

CHAPTER X
THE RHYTHM OF SEX

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DEAR MRS SANGER

Your book entitled *Woman and the New Race* arrived yesterday and I have read it thru twice. You are truly doing a wonderful work for womankind. I am a victim of prudish parents. I was told nothing whatever of the facts of life. I did not even know where babies came from until I was a junior in high school. I was never a type to attract other children and I got no information thru this source. My father died before I finished high school and my mother worked in a factory. I worked outside school hours. I was ambitious to go thru college so when my mother married a second time and went to California I went to a neighboring town and worked for my board and room while going to college on a loan scholarship. I married a year before I finished college not even knowing that I would be required to have physical unions with my husband. He was as patient as could be at first. Finally an aunt who has had six babies in nine years told me what it would mean if I allowed my husband to have unions with me. So I have refused. We have lived together almost two years. I am growing more nervous and irritable all the time and have lost my appetite and fallen in weight. I am teaching. I must pay back the enormous debt I owe for my education before I think of raising a family. My husband wants to start in business for himself. He can't so long as my school debt has to be paid. We have no home. I refuse to be made an incubator as my poor aunt has been. Her health is almost ruined and her children do not receive proper care. My husband is growing more and more dissatisfied. He says he will leave if I do not allow him to have unions. I love him dearly and would be

heartbroken if he should but I will not subject myself to forced motherhood I will not have children until I am ready for them even if it means losing the man I love Mrs Sanger is there any way out? Can you give me the information which your book has made me see more clearly than ever that I have a right to ask for? And can you help me to help my poor aunt who is expecting another child? I will do everything in my power to help you forward this cause I am a college woman and a school teacher and if I can help you in any way please call upon me to do so

Sincerely

Mrs H R T

CHAPTER X

THE RHYTHM OF SEX

The permanence or periodicity of the sexual life must certainly affect the relations between the sexes

The type of periodicity based on natural law or man made habit—the former more conducive to permanence

—*Westermarck*

MANY people have been taught to look upon sexual intercourse merely as a physiological function. They consider love an appetite to be controlled yet to be regularly satisfied.

Attempts to regulate and systematize the time and place of sex union in marriage have usually not been productive of happiness because what should be a source of ecstasy becomes a mere matter of habit with duty instead of desire dictating the time and place.

Nevertheless the problem of mutual adjustment of desire must be met and solved. The successful solution of this problem depends as all others upon the proper and careful initia-

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tion with adequate attention paid to every step toward the conquest of marital happiness

In the first place it is impossible to set hard and fast rules to be observed by every married couple. The age, the mental and physical constitution, the degree of stimulation, and many other factors must be considered. Sages and lawmakers from the dawn of humanity have insisted on the necessity of proper intervals between the acts of sexual communion. Mahomet prescribed eight days, Zoroaster nine days, both Solon and Socrates ten days. Moses forbade intercourse during the menstrual period and for a week following the cessation of the flow. In more modern times Martin Luther, whose influence on the institution of modern marriage has been enormous, prescribed intercourse twice a week.

Customs of today are more or less a blend of the wisdom of past ages. It is generally conceded that over-indulgence and too rapid repetition of the act is harmful to both husband and wife.

Many men mistakenly believe that their virility is determined by the frequency in which they are able to indulge. Some of them even boast surreptitiously of this power.

Such a power misused and abused weakens the ability of sexual communion. There are three uses or purposes for sexual intercourse—physical relief, procreation and communion. The first two have little to do with the art of love. Power, says Balzac in his *Physiology of Love*, does not consist in striking hard and often, but of striking properly.

Authorities are agreed that conservation of sexual powers *before* maturity and in the twenties preserves this energy and enables men to continue virile for a much longer period of years than when it is dissipated by excess through inability to control the appetite.

If the husband concerns himself with the quality of his performance instead of congratulating himself upon his vigor, which may and in the majority of cases does leave the wife quite unsatisfied, he will soon find his own power and the consequent habit of paying greater dividends in health and joy and in the increasing love for and of his mate.

Sexual experience can no longer be gauged by the number of affairs a man has had either within or outside the bonds of matrimony. The man who is notoriously promiscuous is most often he who is unable to awaken

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the deeper love of any one woman. If the woman's side of the story might be heard we should undoubtedly hear a tale of selfishness of disappointment of this Don Juan's inability to understand anything but his own gluttonous appetite.

On the other hand the intelligent monogamous husband with a wife whose love constantly deepens with the passing of the years whose peaceful and poised countenance speaks louder than words the inner secret of sexual harmony and happiness—this is the man who is the master of love and the real leader of humanity toward the future.

This problem of happiness in marriage can not be satisfactorily solved except in blending the menstrual rhythm or periodicity in women with the other urges. Like the tides there is an ebb and flow of sexual desire in normal women and in some men. According to the cyclical theory of menstruation the sexual desire in women consists of a series of wave like periods determined by the monthly cycle. The menstrual cycle is complete in the normal woman every twenty eight days the period of menstruation taking up at least five of these.

Authorities and investigators are not in complete agreement upon the point when desire rises to its highest point. This undoubtedly varies in different women according to age, climate and general environment. If fatigued, distressed or maladjusted and unhappy in her marriage relations, the full natural wave like rhythm of desire is inhibited and often distorted.

Just what the period of desire might be could be found if our lives were not so stimulated and nerve straining. The desire curve has no doubt been flattened out by excesses or sexual demands made upon the woman by ignorant but well meaning husbands. Seldom does the married woman have the full control of her sex life or having this she is influenced by false suppositions concerning her husband's sexual needs, as well as by the custom of the ages of wives submit yourselves unto your husbands.

