

OF DIRTY STORIES

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Once upon a time the dirty story had its proper place and stayed there.

Foul-mouthed sailors stepped back on land from their galleys and crude sailing craft. Their legs were stiff from long months at sea. Their minds were dull with the monotony of a voyage of uncounted days. And with their pay recklessly displayed in their dirty fists, they scampered along the waterfront for the dives that were their immediate objectives.

And the dives and the human vermin that infested them welcomed the returned travellers gladly. There they settled down in a gloom that was part bad lighting, part the effluvium of bad breaths, part the stench of unwashed bodies and unwholesome liquor, part that dark, heavy atmosphere in which vice hides and most easily spawns.

From the Depths.

Whether the port was Carthage at its prime or a town of Phoenicia, when the Phoenician triremes swept the known seas from Africa up to Britain, or any of the hundred little sea-coast towns of the Isles of Greece, or Ostia, near Rome, the sailors knew that no law held them and no convention or commandment was theirs to obey.

So, among the lowest denizens of the waterfront, the dock rats of the day, these sailors, filled with bad liquor and unrestrained after the cramped confinement of their days at sea, told their stories. Into willing ears they poured their unwholesome amours. They bragged of the women they had seduced and betrayed. They told tall tales of courtesans of other lands. And willingly, too, they listened while other travellers from other ships retailed their crude adventurings, the vulgarities and obscenities that filled their unwholesome minds.

And as they talked, and as the drink loosened their tongues, and the proximity of vice-sodden people urged them on, talk grew loud, tongues grew looser and looser, and laughter, coarse and vulgar and boisterous and obscene, awoke in swelling chorus as dirty story piled on dirty story, born of dirty minds in dirty surroundings for the pleasuring of dirty ears.

A Filthy Trail.

No one will ever be able to track down the thousands of dirty stories born in surroundings such as these, or in the taverns infested by the scum of ancient Egypt; stories told by soldiers, for example, just back from brutal wars, in which anything went, provided only it defeated and crushed an enemy, sacked his cities, corrupted and destroyed his women, held him ruined in body, poisoned in soul, the slave of conquering Egypt.

Of course, the slave quarters of each succeeding pagan nation added its quota of dirty tales. In Babylon and Assyria and Persia and Medea, the meanest of slaves, deprived of all liberty to go and do as they pleased, shut off from honourable marriage or the company of decent people, found one liberty permitted them, one licence of which no one could deprive them. They could exercise full liberty for their rotten minds, full licence for their filthy tongues. If they could revenge themselves no other way upon their masters and mistresses, they could at least befoul them with their tongues, telling wild tales of their misdeeds, magnifying their vices into ludicrous adventures, besmirching to the extent of their power the men they hated and the women they despised.

The walls of slave quarters, dug up by modern excavating parties sent out to explore ancient cities, are covered with the obscene scratchings of slaves whose dirty minds and evil imaginings were preserved for later ages to see and blush over. There are walls in Pompeii and Herculaneum not shown to the ordinary tourist. The bespatterings of evil-minded slaves have placed them outside the range of the decent-minded traveller.

For the Corrupt.

The dirty story was, as one might be led to expect, immensely popular with certain types of pagans. While pagan men,

in the wholesome ages of each nation as it forged ahead to brief greatness, carefully guarded their decent women, the mothers and wives and daughters of their homes, from contact with the dirty story and obscene tale, the taverns roared their ready response to them. Corrupt Julius Caesar, perhaps with historic correctness, is pictured standing before his troops and regaling them with filthy stories to take their minds off the battle ahead.

Then, when the nations became corrupt, the dirty stories left the taverns and invaded places once regarded as the resorts of the decent. Smart young writers put them into novels and they invaded the libraries. The ancient Roman novels, many of them happily destroyed as the Christian mind revolted against their filth and obscenity, were simply a retelling of the ancient dirty stories that had been born in the dives and waterfront saloons of a somewhat earlier day, just as Homer's epics were the retelling of ancient and heroic tales destined to happy immortality.

Into the Ancient Theatre.

The dirty story, in a somewhat new setting, moved into the ancient pagan theatre. For a ghastly period it presented as its characters, not men and women, but gods and goddesses; and, while the coarse-minded populace roared in rough, pagan laughter, actors and actresses enacted in sordid detail the stale but still filthy stories, now in the person of the discredited gods and goddesses of their no longer accepted religion.

If one could trace the history of a dirty story, its course would take him through the ugliest of alleys, the filthiest of gutters, resorts in which the soul would quiver with fear, human habitations the stench of which would drive back the unwary trespasser.

