

KNOWLEDGE
FOR THE
GROWING BOY

SID G. HEDGES

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"At the age of twelve to fourteen you take a big step forward from childhood towards manhood, and there are many things which did not concern you before which now you should know."

BY

SID G. HEDGES

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I

What this is all about, and Why

PERHAPS I had better introduce myself first. I guess I'm about as old as your father. For a long time I have been writing in books and magazines and newspapers, very often for boys like you—maybe you have read some of my tales, or books on swimming, games, skating, harmonica playing. I've done many talks for boys too on the radio, as well as lectures and yarns in schools. And a lot of my time is spent in Christian youth clubs and week-night activities, especially in Sunday Schools—on which I am tremendously keen. So, naturally, because I meet many boys they tell me a lot of things and write me a lot of letters. That's what first made me think of doing this little book—you, or friends of mine like you, put it into my head. "Look here," they said, "here's something we don't know that we ought to know. We can't always be plaguing Dad with questions. Will you tell us?"

One chap of fifteen who started life in U.S.A. and

later came to this country said to me in a letter that one thing ought to be improved in England—"the view taken by many grown-up people on the ordinary things of life, when in the presence of boys or girls they whisper to each other that Mrs. Brown is expecting a baby. As if it isn't quite natural for babies to be born." He went on: "Millions of babies have been born and millions more will be born, and I don't see why people should pretend it is a secret. Children should be told about life, or be given a reliable book to read, so that they don't get daft ideas into their heads."

Well, I think that was a mighty sensible letter, that hit a big nail right on the head. So there's one of the things I want to tackle here. There may still be some who talk about babies coming in doctors' bags, or from under gooseberry bushes, or being brought by storks. Keeping any sort of pets will probably have taught you better than that, even if you haven't started biology at school. There's no secret about birth; it's so wonderful a thing as to seem almost sacred—that's partly why decent folk don't talk about it lightly.

But more of that later. You have a right to knowledge. I'm all for healthy frankness and sensible instruction, controlled of course by good taste and courtesy.

Taking another example—God didn't plan the human body, then suddenly discover that it was something shameful. Artists who paint and carve human figures are not wicked people, any more than those who look at and admire their works. But that is another subject, and must also wait.

To come back to you. At the age of twelve to fourteen you take a big step forward from childhood towards manhood, and there are many things which did not concern you before which now you should know. A poet, Coleridge, said: "All knowledge begins and ends in wonder", and you will certainly find that true when you begin to think about the glory and wonder of the way in which God has planned for life to be continued from generation to generation. The great creative power which He has given to human beings is linked up with such things as love, chivalry, music, poetry, achievement, fine craftsmanship, athletics. It has to do with soul and mind and body. Especially is it connected with one big concern of yours—keeping fit, and building up a body so strong, vigorous, and healthy, that it will be a splendid servant to you through life. You want to be that sort of clean, virile boy? All right, let's go on.

Life in General

THE Wisest of Men talked about God being concerned for wild lilies, and sparrows. He—Jesus, of course—knew that God began everything and so is lovingly interested in all His creation, especially in His human children.

Have you ever thought how marvellous it is that all living creatures have been given the power to reproduce themselves—flowers, fish, birds, animals, human beings? If they had not there would soon be no life left. Think of the flowers, for instance—unless they produced seeds they would die, and that would be an end of them. Those gorgeous marigolds are finished by the end of autumn, their golden petals wither and the plants die. But seeds have scattered from them which lie unseen through the winter, and then with the early summer new young plants spring up. It is the same with fish or birds, each season fresh young creatures are born, and so life is continued.

How does new life begin?

One of the most remarkable things about all this is that two "parents", male and female, are needed to start one new life. This has much to do with the great variety of living creatures. You see, if each boy was descended only from his father he would probably possess only the same qualities as the father; but because he has a mother, too, some of her likeness may be in him, so that he may "take after" each parent in some ways and be a completely different and original combination of qualities. That is one of the most fascinating results of the method God uses to hand life on from one generation to another.

Perhaps you know how flowers reproduce themselves.

The tiny pollen grains, which come from the stamens, or male part of a flower, are carried by bee or other insect or blown by the wind, so that they fall into a fresh flower, where they unite with the female "eggs" which are in the seedbox. These tiny eggs or ovules are fertilized by the pollen and so grow into seeds. You know, of course, how the young plant grows from the fertile seed.

In fish also "father" and "mother" each take their share in creating new life. The female lays a mass of tiny eggs, thousands of them, into the water, or on

pool or river bottom. Then the male fish swims over and deposits his fertilizing "sperms" on to the eggs which, when the two elements are joined, become the living specks which develop into myriads of young fish. Most of the eggs, and even most of the fish, may be swallowed by eager hunters for food, but enough survive in spite of this wastage.

