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Baum Henry Nietzsche Dumas Flaubert Turgenev Balzac Crane
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The Sexual Life of the Child

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THE SEXUAL LIFE OF
THE CHILD

BY

DR. ALBERT MOLL

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN BY

DR. EDEN PAUL

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY

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INTRODUCTION

Dr. Moll is a gifted physician of long experience whose work with those problems of medicine and hygiene which demand scientific acquaintance with human nature has made him well known to experts in these fields. In this book he has undertaken to describe the origin and development, in childhood and youth, of the acts and feelings due to sex; to explain the forces by which sex-responses are directed and misdirected; and to judge the wisdom of existing and proposed methods of preventing the degradation of a child's sexual life.

This difficult task is carried out, as it should be, with dignity and frankness. In spite of the best intentions, a scientific book on sex-psychology is likely to appear, at least in spots, to gratify a low curiosity; but in Dr. Moll's book there is no such taint. Popular books on sex-hygiene, on the other hand, are likely to suffer from a pardonable but harmful delicacy whereby the facts of anatomy, physiology, and psychology which are necessary to make their principles comprehensible and useful, are omitted, veiled, or even distorted. Dr. Moll honors his readers by a frankness which may seem brutal to some of them. It is necessary.

With dignity and frankness Dr. Moll combines notable good sense. In the case of any exciting movement in advance of traditional custom, the forerunners are likely to combine a certain one-sidedness and lack of balance with their really valuable progressive ideas. The greater sagacity and critical power are more often found amongst the men of science who avoid public discussion of exciting social or moral reforms, and are suspicious of startling and revolutionary doctrines or practices. It is therefore fortunate that a book on the sexual life vi during childhood should have been written by a man of critical, matter-of-fact mind, of long experience as a medical specialist, and of wide scholarship, who has no private interest in any exciting psychological doctrine or educational panacea.

The translation of this book will be welcomed by men and women from many different professions, but alike in the need of preparation to guide the sex-life of boys and girls and to meet emergencies caused by its corruption by weakness within or attack from

without. Of the clergymen in this country who are in real touch with the lives of their charges, there is hardly a one who does not, every so often, have to minister to a mind whose moral and religious distress depends on an unfortunate sex history. Conscientious and observant teachers realize, in a dim way, that they cannot do justice to even the purely intellectual needs of pupils without understanding the natural history of those instinctive impulses, which, concealed and falsified as they are under our traditional taboos, nevertheless retain enormous potency. The facts, so clearly shown in the present volume, that the life of sex begins long before its obvious manifestations at puberty, and that the direction of its vaguer and less differentiated habits in these earlier years is as important as its hygiene at the more noticeable climax of the early 'teens, increase the teacher's responsibility. Moreover, there is probably not a teacher of ten years' standing who has not faced—or by ignorance neglected—some emergency where moderate insight into the laws whereby the vague instincts of sex are turned into healthy and unhealthy habits, and form right and wrong attitudes, could have rescued a boy or girl from years of wretched anxiety, or degraded conduct, or both.

The social worker, still more emphatically, knows his or her need of a surer equipment for the wise direction of the life of sex in childhood and its protection from the abominable suggestions of those who are themselves sexually diseased or depraved. The casual questioning of medical or legal friends, reminiscences of vague references in the Bible or classic literature, and the miscellaneous experiences which life vii itself throws in one's way, are hopelessly inadequate.

The conscientious practitioner of medicine, too, will gladly add to the scanty, though accurate, knowledge of the sex-instinct and its pathology which is all that even the best medical course can compass, the facts presented by a specialist in this field. The easiest way for those parents who accept the responsibility for rational guidance of their children in matters of sex-behavior to discharge this responsibility is by the aid of the family physician. For the physician in such cases to gain the child's confidence, understand his individual dangers and possible false attitudes, and give more than perfunctory general counsel, knowledge of the psychology of sex-behavior, as

well as its physiology, is necessary. In general, also, modern medical practice must look after the *prevention* of bad habits and unnecessary anxieties in respect to the sex-life as well as their cure; and the science of preventive medicine in this field receives a substantial contribution from this summary of the sex-life of childhood.