He could follow the story into the dirty galleys and forecastles of ancient pirate craft, where men with blood on their hands and vice in their souls rolled on smelly tongues the lustful adventures and the lascivious songs that filled their hours of leisure.

He could find it repeated by the gross Vandals, as they came down upon Europe with rapine as their object, pillage as their motive, and the fair women of Christendom as their hoped-for reward.

Changing, Yet the Same.

It would reappear in the voluptuous harems of fat-bellied viziers, to whom gross eunuchs and licentious favourites rehearsed the ancient tale for their coarse delight.

The story would emerge in slightly changed form from the waterfront dives of Marseilles or Port Said, from the rank atmosphere of houses of ill-fame, from frontier saloons or Cantonese dives, from the mining-town joints of frontier countries, from the flat of a Parisian courtesan.

But always from among the lowest or the most depraved. The lowest and loosest conceived it. The depraved accepted it. The immoral passed it on to those who were themselves immoral, or whom they hoped to make immoral. It was the companion of drink at its most debasing, of people at their most debased. It rose to the surface of supposedly polite society only in those eras in which morals had dropped to low and sodden depths. It invaded the theatre during brief periods when the theatre, born of religion and consecrated to high ideals and noble passions, sold out for the favour of a rotten king, the patronage of a corrupt multitude, the pleasure of the lowest elements of a civilization.

It remained a mouth-to-mouth tradition, and the mouths were strong with the stench of bad liquor and evil living. It was held within the covers of only a kind of subterranean book and booklet that passed covertly, in an ugly "grapevine" literature, chiefly among the very young.

The Decent Decline.

But decent society declined to accept it; or, accepting it, admittedly remained no longer decent. Literature that laid any claim to greatness or held any hope of genuine immortality declined to flirt with its easy possibilities. The theatre which had any aspirations beyond the patrons of the pit, of whom Shakespeare speaks with undisguised contempt, knew that the story offered no real material, for its dramatic weaving.

The dirty story never died. It was as old as the depravity of the first depraved man and woman. It was as historic as sin. But the dirty story, and even more the dirty story teller, knew their place. And, in the main, they kept it.

Until . . .

Until it has happened, to the eternal disgrace of our age and form of civilization, that the dirty story, born in the filthy minds of the lowest of pagan people, bred in the waterfront dives and gutters of decadent cities, rearranged by every group of cut-throats and rotters, of prostitutes and panders in successive generations, has finally got into society.

Welcome to Filth.

The kind permission of the ladies and the willing co-operation of the men of our age have inducted the dirty story into our homes, our parties, our dinner gatherings, our clubs, and our general social life. The dirty story, old as the ages, stale as a musty parchment from the tombs of Assyria, a word-of-mouth tradition among the lowest bred of every civilization, the invention of degenerates and the favourite entertainment of the corrupt, has been marked with the approval of cultivated men and supposedly Christian women in the years of grace of the second third of our 20th century.

In a burst of magnificent stupidity, this ancient, dusty, stale, rotten survival of what is worst and lowest in humanity has been treated and accepted as if it were new, fresh, sweet, clever, even wholesome. Thank heaven, there are still the sound millions who decline to accept the rotten refuse of civilization's lowest ebbs. But the number who call themselves ladies and gentlemen and profess to be Christians and still make the dirty story part of their normal social life is embarrassingly large and distressingly evident.

Up From the Dregs.

From the cheapest of burlesque houses, that had borrowed their plots from smoking-room stories, which had been, in turn, derived from the dive and the brothel, the Broadway producers stole ancient jokes and stale stories as the basic plots of their revue sketches. And the authors filled their plays with double-meaning lines and smutty situations begotten in the maggoty minds of degenerates.

The same stories that had been the traditional and spoken literature of stables and docks and flophouses and the jungles of tramps, became overnight the source books for the successful novelists and the writers of popular short stories.

While society, even the society that claims to be Christian and of a Sunday professes to be Catholic, rolled the ancient dirt off its tongue and accepted the salacious tales, at first shamefacedly, then furtively, and finally with open and unleashed laughter.

From Soiled Lips.

Our modern men and women, old and young, have re-learned and adopted what pagan galley slaves and soldiers, returning from pillage and rape, the vilest off-scouring of slums, lustful barbarians and panders of every race long felt to be their own special and grotesque Golden Legend, spoken, though seldom committed to writing, in their own vile argot.

So the dirty story appears at dinner parties, is flipped about among women over the bridge table, is told by young men to young women and by young women among themselves, is repeated in almost any sort of company, and used as the salty accompaniment of drinking sprees. How the men and women, who in the darkest corners of ugly cities first generated these filthy tales, would stare and then roar with laughter to find their ill-begotten brood adopted by those who pride themselves on being our actual or potential leaders!