With birds, the still higher form of life, just the same principle works out, but this time with one important difference. The female bird has within her body minute soft eggs. Before one of these can begin to grow into a baby bird it has to be made fertile by a male cell or sperm. But as the soft egg is inside the mother bird the sperm has to be placed there too. So the father birds deposits his vital sperms into the mother's body where one of them unites with the tiny, soft egg. After that the fertilized egg grows; becomes surrounded with what you know as white and yolk and by the protecting, and often beautiful, shell. So the complete egg is "laid" and the tiny life inside grows, feeding on the nourishment stored round it and warmed by the tender brooding of the mother, until the little bird is strong enough to break its way out into the world—and is "born."

There is not the wastage of eggs with birds as with fish. The bird has but few, and so takes much greater

care to preserve them. Most fish do not trouble at all about their offspring, but with birds you see the beginning of that wonderful mother love which comes to perfection in our own homes. A hen gathers her chickens for safety under her wings; a sheep will be bold to face fox or other danger to defend her lambs; a human mother loves her boy like—well you know something about that yourself.

With mammals—you can look that up in the dictionary—there are still fewer births than with birds, and so God has planned that even more care shall be taken with the young lives. Mammals—which include most animals, and man—are “viviparous”. I guess that’s a new word too—and another’s coming. Birds are “oviparous”, their young develop out of the mother’s body, in an egg; mammals are viviparous, that is, the young develop in the body of the mother.

You already know that there are two sexes—“Male and female created He them,” says the Book of Genesis. With animals there are bull and cow; dog and bitch; stallion and mare; buck and doe rabbit. And so there are man and woman.

Before new life can begin, the sperm of the father has to fertilize the ovum, or “egg”, which is within the body of the mother, and then the new young life develops there until it is grown sufficiently to be born.

Young lambs, kittens, calves, foals, are able to fend for themselves very soon after birth, for they are fully formed when they appear in the world, though, of course, they depend for a time on their mother's suckling milk for nourishment.

A human mother carries her growing baby within the safety of her own body in just the same way, until it is big and sturdy enough to emerge into the world and begin its own separate life, although it is still very helpless at first. Is it any wonder that a mother is devoted to her child when for nine long months so much of her thought has been about the coming of this new life? Nor is it any wonder that chivalrous folk are specially courteous to "expectant mothers". By the way I think Isaiah 40, 11 is great stuff! Look it up.

Marvellous things, new babies. Ugly, tiny, squawking, not concerned about much else than mother's breast milk—but every hero of mankind started off like that once. So did you.

The mother, then, carries her baby in the protecting "nest" of her body, which is called the "womb", until that wonderful day of his birth. For him it is a time of unique beginning, for her it is sharp pain and agony lasting perhaps for hours, even maybe of great danger. The remembrance of that should teach every boy and man to honour and respect women and girls.

What about the father's part? Well, he has two nut-sized glands called "testicles"—you should know all these correct names—which are enclosed in the skin pouch called the "scrotum" which hangs between the thighs. In the testicles are made the sperms—they are in a whitish liquid called the "seminal fluid", or just "semen". This "semen" has to be discharged through the "penis", the male organ which passes waste water from the body. The "semen" is discharged from the "penis" into the passage in the female body behind that through which the urine is discharged. This passage also leads to the place where the ova (the plural of ovum) are stored. So here in the female body the new life begins through the union of sperm and ovum. When a man and woman come together in this way the man's "penis" stiffens so that it can be pressed right into the female passage.

So that was how once you were made, and perhaps after you were born, as you know, though you do not remember, your mother took you to church and offered you to God, and you received your name in baptism, or at a dedication service. That was a notable day of thanksgiving too.

3

What Happens to You

ROUND about the age of twelve or thirteen, as I have said earlier, you take a big step forward in development. Hair grows under the arms and around the testicles; the "private parts" get larger; the muscles grow. In short, you are really moving towards manhood. Semen is manufactured in the testicles, and these glands also pour important new substances into the blood, which affect your growth and character.

The centre of all this new activity is what is conveniently called the "private parts". So far you will have thought of these parts as being only the waste-products machinery of the body. Very wonderful their function is too. They pass off the solid and liquid debris, all that part of food and drink which is not required, and on their proper working, more than on any other organs, depends the health of the body—so always be thankful and careful for them.