Intelligent husbands should make a thoughtful study of the inner nature of their wives and seek to carry to consummation their own amorous desires on the rising movement of this wave instead of with its fall. If they do this they may find themselves buoyed onward with the

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great sweep of a natural and possible cosmic rhythm instead of fighting against a falling movement when they find themselves in the position of a swimmer struggling against the tide. Such an intelligent study of the monthly cycle which both intelligent mates should study and if possible keep a record of would be an invaluable aid in the conquest of marital harmony and the banishment of sexual discord which lies at the root of most unhappy marriages.

If the period of desire in women rises to a monthly acme husband and wife might make of this period a renewed honeymoon of physical and spiritual communion. This I believe everyone must agree is infinitely preferable to making the act a routine function indulged in as a duty and a habit.

To follow the counsel advised is conducive to making it a renewal a discovery a conquest of power. It also makes possible a long period of sexual relaxation a season of sleeping and renewing powers. Monotonous regularity is fatal to a romantic spiritual union.

To study the more profound rhythm of life to woo and win the woman anew each time is

to preserve to perpetuate the relationship and the romance

It is also from the point of view of the wife the surest way to hold the interest of the husband and to intensify it

Some have claimed that this hypothesis of the wave of rhythm in woman's sexual life has brought forth many premature conclusions and theories. In answer to this criticism the immediate and obvious reply is that from every point of view thoughtfulness of the wife's cycles as well as of the longings of the husband makes married life more interesting more stimulating more poetic and infinitely more mysterious. It appeals to the intelligence as well as to the emotions.

To the objection that this theory and practice is merely substituting one habit of regularity for another the answer would be that too little is yet known about the ebb and flow of woman's emotional life ever to suppose that the wave crest would be attained on a regular day each month. It would change perhaps from month to month while the rhythm might be always at the foundation of this eternal and natural movement.

Marital relations based on this mating sea-

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son will I am quite certain do much toward the solution of many of the thorniest problems today, notably that of the so-called 'frigidity' among women

Undoubtedly many women today have lost consciousness of this monthly ebb and flow. It atrophies with woman's removal from the natural mode of life that prevails among savages and primitive tribes. Conditions of modern life particularly of social life in cities with increased nervous excitement, false stimulation and a hectic enslavement of hurry and speed is most likely to supersede and replace the tug and pull, the ebb and flow of the great profound rhythms of life and nature.

Often a discord that results in neurasthenia, nervous collapse and general organic disorder is the result of the conflict between the primitive cycle or rhythm and the regularity accepted by custom.

To the objection that the habit of a monthly courtship and honeymoon between husband and wife would be to impose sexual restraint for too long a period on the man, the answer is this: most normal men, freed of that convention or self-deception which makes them hypocritically assume the position that they are

always at the acme of sexual power so would welcome this period of relaxation and passivity and would resume the courtship with more fiery ardor if their aggressive advances were received or rejected on primitive or biological impulses rather than on legal or biblical codes

The menstrual ebb and flow exists in the woman of all races. It is curiously coincident with the moon cycle. Relatively men live on a plane. In contrast the physiological and emotional life of women tends to follow a wave like rhythm. Always a woman is on the gradual upward or downward curve.

The highest peak of desire which varies in intensity and time in the individual is of the very utmost importance in the sex life of the woman. Every husband must bear it in mind and take advantage of his study of the woman whose happiness it should be his chief aim to realize. No hard and fast rule can be set down for the monthly rhythm as like the breaking waves on the shore there is undoubtedly an infinite variety and change. With some women the wave motion may be more choppy a thing of great rise and fall while with others, it may be a slower less accentuated motion.

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The rise and fall of sexual desire is determined in the majority of cases by this wave-like rhythm. Havelock Ellis tells us in *Man and Woman* that in most healthy women the sexual emotions are strongest or at the maximum *before* the menstrual period and at the lesser maximum after the period. It is more difficult to prove that mental vigor is also greatest at the same periods but Ellis thinks this is extremely probable.

After the crest of the wave of vital activity is reached or a day or two afterwards the menstrual flow begins. This period is easily observable. It is the day or two preceding the menstrual period that women are mostly given, if they are at all predisposed to sudden caprices fits of anger nervousness depressed and sad moods impulses of jealousy. On the emotional side of their natures there is more or less diminished self control they are more easily impressed. Menstruation and its difficulties permeate the whole being of a woman. It is especially necessary therefore that the husband understand this deep natural mystery and not aggravate her indisposition.

This periodic discharge from the uterus, known as the menstrual flow is a perfectly

natural function of the body, and should not be regarded as an illness

The husband should learn to respond to this cycle to take advantage of her exact condition in this moon monthly rhythm instead of beginning his lovemaking at the wrong period He must in short fall into step with her movement instead of combating and disturbing it This latter behavior can only produce conflict and discord

Among all intelligent couples it is possible and it is highly advisable that the wife indicate her own desire in this matter if she has learned to become conscious of the wave like ebb and flow of her own emotions

According to the diagram in Ellis Man and Woman there would be two intervals for communion during the moon month of twenty-eight days at the wave crest before the menstrual flow and after it an interval of about eleven days Following this there would be a respite or sexual relaxation of about two weeks or sixteen days

At these periods mutual desire would set the number of times for cohabitation There would need to be no restraint exercised except that imposed by lack of desire

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Thus in women in whom the monthly cycle is more pronounced this periodicity would be more or less evident. In those in whom it is scarcely noticeable this hypothesis might develop and strengthen this tendency.

Sex love instead of becoming a habit for physical relief would be allowed to take on more of the thrill and excitement of dramatic activity. No longer would it be a matter of mere routine but should partake of the great tidal rhythm of nature. No longer would it be determined by the appetite of one participant alone but would be enhanced and made doubly adventurous by the ceaseless search for higher and more thrilling ecstasy.