Vulgar or Worse.

From the beginning of any discussion of this subject, it must be clearly understood that there is a complete moral distinction between the story which is vulgar and the story which is obscene. Conveniently they are often lumped together under the general classification of dirty story. In reality they have only the common denominator of generation in soiled imaginations.

The distinction between the two was made, in passing, by a dramatic critic who recently remarked of a certain brilliant revived play that it has proved one could be amusing and gripping without references to plumbing or adultery.

The vulgar story deals, so to speak, with the plumbing. It stresses physical functions which, while normal and natural, are decently hidden by polite society for its own greater peace of mind and the improvement of human association. But in themselves they are not sinful nor in any way morally wrong.

The obscene story, on the other hand, deals directly with wrongdoing of a special type, sins against the proper sex relation, with notable emphasis on adultery, seduction, and, regrettable in our era, our perversions and abnormalities. They are recitals of the vices and passions and base desirings of men and women, treated as if these sad crimes were funny and subjects for laughter.

Too Crude for Us.

Vulgarity is certainly no pleasant thing to meet with in life. Almost as little pleasant is it to the refined mind to meet it in a story. Few things are harder on a refined, decent person than to be thrown into constant association with a vulgar person, to be subjected to his rough, uncouth, ill-bred, ill-mannered ways. There are certain elements in life that are naturally unpleasant, and contact with them is likely to inspire disgust. The higher the type of civilization, the more it tries to refine and disguise or hide away from the public eye or private comfort these slightly unpleasant, though natural, factors.

But the teller of the vulgar story thinks otherwise. He regards these things as amusing—in fact, quite delightful. His vulgar story drags them into the light. It obtrudes them on the attention of perhaps quite sensitive listeners.

Now, there's nothing morally wrong about this, except in so far as it may be distinctly uncharitable to make others uncomfortable by a garbage type of humour. It is, and we apologize for the unpleasant candour, as unmoral as a belch—and as completely unpleasant and vulgar. But, ethics and morals aside, there is nothing much to be said in favour of a mind which finds amusing and the subject of jest things that are in themselves offensive, ugly, repellent, and, by common consent, banished from decent society.

Still, if one chooses to be vulgar, one can be vulgar and still be moral. The same is not true of one who deliberately tells or listens to the obscene story.

Or Obscene.

The obscene story, the story that regards lust as funny and adultery as amusing and seduction as a grand joke, that generates the sort of laughter never heard except in response to this type of wit, a laughter strained and nervous, blatant and raucous, slightly if not notably hysterical, high-pitched in women, low-keyed and convulsed or guffawing in men—that is the type of story which properly is meant by dirty. And it is entirely different from the story that is just physically unclean, naturally noisome, even decidedly fetid.

The fact that the obscene story excites a different type of laughter from that accorded any other class of humour is significant. Most laughter is a wholesome breath blowing away our cares and worries. It is a happy gale of human relief. It is the response of the happy mind. It is as wholesome as rain, as relaxing as a great, generous yawn, as refreshing as sleep, innocent enough to be shared by a little child and an ageing mother, by a nun and an athlete exulting in the sun; by a poet who has found his true love and an adventurer who has ended his quest; by a father in the joy of his children and an inventor in the triumph of his achievement; by young couples facing life together or the failure who has fought back to success. Such laughter is of nature and of God.

Unclean Laughter.

The other laughter is, as anyone knows, instantly recognized as unwholesome. It is not even as honest as a sneer. Born of uncleanness, it is in nature and essence unclean. Describe it, no one adequately can. But anyone can recognize it, even from a distance, as the ugly exhalation following an ugly reaction.

Now, all honesty compels the admission that from one viewpoint obscene stories are funny. They have a form of humour about them. For they are founded on incongruity, and incongruity is the foundation of all humour, whether true or unhealthy.

Humour is based on the unexpected, the unfit, the things out of place and out of line, provided always that the watcher or listener experiences no sense of personal danger. The classic instances of humour are many. For instance, the well-dressed man who puts on his silk hat and pulls on his white gloves, only at the next step to plant his foot on a wet mop and slide the length of a flight of stairs. We don't expect men in silk hats to go sliding down the stairs. It is unexpected, out of line, against what we think proper, congruous; and because the episode comes as a surprise, catches us unawares, yet brings no sense of personal danger, we laugh even without so willing.

Why Funny?

A cat is not funny. In fact, cats are widely regarded as serious, rather proud, slightly mysterious, very selfish, and even somewhat sinister creatures. A cat on the back fence is not funny. But a cat suddenly discovered walking down the aisle of a church during a wedding immediately evokes laughter from the pews. The sacredness of the setting and the seriousness of the occasion make the cat out of place, and hence funny.