By the way, do you know the correct names and

terms connected with these "excretory" (dictionary again) organs? You should, because they are so often needed. There is the "anus", or "back passage" through which "faeces" (pronounced *feeses*), "stools" or "motions" are passed from the storage chamber of the "rectum", when you "go to the lavatory" or "use the W.C.", or "have a movement of the bowels". Then, when you "make water" the "urine" passes out from the "bladder" through the "penis". That loose skin round the end of the penis is the "foreskin"—you remember that Jesus, like other Jewish boys, was circumcised? That was simply the cutting off of the foreskin of the tiny child, which made cleanliness easier in later life and was a religious custom too. Circumcision is also done for medical reasons.

That's all clear then. It is important that you should know how to talk about these things. So many boys never learn the correct names, so have to whisper shame-facedly with silly and ugly words. There's nothing secret about right words, though naturally the excretory organs, wonderful and essential as they are, need not form topics for ordinary conversation. And if they are called "private parts" and covered up by most civilized people, it is certainly not because there is anything shameful about them, but simply

because for all sorts of small reasons mankind has found it rather a good habit.

But we must move on. Well, now that you are reaching the 12-14 age of "puberty" the testicle glands begin to take a hand in your growth control, along with glands in the neck and elsewhere, so the private parts are linked up with other tasks than the scavenging work of the body. You have learned in the last chapter how the semen is manufactured, and the part that the penis plays as a channel through which it can be expelled. These fresh changes are Nature's preparation for possible future parenthood. Of course that is a very long way off, and you might never even become a father, but most men naturally do, and all the new feelings and impulses which come to you at this time are, so to speak, the first stirrings of the sexual machinery. It seems strange to you because you have not felt it before.

Another thing happens to you at this time. You may not have noticed it so much, but it is equally important. You begin to notice more the world around you, and to see how you are linked up with it.

As a youngster you were concerned only with yourself. It was usually: "I want this", "I like doing that", "I don't want to go". How your actions affected other people didn't much concern you. But now you

begin to feel more the need for understanding the world and how you fit into it, and for friendships with girls as well as boys. You want to think things out for yourself too. Most likely you will be thinking specially hard about religion and the things you have been taught to believe, for you feel now that it isn't good enough just for someone else to tell you things, you've got to thrash them out and be sure for yourself about truth.

That is all an exciting and wonderful part of your growing up. And you can be quite sure of this—no one was ever the worse for fearlessly seeking truth and right. You may get shocks now and again when you find you are not quite so certain about something which you had always taken for granted. But never shrink from absolute sincerity—God gave you a mind for thinking, as well as a heart for feeling and a body for use.

4

Things to Know

SOMETIMES the sex glands overwork and the semen overflows. This generally happens at night, during sleep. You may wake up to find the bedclothes wet, or your penis in the act of pumping out a milky fluid. This little occurrence—called an “emission”, or “wet dream”—need not trouble you if it occurs no more than once or twice in a fortnight. If it should happen more often, then you might consult your father, Sunday School teacher, or some other man you trust.

Emissions do happen, by the way, because of having too many clothes on the bed, or too much supper, or through sleeping on the back. How can you tell when you are sleeping on the back? That's easy—tie a handkerchief round your waist, with a lumpy knot behind, or better still tie a cotton reel round, with string, so that if you chance to roll from your side it will press into your back and wake you up.

To waste unnecessarily the seminal fluid is bad, for

it is not only connected with sex but with general growth and development—with your energy and vigour, all the desire for successful achievement, and the manly qualities which begin to show up in boys who grow straight and true.

But this important fluid from the sex glands can even be wasted intentionally, in a way which is known as “masturbation” or “self-abuse”. This is a foolish habit, though it is not uncommon among boys who have not learned better or who have not enough self-control or will power to cease from it.

Ever seen a horse out of control—a runaway? Not a nice sight; usually ends in a smash. Ever seen a man, all self-control gone? A still nastier spectacle. And it's no better in a boy.

I don't mean just sudden excitement or exuberance, like the hysterics girls were once supposed to suffer from—which reminds me of a couplet from a first-aid book:

*Hysterics are all bosh, or very nearly,
Pour water on the girl and speak severely.*

But lack of self-control in boys certainly isn't all bosh. A boy chances to discover that handling the private parts of his body causes a feeling of excitement—and possibly the sudden discharging of the testicle

fluid, from the enlarged and stiffened penis. So, though he knows or suspects how wasteful it is, and how such a habit can grow, he gives way to it, becoming unable to control either his actions or thoughts.

This does not cause disease, but it can lessen pluck, grit, and stamina. The strong man is the one well disciplined, and the body should be "the Temple of the Holy Spirit"—that's a pretty big thought of Paul. It can become so only if thoughts and actions are pure, and if the due share of precious fluid from the sex glands is not thrown out, but absorbed into the blood where it helps to build up power and vigour of mind and body.

