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Physical and Mental....

Preparation

— for —

Motherhood



— BY —

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PHYSICAL AND MENTAL  
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How shall our girls prepare for motherhood? How shall they attain to the fullest expression of life for themselves and at the same time project into the future their most perfect image? The question is two fold, not only involving the preservation of the present race of mothers, but the well-being of those to come. The consideration of motherhood and its highest and best performance is one of the most vital of the many human problems to be solved.

In the whirl of the many currents of modern thought and activities, so great has been the departure from natural lines, from old traditions, and so rapidly have new creations and fads arisen that we dizzily wonder where it will end and what will be its outcome.

Through all this restless movement, beneath this surface agitation may be observed the fundamental laws of being, which hold each to the fulfillment of his destiny, and it is a realization of these underlying or basic principles that makes the solution clear.

Nature has divided mankind into two divisions, the man and the woman, alike in general human characteristics, and yet

distinctly different, mutually dependent upon each other and yet with different functions. To woman was apportioned the supreme function of the growth and development of the living ovum until mature enough to have a separate existence, after which it was placed in her keeping to be nursed and nurtured to the point where it had gained power to care for itself.

In her keeping was placed the priceless essence of another being as the supreme function of her life. While the man comes and goes, busy with the activities of life and the large outworking of physical and mental activities, the mother of the race gives of her forces and powers day by day to the mysterious unfolding of the child to come. Whatever and wherever the woman, be she the pre-Adamite woman or the *fin de siecle* creation, walks she in the backwoods of the virgin country or amidst the splendors of wealth and fashion, she cannot evade the fulfillment of her destiny, the mothering of the coming people.

Nature is too careful of her creatures not to prepare most wisely for their perpetuation, and thus she places the process that constitutes motherhood the highest function of the physical woman. By highest I mean the most intricate and complicated to which all her other functions are secondary and to which they all contribute.

She has spared no pains to make manifest her designs in a woman's formation. Note the deep and roomy pelvic osseous structures, the elastic and supple joints, the light and bouyant body, capable of changing form easily. Note the cycling changes of menstruation and ovulation with its attendant phenomena, ever active during the prime of her life, ever awaiting pregnancy; note the mental characteristics accompanying these physical manifestations, the love of the young, the tenderness, patience and power of devotion so characteristic and ever present, and then deny that the mother-part of the woman is the dominant element of her existence.

Now, it is the recognition of this natural sex selection and supreme endowment of woman for motherhood that should be the central thought in the rearing and training of our girls. It is too great and mighty a thing to be accorded a secondary or minor place; and yet how often is it even considered?

In a brilliant and thoughtful essay in the *Forum* of December, 1892, President Elliot, of Harvard College, under the title, "Wherein Population Education Has Failed," has discussed the question of the shortcomings of modern education, with the conclusion that the modern methods of educating the young have fallen short of the ideal hoped for them, because they tend to the cultivation of other mental attributes than the essential ones of observation, recording, deduction and expression.

There can be no doubt of the truth it contains, and yet, from the point of observation of the physician still more light may be thrown upon the subject. Have the school men in the plan of education for the young entered into the consideration of what are the essentials in preparing children for the duties of life? Herbert Spencer sums up the order of the objects of education as follows: "That education which prepares for direct self-preservation, that which prepares for indirect preservation, that which prepares for parenthood, that which prepares for citizenship, that which prepares for the necessary refinements of life."

It is not within the scope of this paper to enter into a discussion of how thoroughly each object has been attained. We shall consider only the part that pertains to the direct preparation for parenthood. In the modern plan of education instruction as to how the individual is to protect himself against injury and disease and how to perfect his mind and body to the highest degree is not considered. As for instruction as to parenthood in our higher schools for boys and girls, is it even touched upon? Out of the twenty to fifty hours a week devoted to mathematics, languages and sciences

in our girls' colleges, is one hour a week given to instruction concerning herself, and the duties of motherhood? And yet, what training would be of higher value to the individual and the race than this? It is this lack of placing before girls the true meaning and full realization of the essential things of life that is responsible for the mistakes that they make later in life. As a result, motherhood is not a welcome nor a desirable thing. Among our married women it is how to evade maternity by preventing conception or inducing early abortion, instead of how to perform the function in the highest possible manner. The modern tendency is away from maternity. The trend of human effort among both men and women is to thrust it aside as a lesser thing. In the keen enjoyment of individual development, in the pursuit of pleasure and the intensity of the modern whirl there is no time to give of the best of ourselves to the next generation.

It is this attitude of depreciation of motherhood and the lack of intelligent preparation for it that to my mind is largely responsible for the imperfect pregnancies, the difficult labors, and the lack of ability to perform lactation.

Before much can be accomplished in the individual training, there must be a change of *sentiment* in the community. Physicians have much to do in bringing this about, and, if properly presented, I am sure so strong is the spirit of motherhood in each woman that there will be a responsive movement. Exalt the pregnant woman to a higher position, show her the high appreciation that is due her for the sacrifice of self she must make and the ordeal she must pass through. Direct the conditions about her aright while she is performing her high function, and we shall find a greater willingness to assume motherhood.

To prepare the individual for motherhood, we must begin far back with the early childhood of the girl, and if we could begin with her grandmother, it would still be better. Fortunate is

the girl endowed with a strong body, whose ancestors have bequeathed to her a vigorous constitution, a well-poised nervous system, and a freedom from inherited vices or weakness.