There are now many men and women who are dissatisfied with doing for their children merely what outgrown customs decree, who are willing to give time and study, as well as money and affection, in their service, and who are eager to see or hear or read anything pertinent to their welfare. For many such parents, if they are of the scientific, matter-of-fact type, Dr. Moll's book may prove the means of answering many troublesome questions and of prompting to a wiser co□□ation with church, school, and the medical profession in safeguarding their own—and, we may hope, all other—children against blunders and contaminations.

One word of caution is perhaps necessary for those readers who are unused to descriptions of symptoms of diseases, abnormalities, and defects. Such readers are likely to interpret perfectly ordinary facts as the symptoms which they have been studying. So the medical student at the beginning of his reading, fears appendicitis when he has slight indigestion, and sees incipient tuberculosis in every household! So the embryonic psychologist finds 'degenerates' in every crowd of boys, 'hypnotic suggestion' in every popular preacher, and 'aphasia' in viii any friend who forgets names and faces! Dr. Moll gives more protection against such exaggerated inferences than is commonly given in books on pathology, but many of his readers will do well to be on their guard lest they interpret perfectly innocent behavior as a symptom of abnormality. The mischief done by our present ignorance and neglect of important features of sex-behavior should be prevented without the incidence of mischief from exaggerated expectations and unwise meddling.

It would be evasive to shirk mention of the fact that many of the most devoted servants of health and morals object to public discussion of the facts of sex. They discard enlightenment about sex as relatively unimportant because a clean ancestry, decency in the family and neighborhood, and noble needs in friendship, love, and marriage must, in any case, be the main roots of healthy direction

and ideal restraint of the sex-instinct. Or they fear enlightenment as a possible stimulus to undesirable imagination and experimentation. Or they dislike, even abhor, it as esthetically repulsive—shocking to an unreasoned but cherished craving for silence about these things—a craving which the customs of our land and time have made an unwritten law of society.

Of the first of these three attitudes, it may be said briefly that the relative unimportance of enlightenment is a fact, but no argument against it. Modesty, austerity, and clean living on the part of parents will counterbalance much negligence in direct guidance or protection. But the former need be in no wise lessened by improving the latter. Of the second, I dare affirm that if the men and women in America should stop whatever they are doing for an evening and read this book, there would be less harmful imagination as a result than from the occupations which its reading would replace. Of all the causes of sexual disorder, the reading of scientific books by reputable men is surely the least! The third—that is, the esthetic—repulsion toward publicity in respect to the natural history of sex, I will not pretend to judge. Only we must not strain at gnats and swallow camels. It is no sign of true esthetic or ix moral sensitiveness for a person to be shocked by 'Ghosts,' 'Mrs. Warren's Profession,' or 'The Sexual Life of the Child,' who finds pleasant diversion in the treatment of sex-behavior in the ordinary novel, newspaper, or play.

On the whole, the gain from giving earnest men and women the facts they need, seems likely to outweigh by much the harm done to such light minds as will be misled, or to such sentimental minds as will be wounded, by enlightenment about sex. No harm will be done to those men and women whose interest in the welfare of children makes them eager to face every problem that it involves, and whose faith in the ideal possibilities of love between the sexes is too well-grounded to be disturbed by the facts of its natural history.

EDWARD L. THORNDIKE.

May, 1912.

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PREFACE

The number of books and essays dealing with sexual topics published during recent years is by no means small; but although some of the works in question have added considerably to our knowledge, the advance of sexual science as a whole has not been proportionate to the extent of these contributions. The reason is that insufficient attention has been paid to special problems; and the majority of writers have either repeated what has already been said by another, in identical or equivalent words, or else they have published comprehensive treatises on the sexual life, which may, perhaps, be of interest to the laity, but do not in any way enrich our science. Further advances in our knowledge of the sexual life can be effected only by the investigation of special problems. Such work is, indeed, laborious; but that it is also fruitful, has been clearly shown, not only in the first instance by von Krafft-Ebing, but more recently, above all, by Havelock Ellis, whose special studies have contributed more to the advance of sexual science than the work of dozens of other writers.

