

The nature of man : the problem of homosexuality

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The Nature of Man

The Problem of Homosexuality

Since the dawn of history man has been at war with nature and his environment. Nor has the struggle been confined to these limits. For man is part of nature and the spirit of man is in enmity with his nature. One aspect of this conflict is seen in the relationship between the sexes, and indeed in the matter of sex itself. Nor is this surprising. For nature in her wisdom has ordained that the same organs with which she has endowed humanity should serve the lowest and the highest purpose: the natural bodily functions and those of a biological nature and purpose.

Now experience has taught man that it is impossible in practice to dissociate the natural bodily functions from the biological; just as it is equally difficult to divorce the purely animal instincts and the satisfaction associated with them, from the ethical aspirations which they engender. This has led man in his endeavour to rise above his nature, to clothe sex with a spiritual cloak, and at the same time to relegate the whole matter to the compass of conjugal relationship. Within this sphere, it has served to meet the needs of family life: the protection of the female sex and the offspring. With this end in view, society has in addition framed the law and contrived by every means within its power to convince that this solution is the best and happiest for all concerned. The result has been that until recent times there has been no study of this, one of the most important subjects in the whole range of medical science. For of all the forces in nature, the sexual instinct is the most vital: it pervades the whole being and conditions life in every aspect from the moment of birth to death. It is both master and servant: it conditions the mental and emotional qualities and predilections: it determines the whole range of human relationship. Moreover, it serves to express and fulfil the innermost urge of nature: to express the personality, and in so doing to unlock the secret desire by the reproduction of the species.

The further important result of this attitude of society towards sex has been to build up a wall of prejudice and ignorance to the detriment of impartial investigation; and to cast a shadow of reproof on all those who question the wisdom of treating sex as a matter for study and discussion. During the last half century, however, the medical profession has become increasingly aware that the health of the individual and that of the nation is intimately bound up with the subject; and this has led to the acknowledgment that the two sexes are much more closely allied than was supposed hitherto; further that no rigid line can be drawn between the two; finally that each human being born into the world is dissimilar in composition and that over the whole population there is an imperceptible gradation from wholly heterosexual to wholly homosexual and that this applies equally to both sexes. Such an acknowledgment naturally brings into question the marriage laws and grounds for divorce. It also raises disturbing ethical questions in relation to the law which has hitherto treated all those who deviate from the rigid code of hetero-

sexual conduct as deserving of the direst penalty. Moreover society and the law, in order to maintain and uphold a narrow morality, has sought to harness to their cause the argument that any deviation is a perversion for which the individual and not nature is responsible. Nothing is further from the truth. Indeed, however disturbing this fact may be, it is now indisputably and freely acknowledged in all responsible circles that the complete heterosexual is by no means the norm; on the contrary the intersexual or bisexual is as common and normal. Nor must perversions proper be associated with this condition, for they are an extension of this condition and should be classified in the category of paraphilias.

To state these facts is not to attribute a cause. Nor does their acknowledgment necessarily involve a denial of the principles on which society has hitherto been founded—but rather they require that the law on which they rely for their support should be re-examined and amended in order that those principles may be more firmly established rather than denied authority by unreasonable application.

Now, before any diagnosis of this position is possible, it is desirable to set out certain salient features which may be some guide to the cause of the condition of deviation from the heterosexual. First and foremost the gradation from the heterosexual to the wholly homosexual as a condition has been common to all races and both sexes in varying degree in all ages. Nor is it confined to class, condition or caste. Secondly, quite erroneously, decadence has been associated with it. Nothing is further from the truth historically. The fact that the Jewish race has regarded the condition with such abhorrence is also due to historical reasons, and the desire to propagate the species as freely as possible. Thirdly, the idea that the condition is in any way damaging to the individual or nation is entirely fallacious, since nature is as a rule the best guide and judge of what is the more suitable material for the propagation of the species. Moreover, opinion and custom as to ethics of the deviation have varied from civilisation to civilisation down the ages and vary at present from country to country.

If these propositions are conceded—and any objective study of the question is bound to acknowledge their validity—we are now free to consider the cause. In spite of serious study over the last quarter of a century, there is no agreed diagnosis. Several theories have been advanced, notably those which have been biassed by the desire to reconcile the interests of society in upholding a harsh law with the facts as they are now known. This has led to the denial in some quarters that the condition is inborn or due to any physical abnormality; but rather due to environmental conditions together with development anomalies. It is well to consider these briefly.