In the growth and development of that girl, every day of her life, even from babyhood, is marring or perfecting the coming mother. Going back to the beginning of life through infancy, the babe should receive the natural nourishment until mature enough to be weaned. After which, its diet should be of the simple grains, milk and fruit, gradually allowing a greater variety as the child grows older, but throughout childhood, maintaining simplicity in the number and quality of the articles eaten. Through childhood I would have the girl play with her brothers, living largely an out-of-door life, with a freedom from nerve tension so frequently manifest in our present school system. Let the girl live out naturally the active buoyancy that is so characteristic of youth. It is the playtime of life, when a tremendous growth and development is taking place. Give the girl the large freedom and opportunity that is necessary for that development. As the intellectual powers awaken, the mental training should be begun. Wisely and slowly should the girl's mental powers be developed; temperaments must be studied and individualized, and studies modified for the different minds. The methods in the modern public school system will have to be modified most radically before it will accomplish what it should. Its cramming system will have to be abolished; its long hours of school work modified; its multiplicity of studies lessened, and, above all, there will have to be a better understanding of the needs and importance of the girl's growing body, with a resulting greater simplicity and larger opportunities for the natural unfolding of the girl's powers.

In the care of the girl child every effort should be made to prevent her from contracting the diseases of childhood, not only the exanthematous, but also the constitutional, which are largely

preventable. There is not only the possible interference with normal growth and nutritive processes, but the danger of inflammatory action and impairment of the pelvic organs. Constitutional diseases, such as scrofula or rachitis, may leave their irreparable marks upon the different structures of the body, especially upon the osseous, producing most frequently the deformed pelvis which renders maternity hazardous and many times impossible.

With the mental training of the girl, the physical culture of the body, as well as the moral, should go hand in hand. A trained body is better than an untrained one, no matter how great the strength. The moral training should aim to teach the girl the proper control of self, her duties in relation to others, and the control of the emotions which are so often allowed undue development.

As the girl enters puberty, the happy unconsciousness of childhood is passed, and there is an awakening of sex consciousness; then should come the instruction about herself, her functions and the care she must exercise over herself.

If the girl up to this period has been wisely cared for and trained, she will be a vigorous, well-poised being, ready to receive in a wholesome manner the instruction that is given. After puberty, her mental and physical training should be carried on until she has reached maturity; no injury will result from her mental work, provided that the equilibrium of physical and mental activity be maintained, a proper number of hours of study counterbalanced by out-of-door activity. Nerve strain and improper methods at this period produce most disastrous results upon the productive organs, not only resulting in their imperfect development but also in impairment of function. These pathological conditions, having their origin in organic changes, are rarely cured in after life.

Before entering into the married state, wisely and with a clear understanding of her high duties should she be prepared

as well as her life companion. Both should realize the dignity of the productive instinct, its true meaning and use both as relating to themselves and the effect upon the coming race. As Drummond says, "Sympathy, affection, fidelity, sacrifice—indeed, all those noble traits included under the term altruism, spring from the productive instinct." They should also know of the laws of heredity, and how strongly are their personal attributes, be they good or evil, impressed upon their children. Understandingly instead of ignorantly will they solve the problem and avoid the pitiable and sad mistakes of the present time.

They should be taught the dangers and penalties of preventing conception as well as the production of abortions, one of the most deadly and prevalent sins of the present day. What a tremendous injury it is to the woman, the numerous pelvic diseases resulting therefrom and the impairment of function or resulting sterility. "Here again justice may move with a leader foot, but she strikes with an iron hand."

In the immediate preparation for motherhood, if the growth and development throughout the woman's life have been in normal lines, there is every likelihood that pregnancy, being a normal process, will be a normal one. The pregnancy and parturition will be a crucial test of how well the body has been moulded for its high function. In our present artificial life there is always the possibility of deviation from natural lines, and it is most advisable that the pregnant woman be placed from the beginning under a physician's care, that her life may be wisely directed, and, this being the age of preventive medicine, any pathological condition that arises may immediately be controlled.

Scientific inquiry and statistical research show that labor has grown more difficult with advancing civilization. Duncan formulates his conclusion on this point as follows: "That in the Darwinian progress of the species, the head of the foetus has increased in size more rapidly than the orifices and passages



through which it has come have increased in size and dilatability."

The laity should be educated to realize that the physician should have the supervision of the entire pregnancy, thereby avoiding many of the complications that arise during labor. It is not wise to trust to the woman to determine when a condition passes the physiological line and becomes a pathological lesion.

I shall not enter into the details of the hygiene of pregnancy, that belongs to the field of obstetrics, both as to dress, diet and modes of living. Only one point during that time do I wish to emphasize, and that is to impress upon the laity the necessity for greater freedom from care and work during pregnancy.

The development of the fetus involves a tremendous amount of nerve force on the mother's part. If her nervous energies are consumed in the care of the family, her thousand-and-one duties, how much nerve force can she give to her child?

I am impressed with the ignorance and indifference manifest on this point by pregnant women and those in her household.

As a rule, whatever her walk of life, she toils unremittingly as long as there is the strength to carry out her plans, little realizing that she is depriving her child of its natural birth-right, a well-endowed nervous system. In the present social arrangement, where the mother is the center of the household, actively controlling or immediately concerned in the care of the growing children, the management of the home, social and other duties that belong to the home maker, it is difficult to know how to control these forces.

I cannot but believe that with a deeper realization of what is due to the coming mother during the months preceding the birth of the child, there will be a modification and rearrangement of our social system, so that the mother may have the freedom, the repose and power necessary for creating the best type of the coming race. Thus largely diminishing the defective classes, the weak, the insufficient, the dregs of the body politic for Nature, if given the opportunity, tends ever upward to the higher type.