The recognition of the need for specialised investigations has led me, in this province of scientific work as in other departments, to devote myself to the elucidation of certain definite problems. For several reasons I determined to study the sexual life of the child. In the first place, I believe that an advance in our knowledge of the sexual life of the child will indirectly enrich our knowledge also of the sexual life of the adult. In order to understand the sexual life, the gradual development of that life must be recognised, and for this purpose it is essential that we should study the sexual life of the child. Moreover, the modern movement in favour of the sexual enlightenment of young persons renders indispensable the possession of precise knowledge of the sexuality of the child; and such knowledge is no less necessary to all instructors of youth, especially to those to whom the psychical life of children is a matter of concern. Judges and magistrates also, as we shall see in the seventh chapter, are very greatly interested in this matter: it is, in fact, hardly open to question that erroneous legal decisions and the unjust condemnation of reputed criminals can only be avoided by giving our judicial authorities the opportunity of obtaining sound

knowledge concerning the sexual life of children in all its modes of manifestation. By all these considerations I have been induced to study the problem of the sexuality of children from the most widely different points of view. Although other writers, such as Freud, Bell, and Koller, have contributed certain data towards the solution of these questions, no comprehensive study of the subject has hitherto been attempted. My material does not consist only of the reports of patients. In addition, in order to avoid a one-sided dependence upon pathological considerations, I have accepted with greater confidence the reports concerning the sexual life of children which I have received from healthy individuals, both men and women. I take this opportunity of tendering my most heartfelt thanks to all those who have assisted me in this manner.

ALBERT MOLL.

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THE SEXUAL LIFE OF THE CHILD

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY AND HISTORICAL

To speak of "the sexual life of the child" seems at first sight to involve a contradiction in terms. It is generally assumed that the sexual life first awakens at the on-coming of puberty (the attainment of sexual maturity of manhood or womanhood); the on-coming of puberty is regarded as the termination of childhood; in fact the term *child* is usually defined as the human being from the time of birth to the on-coming of puberty. But this contradiction is apparent merely, and depends on the assumption that the on-coming of puberty is indicated by certain outward signs (more especially the first menstruation and the first seminal emission), insufficient attention being paid to the long period of development which usually precedes these occurrences. And yet, during this period of preliminary development, the occurrence of certain manifestations of the sexual life is plainly demonstrable.

The period of childhood is subdivided into several sub-epochs, but the delimitation and nomenclature of these varies so much with different investigators, that to avoid misunderstanding I must first define the subdivisions which I myself propose to employ. If we regard the beginning of the fifteenth year as the termination of childhood, we may divide childhood into two equal periods, the first extending from birth to the completion of the seventh year, the second from the beginning of the eighth to the end of the fourteenth year. I shall in this work designate these two periods as the *first* and the *second period of childhood* respectively. In the first period of 2 childhood, the first year of life may be further distinguished as the *period of infancy*.¹ The first and second periods of childhood comprise childhood in the narrower sense of the term. The years that

immediately follow the beginning of the fifteenth year I shall denote as the *period of youth*. Inasmuch as the symptoms of this latter come to differ from those of childhood proper, not abruptly, but gradually, the first years, at least, of youth will often come under our consideration, and I shall speak of this period of life as the *third period of childhood*. Although childhood in the narrower sense comprises the first and second periods only, childhood in the wider sense includes also the third period. It is hardly possible that any misunderstanding can arise if the reader will bear in mind that whenever I speak of childhood without qualification, I allude only to the period of life before the beginning of the fifteenth year. For all these periods of childhood, first, second, and third, I shall for practical convenience when speaking of males use the word *boy*, and when speaking of females, the word *girl*.