Sometimes the habit of masturbation is formed quite unconsciously. But however it begins it can be cured.

Firm determination and common-sense can usually bring victory. If one has suffered the habit for a long time the system of auto-suggestion made famous by M. Coué may be successful. You practise it at bed time. Just before going to sleep you lie limp and relaxed and calmly say to yourself, without effort: "I am quite finished with that habit" or "I am quite free from it", or some simple affirmation like that. But you must be relaxed, and there must be no effort of

will about it—just a calm, happy statement of fact. And that statement, you will find, will really be fact.

So never handle the private parts, except for purposes of cleanliness. And do not have clothes which chafe them—like trousers drawn up tightly between the legs.

Lastly, before we leave this topic, let me remind you of how much prayer can do. Where human strength and effort fail to break an evil habit God Himself can give the longed-for power. That is not just a vague and pious statement, but a solemn and wonderful fact. The surest, the only, way to prove the worth of prayer is to try it for yourself.

But I expect you do.

There is something even more. If a temptation has overcome you again and again, and all your fine resolves have failed miserably, then share your trouble with a trusted friend or parent or minister and you will soon have freedom and happiness restored.

5

Looking Forward

YOU will see by now that there is nothing ugly or unclean about the sex organs and impulses. They are given by God for His high purposes. In animals they are wonderful enough, because for them they mean the begetting of young at appointed "mating" seasons, so that life is handed on.

You may meet, perhaps even already you have met, boys who talk in such sly and smutty fashion as to soil in thought and word things that should be honourable. Have nothing to do with such companions, unless your disapproval and better example can influence them for good.

These urgings towards creation express themselves in animals only through sex. In man they are much more splendid and powerful. Sex is just one side of the creative instinct, and it is important to remember this in connection with the strange new feelings that

have come to you in these years. All poetry, music, art, knowledge, fine handicraft, athletic achievement, are just other expressions of the same urge of creative feeling in man, or boy. If you rightly use your new powers and impulses in the ways already open to you they will lead you far.

For instance, ambitions and careers are looming pretty large with you, I expect. So they should. It's right for "teenage" folk to begin to get some idea of where they want to go in life, else how can they expect to get anywhere? The fellow who hasn't a goal never reaches one.

The right aim should not merely be making money. They're poor fish who only do that. Effectiveness and deep content come rather from full self-expression—having the job where you can let yourself go all out. Don't be unduly worried if you can't find that job right away, or if you can't even imagine what it will be. Some hit on a life career right away at the start, and all their creative impulses have full play, so that the sex energy side of it is almost forgotten until manhood and mating time are reached. Some don't, but feel around for a few years, trying this and that, until they discover their real niche. If you are interested enough to hunt me up in the fat, red *Who's Who* you'll see I went that way.

And while talking about careers, let me say that I believe you can achieve almost anything you want to—if only you want to hard enough. So don't look at others and bemoan that you haven't had their opportunities and advantages. Buckle to and make good your own shortcomings. The time to discipline yourself and slog away is—now. I like reading biographies of heroic achievement—Carey, Livingstone, Conrad, William Booth, Walter Scott, Palissey, Gandhi, Kagawa, Edison. They'll help you too. What's your ambition, and how are you shaping towards it? Do you welcome the tough spots in life, because they develop mind and soul and sinew? One of the earliest things I wrote for boys was a little poem called *The Things that are Hard*, and two lines went:

*For the things that are easy have little regard,
But always be glad for the things that are hard.*

I'm as sure as ever about that. So go ahead, and carve out your career—remembering that backbones achieve more than wishbones. Or, if you are still at school, then study handicraft, athletics—swimming, of course, above all, as you would expect me to say—those are the ways of using to the full the new powers within you. The physical gratification of the sexual

impulse—which is all that the mere animal knows—can be ignored until the proper time, when you have fully reached manhood. It is an interesting and important fact that the sex organs do not weaken or atrophy, as do muscles, through lack of use. You may forget them for ten or twenty years, and then they will be ready in perfect fitness, in the wonder of happy married love, to create new life.

The thought of that rich future should help you much in keeping pure through the coming years. When man and woman love each other so fully and understandingly that they long to spend their whole lives in helpful companionship, then they take the solemn sacrament of marriage together—as did your father and mother. And, in holy married love, they are able to fulfil that God-given impulse to join themselves together and bring a new young life into the world—as you were brought.

