indefinite future growth.

The family, being the first simple element of society—the first natural product of the principle of sex—the whole structure of society must depend upon the character of that element, and the powers that can be unfolded from it. Morality in sex will be found to be the essence of all morality, securing principles of justice, honour, and uprightness, in the most influential of all human relations, and as it is all-important in life, so it is all-important in the education which prepares for life. A great social

question lies therefore, at the foundation of the moral education of youth, and influences more or less directly each step of education. It is indispensable to consider the relation of this subject to the various stages of education, and the methods by means of which education may guide and strengthen youth, in their entrance into wider social life.

The principles which should guide the moral education of our children—our boys and girls—must necessarily depend upon the views which we hold in relation to their adult life, as men and women; these views will unavoidably determine the course of practical education. Two great questions therefore, naturally present themselves at the outset of every careful consideration of moral sexual education.

1st. What is the true standard for the relations of men and women—the type which contains within itself the germ of progress or continual development?

2nd. Is this standard attained, or how can it be attained by human beings?

It will be seen that the answer we give to these two important questions, will guide every step in the education of youth. The endeavour to ascertain the true answer, in its bearing upon the growth of the young, and the welfare of family life, is the object of the present work.

The very gradual growth of mankind from lower to higher forms of social life, makes the study of the relation of the sexes a very complicated one; but a sure guide may be found in the great truths of physiology viewed in their broad