The use of this terminology must not be regarded as implying that the distinctions indicated correspond in any way to fixed natural lines of demarcation; on the contrary, individual variations are numerous and manifold. Not only does the rate of development differ in different races (in the Caucasian race, more especially, the age of puberty comes comparatively late, so that among the members of this race childhood is prolonged); but further, within the limits of one and the same race, notable differences occur. More than all have we to take into account the differences between the sexes, childhood terminating earlier in the female sex than in the male—among our own people [the Germans] this difference is commonly estimated at as much as two years. In addition, in this respect, there are marked differences between different 3 classes of the population, a matter to which we shall return in Chapter VI.

It is also necessary to point out here in what sense I employ the term *puberty* (nubility, sexual ripeness, or maturity), and the associated terms, *nubile* and *sexually mature*. Much confusion exists in respect of the application of these terms. Some use *puberty* to denote a period of time, others, a point of time, and in various other ways the word is differently used by different authors. Similarly as regards the term *nubile*; some consider an individual to be nubile as soon as he or she is competent for procreation, others speak of anyone as nubile only when the development of the sexual life is completed. Obviously, these two notions are very different; for instance,

a girl of thirteen who has begun to menstruate may be competent for the act of procreation, and yet her sexual development may still be far from complete. The confusion as regards the use of the substantive *puberty* is no less perplexing. One writer uses it to denote the time at which procreative capacity begins, and believes he is right in assuming that in the male this time is indicated by the occurrence of the first involuntary sexual orgasm. 2 I may point out in passing that there is a confusion here between procreative capacity and competence for sexual intercourse, for as a rule the first seminal emissions contain no spermatozoa. But, apart from such confusions, the term *puberty* is used in various senses. Thus, a second writer denotes by *puberty* the point of time at which the sexual development is completed; a third means by *puberty* the period 4 which elapses between the occurrence of the first involuntary orgasm and the completion of sexual development; a fourth uses the word to denote the entire period of life during which procreative capacity endures; and finally, a fifth includes under the notion of *puberty* the whole course of life after the completion of sexual development. In this work I shall mean by *puberty* the period of life between the completion of sexual development and the extinction of the sexual life. The period during which the state of *puberty* is being attained will be spoken of as the *period of puberal development*, and I shall therefore speak of the *beginning* and the *end* of the puberal development. The terms *nubility*, *sexual maturity*, *nubile*, and *sexually mature*, will be used with a similar signification. As regards the puberal development, let me at the outset draw attention to the fact that it takes place very gradually; and further, as we shall see, that it begins much earlier than is commonly believed. In the young girl, from the date of the first menstruation to the time at which she has become fitted for marriage, the average lapse of time is assumed by Ribbing 3 to be two years. This is a fair estimate, but it does not correspond to the totality of the period of the puberal development. If we estimate that period from its true beginning its duration greatly exceeds two years, for the first indications of the puberal development are manifest in the girl long before the first menstruation, and in the boy long before the first discharge of semen. The approach of *puberty* is indicated by numerous symptoms, some of which are psychical and some physical in character. In perfectly healthy children, as will be shown in the sequel, individual symp-

toms may make their appearance as early as the age of seven or eight, and further symptoms successively appear during succeeding years, until the puberal development is completed.

What methods are available for the study of the sexual life of the child? Three methods have to be considered: first, the observation of children; secondly, experiment; and thirdly, reports made by individuals regarding their own experiences. As regards the last mentioned, we must distinguish clearly between accounts reproduced from memory long after the incidents to which they relate, and accounts given by children of their state at the time of narration. But both varieties of clinical history are defective. The child is often incompetent to describe his sensations—think, for instance, of the processes of the earliest years of life. Even when the child is able to make reports, a sense of shame will often interfere with the truthfulness of his account. Whilst as regards the memory-pictures of adults, recourse to this method often fails us because the experiences are so remote as to have been largely, if not entirely, forgotten. The autobiographies of sexually perverse individuals have drawn my attention to the fallacious nature of memory. Its records are uncertain, but that especially is recorded which has aroused interest. Not only the interest felt in the experiences at the time determines what shall be recorded, but also the interest felt later when reviving these experiences in memory. Childish experiences are very readily forgotten, either if they were uninteresting at the time, or if subsequently they have become uninteresting. During childhood, a homosexual woman has experienced sexual feeling, directed now towards boys, now towards girls. Later in life, when the homosexuality has developed fully, the memory of the inclination towards boys fades away, and her homosexual sentiments only are remembered. As a result, we often find that the homosexual woman—and the converse is equally true of the homosexual man—declares at first, when inquiries are made, that she has never experienced any inclination for members of the other sex; whereas, at any rate in a large proportion of cases, a stricter examination of her memory, or the reports of other individuals, will reveal beyond dispute that in childhood heterosexual inclinations were not lacking.

