

133. The French Pessaire Preventif

Mrs B. Smyth had a shop in Melbourne that sold women's lingerie and a variety of contraceptives. She wrote pamphlets of birth control, marriage and motherhood. The

following extract is from a survey on available contraceptive devices she gave to a group of women in the South Melbourne Town Hall in 1890. Mrs Smyth favoured the diaphragm, a method that she emphasized was in the control of the woman and could be used without the husband's knowledge or consent.

12th Check — The Preventif Pessaire or Contraceptive Check. — *The best, safest, and most sure Check.* It has never been known to fail where instructions have been carried out.

The French Pessaire Preventif.

In offering this instrument to the public, a few remarks in explanation may be appropriate. There seems to be a lack of confidence in the Pessaires heretofore used, owing to the fact that they have been constructed without bearing any relation whatever to the parts with which they were to be brought into contact, consequently more injury than benefit has been caused by their use.

The French Pessaire Preventif is constructed on a common sense principle, and strictly in accordance with the anatomy of the female organisation. It is light in weight, being made of pure soft rubber, prepared expressly for the purpose; it is without stem, straps, or other cumbersome appliances; does not interfere with micturition or coition, can be easily adjusted, is not injurious in any way, and with proper care will last for years.

It affords a convenient and prompt means of cure to those afflicted with prolapsus (falling of the womb), leucorrhoea (whites), and in the ready cure of the ulceration of the mouth and neck of the womb, so commonly the living torment of delicate women. In treatment of the cancer of the womb, it is a most admirable instrument. The ordinary treatment of female diseases by injections is uncertain, slow, tedious, disgusting and expensive.

In the use of local medication by means of the Pessaire Preventif, the cure is directly applied to the seat of the disease, and can be retained any length of time with ease, comfort, and success. By this valuable agent, old chronic female afflictions, seldom curable by former kinds of treatment, now yield readily. Many a poor woman who was completely broken down in the prime of life, a burden to herself, and worse than an utter blight to the marriage bed, is now restored to the enjoyment of domestic and social life.

The French Pessaire Preventif is of inestimable value to delicate females, to those in poor health, and to those who, by disease or distortion of the pelvis, cannot with safety bear children, as it is a perfect, convenient, and safe protection against conception and pregnancy, and the only article of the kind that can be used without the knowledge of the husband.

Injudicious and rapid child-bearing is the saddest affliction of the young women of America. It is destructive to the health of both the parent and the child. How often is the familiar spectacle witnessed of a young and beautiful girl, single today, married tomorrow, and next year a mother and an invalid. This instrument prevents the crime of abortion.

This being the fact, we can best serve humanity and Christianity by preventing the bearing of children, in such case as named above, which every woman may do, and should under circumstances that make it a crime to bear them.

The necessity of so doing reason teaches and conscience approves, since it would prevent much evil, crime, and suffering, in that it would prevent murder, annually, of tens of thousands of infants, save health and often life. This, together with the fact that it can be done without injury to the health, or violation of moral or physical law, makes it not only right but a religious duty.

teachers, and many others have also urged the necessity for legislation; while a similar request has been made by many members of the legislature and by the press.

The Bill will not in any way interfere with the right of a person to purchase the articles if he so desires, nor will it prohibit or restrict the publication or sale of medical or scientific books dealing with the subject of birth control. It will, however, prohibit the printing, publication, or distribution of any advertisements for contraceptives, their public display, whether in shop windows or elsewhere, or their hawking from door to door. The result expected is that a knowledge of their existence will be kept from children of tender years, and men and women will not have these things flaunted before them. If a person wants to purchase them, he can do so, but he must ask for them and they must not be thrust upon him.

H. Pye, speech to the Victorian Legislative Council, 23 October 1935.