First it is maintained that sexual abnormalities are due to the aberration of instinct. Secondly that the condition is influenced by a reversion to previous evolutionary type; or again to genetic factors. Thirdly that it may be due to development anomalies: that ontogeny repeats phylogeny, to «fixations» and «regression». Lastly, it is attributed to environmental factors. Now what emerges from the study of these several possible causes is first and foremost that no one cause can be the prime factor.

Indeed sex is the expression of the whole personality. This has infinite variation in nature. Moreover, nature is prolific, wasteful and uneven in all her purposes. Her idiosyncrasies are notorious and universal. Furthermore the composition of man (and woman) is complex in the highest degree, the physical, mental and emotional blending in infinite variety. Thus the stimulus of attraction has no fixed laws: for the heterosexual, one characteristic may appeal, another repel: the strength of the urge, the mode of expression and the object (young, middle age, or old) are equally varied. Hence the wide range in the variety of taste from heterosexual to homosexual. While no one can deny these facts, yet there are some who would attribute these basic «conditions» to environmental and development anomalies. That these factors do in certain circumstances accentuate the condition is more than probable. But they are not the cause. It is the denial of these facts, however, which has allowed of a diagnosis which fits all too well the interests of society. Thus great damage has been done to the cause of truth and of happiness. For if it is conceded that environmental and development anomalies have the effect of merely accentuating the condition, it must in fairness be admitted that the prime cause is in the personality of the subject; and by this is meant the physical, mental and emotional composition of the individual.

If this is so, it follows that the position must be accepted and cannot be altered however unfortunate this may be. It is inborn in the widest sense and though it may be temporarily modified it cannot be changed except by surgery. Each individual born into the world has his or her own personality, qualities and defects and predilections, and in an infinite variety and in accordance with the strength or weakness and direction of the sex urge or instinct—which itself is determined by a large number of factors which go to determine the personality.

How, then, should society deal with the matter? We have seen that in the interest of the state and society as a whole family life should be protected on biological and ethical grounds. It remains to consider how far the state in upholding this principle can relax the law which supports it—in the interest of justice, without weakening the principle involved.

First, it would seem desirable to acknowledge frankly that deviation from the heterosexual ideal is neither a crime, nor an abnormality, but rather a misfortune, for which the individual is not responsible. Secondly that it is desirable to mitigate this unfortunate condition so far as this is possible by removing the penalties—where this can be done without infringing the principle of the protection of family life. Thirdly the discouragement of those environmental conditions which are likely to accentuate the deviation from heterosexual conduct. To effect these purposes it will be necessary to amend the law drastically to conform with the principles of the Code Napoléon which has operated so successfully on the Continent, viz. that the law should not punish save (1) where one of the parties is under age or unable to give consent, (2) where there is violence or absence of consent, (3) or where there is «outrage public à la pudeur». Indeed these principles are largely applicable to English law in so far as heterosexual conduct is concerned, and it is only in

respect of homosexual conduct that the law deviates so markedly. If the law is amended as suggested, it will result in ridding society of the great evil of blackmail in this respect; of reducing the number of invert by making it easier for the borderline case to adjust him or herself to society—for few, if any deliberately desire to behave «anti-socially». In addition it would empty the prisons and increase the happiness of a not inconsiderable number of individuals who, apart from this condition, are valuable members of society. Finally it would remove from the law the stigma of injustice and hypocrisy; for a law which is largely unenforceable and at variance with public and informed opinion is thereby brought into contempt and those who administer it into disrepute. A. L.

Poems

*Love there was for a while;
though love ceases to be now,
still the need is there.*

*We played with creation
and she turned into destruction.*

*Each delved deeply into the other's loneliness,
and we become one in flesh and spirit.*

*Our union destroyed the beckon
which brought us together — —
That we were apart, alone.*

*Is this our peculiar fate
that love should soon perish?
Then this is our peculiar privilege
that love will enter again.*

Has anyone ever experienced any human feeling
more exciting to the feelers of the skin,
more thrilling to the probers of the soul,
more rending to the sensitivities of the mind
than the transitoriness of a hesitant touch of another's hand?

Be this hand that of one yet untouched,
(but one who is straining to touch, even as you are)

A moment of new life and exalted love
is wrenched from an hour of human loneliness;
And for this moment these beings writhe in ecstasy.

Oh . . . if life were only for a moment,
and eternity the everlastingness of this moment.

Lowelle Simms.