A further defect of memory has been made manifest to me by the study of perversions. Processes which in childhood were entirely devoid of any sexual tinge, but which later became associated with sex-feelings, very readily acquire false sexual associations also when they are revived in memory. Consider, for instance, the case of a homosexual man. He remembers that, as a small boy, he was very fond of sitting on his uncle's knees, and he believes that the pleasure he formerly experienced was tinged by sexual feeling. In reality this was by no means the case. His uncle took the boy on his knee in order to tell him a story. Possibly, also, the riding movements which the uncle imitated by jogging his knees up and down gave the child pleasure, which, however, was entirely devoid of any admixture of sexual feeling. But in the consciousness of the full-grown man, in whom homosexual feeling has later undergone full development, all this becomes distorted. The non-sexual motives are forgotten; he believes that even in early childhood he had homosexual inclinations, and that for *this* reason it gave him pleasure to ride on his uncle's knees.

Nor is observation in any way adapted to furnish us with a clear picture of the sexual life of the child. So little can be directly observed, that in the absence of reports much would remain entirely unknown. From the moment when the children gain a consciousness, however obscure, of the nature of sexual processes, they almost invariably endeavour to conceal their knowledge as much as possible, so that we shall discover its existence only by a rare chance. None the less, the results of direct observation are often important; sometimes because we are able to watch children when they are unaware of our attention, and sometimes because they do not as yet fully understand the nature of the processes under observation, and for this reason are less secretive.

The third method, that of experiment, is available to us only in the form of castration. I need not dilate on the inadequacy of this application of the experimental method, even apart from the fact that it subserves our purposes almost exclusively in respect of the male sex—for in the case of young girls, castration (oophorectomy) is almost entirely unknown.

Thus we see that all our methods of investigation exhibit extensive lacunæ and further, that they are all in many respects fallacious; we shall therefore endeavour to supplement each by the others, in order to arrive at results which shall be as free from error as possible. Thus guided, we learn that sexual incidents occur in childhood far more frequently than is usually supposed. So common are they, that they cannot possibly escape the notice of any practising physician or educationalist who pays attention to the question, provided, of course, that he enjoys the confidence of the parents. These latter have often been aware of such sexual manifestations in their children for a long time, but a false shame has prevented them from asking the advice of the physician. They have been afraid lest he should regard the child as intellectually or morally deficient, or as the offspring of a degenerate family. In addition, we have to take into account self-deception on the part of the parents, who, indeed, often deceive themselves willingly, saying to themselves that the matter is of no importance, and that the symptoms will disappear spontaneously.

Having given this brief account of the terminology to be employed and of the methods of investigation, I propose to sketch no less briefly the history of the subject.

Casual references to the sexual life of the child are to be found even in the older scientific literature. In the latter half of the eighteenth century, and at the beginning of the nineteenth, interest in the subject became more general. Two works, in especial, published almost simultaneously, attracted the attention of physicians and educationalists. One of these, Rousseau's *Jule*, discusses the proper conduct of parents and elders in relation to the awakening sexual life, and what they should do in order to delay that awakening as much as possible. The other, the celebrated work of Tissot, depicts the dangers of masturbation, but deals chiefly with persons who have attained sexual maturity. None the less, in consequence of this book, much attention was directed to the sexual life of the child. Earlier works on masturbation, such as that of Sarganeck, for instance, had not succeeded in arousing any enduring interest in this question. But Rousseau's and Tissot's books induced a large number of physicians and educationalists to occupy themselves in this province of study. Thus at this early day many authorities were led to