You already know how that happens. The two must lie so closely together that the male fluid can be passed by the stiffened penis into the passage from which the female cells can then be fertilized. Often in the Bible you come across phrases which tell of this wonderful union of two people: “And Adam knew Eve his wife and she conceived and bare Cain”; “And Jacob lay with her that night” “And Judah went in unto her.”

When two people, without love and marriage, come together like that it is a sin—called by the Bible “fornication”, or “adultery”.

God has given us these powers of creation so that they can be used and harnessed not only to bring children into happy homes, but to make richer and more vigorous all life. Your job is to preserve the sexual side of the creative instinct unharmed and pure for the day of its proper use. That is not easy, but it is a task worthy of clean, strong manliness.

You will certainly wish to avoid all temptations and excitements that are likely to make you abuse or waste those powers.

One aspect of things I have not yet dealt with—the very natural interest in the other sex, which before puberty you had never felt. It is easy to understand how, when the sex powers are awakened—and they develop in girls slightly earlier than in boys—the two sexes are instinctively attracted to each other. All those growing years towards manhood and womanhood are to allow self-control to be developed, and also to give opportunity for increasing knowledge and experience of each other, so that when real love at last comes and the great step of marriage is faced there shall be intelligent and wise choice. That sort of choice has little to do with just sexual attraction, or pretty

figure or face, but depends on a true mutual love of bigger and deeper and more lasting qualities.

So in these days it is natural that you should have girl friends. Treat them with the same straight courtesy and kindness as your boy friends. I guess I needn't say more.

Except, perhaps, that reckless flirting, hugging, petting, do not belong to a healthy, chivalrous boy. Too close physical contacts stir the sexual emotions improperly, even dangerously. Not only are they likely to harm the boy, in the ways already discussed in the last chapter, but they unfairly excite the girl, similarly, and so show lack of good feeling and consideration for her.

Be a friend, but don't play with sex—that spoils everything.

6

Finally

I NEED only give you a few more health hints and some scraps of general advice.

In these teen-age days your health and fitness will depend increasingly on your own good habits and common sense.

Drink plenty of water, though not at meal times. A tumbler on rising in the morning, and others between meals during the day. Eat fresh fruit, salads, vegetables, and wholemeal or brown bread in preference to white. Go to the lavatory regularly every day at the same time—just after or before breakfast. Don't let anything alter this habit. Constipation is a most pernicious thing. With proper diet "opening medicine" ought never to be necessary.

Do deep breathing each day; sleep with the window open all the year round, and don't have more bedclothes than you really need. Empty the bladder,

“urinate” is another word for it, before getting into bed.

Take plenty of exercise in the fresh air. Try and excel in some sport. Have a hobby.

Keep the body clean. A cold or tepid bath or sponge-down each morning is excellent, followed by a vigorous towelling. Keep the private parts clean. A cold sponging of them is a good remedy against frequent stiffening of the penis or emissions. When taking a bath always draw the foreskin, or “prepuce”, back so that you can cleanse beneath it, unless it has been removed by circumcision. But never handle the sex organs more than you need.

Girls who have reached puberty have a sort of flush-out discharge once a month, which cleanses their bodies of waste products. These are called their “periods”, and often for three or four days a girl may feel quite unwell. Of course you will not speak of the periods, but it is good to understand what happens, because if a girl makes unexpected excuses from a picnic or game or swimming party you will understand, and not think her unreasonable, or press her to come when clearly she does not want to.

Avoid impure thoughts. So many evil influences are waiting to encourage them—smutty talk, suggestive pictures and stories, sensational accounts of divorce

cases in the newspapers, and so on. When such impure thoughts invade the mind turn them out at once—by a change of occupation, by switching on to other ideas, by repeating a verse of scripture or of a hymn, by a quick prayer. When, in motoring, I find myself faced with sudden emergency I always murmur, “Oh God, help me”—and in many years’ driving I’ve never had an accident. Such urgent prayer will help you too.

But don’t think you can compromise with evil—that you will look at improper pictures, but only a little; that you will listen to impure talk, but not take part in it. You remember the old yarn of the camel who asked permission to put just his nose inside the traveller’s tent—and soon the neck was in, then the humps, and then the whole camel, and the traveller found himself crowded out. Sin is like that. Sex thoughts themselves are natural enough; do not be troubled by them. And temptation is not sin. But I needn’t labour all that, you can tell right from wrong in these matters now.

Finally, remember that sex is only one part of life, only indeed one part of your growing up. All these new powers within you are implanted by God that you may build yourself into full and splendid manhood. Properly controlled they will bring you to health, happiness and vigorous life. And with your

full life dedicated into His keeping your years will be a glorious adventure. So cheerio! May you, like the Master Himself, grow in wisdom and stature and in favour with God and man.

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