

An important new book

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AN IMPORTANT NEW BOOK

Society and the Homosexual, by Gordon Westwood (Gollancz, London; 9/6), fulfills in many respects the author's intention «. . . to evaluate the social implications of homosexuality.» Discussing, as it does, so many aspects of this broad subject (the extent of homosexuality, its causes, treatments and cures, the effectiveness of the law, the attitude of society, the levels of homosexual society, the mind of the homosexual), the work cannot pretend to be exhaustive nor can its author escape the charge of propagating questionable personal opinions and unsubstantiated observations. Exception might be taken to his considering homosexuality a disease, for which a cure must be sought, nor does he seem to be aware that sincere, lasting friendship and love between members of the same sex can and do exist. However, the book is valuable because of its subject matter, its convincing arguments and its constructive suggestions in the cause of public enlightenment; and it can rightfully be recommended to what should be a wide reading public. The author, in conclusion, summarizes the eight sections of his book as follows:

I. The problem of homosexuality is largely ignored by the general public. When the subject is unavoidable, ignorance and invective make it almost impossible to discuss the subject without emotion. The incidence of homosexuality is far greater than has been recognized hitherto. Nearly all men have a homosexual component in their emotional make-up. There is no sharp dividing line between a homosexual and a heterosexual. Instead there is a kind of sexual balance and a man may be at any point between the two extremes of heterosexuality and homosexuality.

II. The chief cause of the development of homosexual tendencies is maladjustment during early childhood. A man who develops only weak tendencies may pass through a homosexual phase and then adjust himself to normal sexual outlets without difficulty. A man with strong homosexual tendencies is almost sure to experience overt sexual relations at some period of his life. Seduction can be the turning-point in the sexual history of a man, but its influence has been overemphasized. Most men will succumb to homosexual practices if the circumstances are sufficiently unusual — such as an all-male environment.

III. The only antidote known at present is lengthy psychiatric treatment. The chances of complete cure depend upon the strength of the tendency and are strictly limited, but most homosexuals benefit from a course of psychotherapy. As the tendencies are developed in early childhood, they are for the most part beyond the conscious control of the individual and so will-power and self-suggestion are of little help in bringing about a cure, and by themselves are worse than useless.

IV. Throughout history the law in (England) has attempted to stamp out homosexuality by vicious persecution. Even the death penalty failed to put a stop to these activities, while the effect of prison sentences was found to aggravate the disease rather than cure it. All the laws

dealing with this offence were made over seventy years ago, long before the discovery of modern psychological medicine.

V. The attitude of other communities towards homosexuality has varied throughout history, but the British attitude has always been one of ridicule and disgust. These activities are still considered to be a deliberate perversion, and anyone who is found to have had homosexual experience is ostracized by the community. The reasons for this attitude are: (1) Ignorance of the real causes of its development and a failure to recognize that it is a disorder of the mind. (2) A guilt complex caused by the projection of the suppressed homosexual component that exists in most men.

VI. The man who attempts to adjust himself to his abnormality must enter one of the levels of homosexual society. Since the homosexual finds that an important part of the moral code is unworkable as far as he is concerned, he tends to question and reject other parts of the moral and ethical codes. Consequently most levels of homosexual society are sordid, if not frankly anti-social. (In this section the author describes at length, besides the lowest level of prostitutes and perverts, four others: (a) the street corners, (b) the queer bars, (c) the exclusive clubs, and (d) that containing probably the greatest number — the outsiders.) But the majority of men with homosexual tendencies do not adjust themselves to their abnormality and often attempt to conform with the existing moral code by abstaining from all sexual outlets. The results are often tragic because the sexual drives will not lie dormant for ever, and after years of control a sudden outbreak can lead to disgrace and imprisonment.

VII. Sexual abstinence does not provide a solution for most homosexuals. Many of those who suppress these powerful impulses are liable to develop some kind of psychological difficulty. The pathological reactions indicate the lines of the mental disorder that may follow conscious frustration. An understanding of the true nature of his impulses will help the individual to control and modify them. This self-knowledge sometimes results in the better development of the man's personality.

VIII. In the last section it was suggested that the development of homosexual tendencies could be prevented by a better understanding of their cause and that more information and training should be provided for all those people who are entrusted with the care of children. Various changes in the law and in the social attitude to homosexuality were also suggested.

Clearly it is a big problem affecting many people. These people cannot be blamed for their condition and a cure cannot be guaranteed. The existing law is ineffective in dealing with the problem and the present attitude of society is not only unenlightened, it is also indirectly responsible for producing anti-social inclinations in the confirmed homosexual and difficult maladjustments in the abstainer. . . . The best medical and legal brains who have studied this problem do not need to be convinced by any of the arguments used in this book. But they cannot move towards a solution until they have the backing of a more enlightened public . . . It is hoped that some progress will soon be made to relieve

the suffering of these thousands of people even if we can only make haste slowly. In all humility it is suggested that certain things can and should be done at once.

(1) We should recognize that more research into the problem of homosexuality is urgently required.

(2) Parents, teachers, etc., should be made to see that the problem exists and can be prevented, by recognizing the dangers and modifying the upbringing of children.

(3) We might ask ourselves if the law as it stands today is either just or achieving its purpose.

(4) We might question whether the social stigma attached to homosexuality does not actually do more harm than good.

(5) We should recognize that we will not even start to find a solution until we sweep away the prudish silence and superstitious prejudices that surround the subject. The problem of homosexuality must be brought out into the open where it can be discussed and reconsidered. That is the object of this book.

Oh! Death Will Find Me

Oh! Death will find me. long before I tire
Of watching you; and swing me suddenly
Into the shade and loneliness and mire
Of the last land! There, waiting patiently,
One day, I think, I'll feel a cool wind blowing,
See a slow light across the Stygian tide,
And hear the Dead about me stir, unknowing,
And tremble. And I shall know that you have died.
And watch you, a broad-browed and smiling dream,
Pass, light as ever, through the lightless host,
Quietly ponder, start, and sway, and gleam —
Most individual and bewildering ghost! —
And turn, and toss your brown delightful head
Amusedly, among the ancient Dead.

Rupert Brooke 1887—1915