advocate the sexual enlightenment of children, in order to guide them in the avoidance of the dangers of the sexual life. An excellent historical and critical study of this movement, written by Thalhofer, has recently been published. 4 Among the educationalists who took part in it may be mentioned Basedow, Salzmann, Campe, and Niemeyer. The modern movement in favour of sexual enlightenment originated chiefly in the endeavour to prevent the diffusion of venereal diseases; but the earlier movement, occurring at a time when much less was known about venereal diseases, had a different aim. This was rather to prevent masturbation and other sexual excesses, on account of their direct effect upon the organism; an aim not neglected by the modern movement for sexual enlightenment, though subsidiary to the object of the prevention of the venereal diseases. Teachers of that day touched, of course, upon the subject of the sexual life of the child. But this was done cursorily, for when instruction was given on the sexual life, not the actual experience of children, but the sexual life of mature persons, was the subject of discourse. This must be said also of the works of those physicians who, like Hufeland in his *Makrobiotik* (written as a sequel to the work of Tissot), spoke of the dangers of masturbation.

A few of the numerous medical books dealing with the puberal development deserve mention in this place; for instance, Marro, *La Puberté* (first edition, published in 1897), and Bacqu^e*La Puberté* (Argenteuil, 1876). A number of recent works on masturbation have also touched on the topic of the sexual life of the child.

Apart from these recent special investigations, the older and the more recent medical and anthropological literature contains numerous observations which concern the subject of this book. More especially do we find reports of cases in which the external manifestations of sexual maturity appeared in very early childhood. Now we find an account of a girl menstruating at four years of age, now an account of a three-year-old boy who exhibited many of the external signs of sexual maturity. Even in the older, purely psychological works we find occasional references to the sexual life of the child – a fact that will surprise no one who is acquainted with the high development of the empirical psychology (*Erfahrungspsychologie*) of that day (1800). The *Venus Urania* of Ramdohr, for instance, a work on the psychology of love, emphasises the frequency of amatory sentiments in children.

In works dealing with the history of civilisation, we also encounter occasional references to our subject. Take, for instance, the knightly Code of Love (Liebeskodex), a work highly esteemed in the days of chivalry, and legendarily supposed to have originated in King Arthur's Court. Paragraph 6 of this Code runs: "A man shall not practise love until he is fully grown." According to Rudeck, 5 from whom I quote this instance, the aim of the admonition was to protect the youth of the nobility from unwholesome consequences. Obviously, the love affairs of immature persons must have been the determining cause of any allusion to the matter. We may also draw attention in this connexion to many marriage laws, which show that the subject has come under consideration, either because they expressly sanction the marriages of children, or, conversely, because they forbid such unions. At the present day, among many peoples (as, for instance, the Hindus), child-marriages are frequent; and in many countries in which such marriages are now illegal, they were sanctioned in former ages. Many works on prostitution also touch on our chosen subject. Parent-Duch • let, in his great book, refers to girls who had become prostitutes at the ages of twelve or even ten years. I shall show later that in individual instances such early prostitution is directly dependent upon the sexuality of the children concerned. Many ethnological works also contribute to our knowledge of the sexual life of the child, describing, as they do, in certain races, the early awakening of sexual activity.

Remarkably little material do we find, however, in many works in which we might have expected to find a great deal. I refer to works on education and on the psychology of the child. In exceptional instances, indeed, as I have already indicated, the educationalists have taken part in the movement in favour of sexual enlightenment. But when we consider the enormous importance and great frequency of the sexual processes of the child, we are positively astounded at the manner in which this department of knowledge has been ignored by those who have written on the science and art of education, and by those psychologists who have occupied themselves in the study of the mind of the child. Has it been a false notion of morality by which these investigators have been withheld from the elucidation of the sexual life of the child? Or has the reason merely been their defective powers of observation? As a matter of fact, I suppose that both these causes have operated in producing this remarkable gap in our knowledge.

A certain amount of material is to be found in a number of books on zoology, and also in a few quite recent works on comparative psychology.