There is nothing funny about a man's tripping and falling. But if a man trips and falls as he walks up to the President to get a medal for being the champion tap dancer of the United States, the spectators will burst into roars of laughter. The statue of a national hero is something that we regard with solemnity;—a mouse is (with the exception of our beloved Mickey) notably unfunny and to many frightening. But if, when a statue of a national hero were unveiled, a mother mouse with a troop of baby mice were solemnly to stroll out of the hero's high, stone boot, all who saw the untoward, unbecoming, unexpected event would shriek with mirth.

Out of Place.

Now, the plain and unalterable fact is that the material of the dirty story is not only completely unfunny; it is repellent, crass, ugly, and frequently tragic. Nothing funny could possibly be found in a man's tricking and seducing a young woman, an episode the sequel of which would probably be written, not in smiles and laughter, but in tears and perhaps a ruined life. Adultery is an ugly crime against which the laws of every land, civilized and savage and barbarous, and of every age, Christian and Jewish and Moslem and pagan, have been levelled. Surely only tragedy can be found in the deception of a trusting husband by his wife, the tricking of a wife by a philandering husband, the breaking of marriage vows and the betrayal of a love on which is established the safety of our most sacred institutions of marriage, home, and family.

And the saddest of all human beings are those degenerates who linger on the border line between sanity and insanity, the objects of interest only to the criminal pathologist or the student of abnormal psychology, pitiable in themselves, disgusting to normal men and women. Their acts are scarcely the actions of human beings, and are far more like those of animals than like those of creatures endowed with self-will and self-control.

Yet, when told cleverly, stories of adultery and seduction and the abnormalities of sex seem to be funny. And they are, in the broader sense; for, if you neglect the tragic content of the stories, they are perfect instances of incongruity, unfitness, unexpectedness, the obtrusion of the unusual into a sacred and important relationship. They correspond to the black cat in church, the dancer toppling into a fall as he receives his medal, or, let's say, a dignified justice of the Supreme Court suddenly jumping on to his desk and doing a highland fling or a skirt dance.

Sacred Setting.

Indeed, the basic sacredness and importance of sex, its consecration through the sacrament of matrimony, the very beauty and value of love, are the background against which the incongruity of man's betrayal of his dignity and of his high responsibilities stands out in sharp and sudden incongruity. The Supreme Court justice suddenly doing a jig is less

incongruous than the man betraying his possibilities as a father. The tap dancer falling down as he gets his medal is not as out of line as a young woman falling when her innocence and virtue are essential for the future of our race. The mice trooping out of the hero's high, stone boot are less of a fundamental surprise than the ugly desire of seduction creeping out of the mind of a man as he faces the sacred and beautiful temple of the future which is a young woman.

With these elements of incongruity it is possible to make a dirty story sound funny. But only—and this is important—if one shuts his mind to the ugly content and to the tragic consequences of the acts related. If the man in the high hat fell and broke his neck, the episode would not be even slightly humorous. If the cat moving down the aisle of the church were suddenly recognized as the bearer of cholera, the episode would abruptly become tragic. If the mice trooping from the boot were recognized as carriers of the black plague, no one would see any humour in the situation. And only by refusing to see the ugly, horrible consequences of the adultery or seduction, by declining to note the deception, dishonesty, the pollution of the sources of human life, the human selfishness and animal passion, can the listener find the dirty story even mildly amusing.

Sharp Contrast.

Yes, we laugh when a man goes to sit down in a chair and misses it. We are boisterously amused by a chap sitting on his own hat. And the incongruity of a man who through sins of sex hurts himself, smashes things dear and precious, and makes a horrible fool of himself, a woman, and the human race, may seem funny, but only because of the sharp contrast between what is being done and what should be done. It is the perfect instance of a sacred background against which a man or a woman or both make themselves ludicrous and absurd.

Soiling the Sacred.

And the content, the material of the dirty story?

We have not the space here to discuss such obvious things as the sacredness and importance of the whole sex relationship. Only a fool can fail to see its vital relationship to the individual and the future of the race. We need not stress what all decent men have maintained in primitive societies, in civilizations, in chivalry, all through history. We can never forget that upon the safeguarding of sex depends the safe entry of the whole of future humanity into the world and eventually into the next.

Even this brief reminder, however, is necessary, for the reason that the content of the dirty story is a direct effort to destroy all the sacredness and beauty of the sex relationship. It goes on the supposition that marriage is a comic thing, to be treated with ribald laughter. It makes the adulterer a humorous hero, and the adulteress a happy and funny creature.

Can This Be Funny?

The ugly seduction by which a man betrays the innocence of a woman and hurts her possibilities for pure love and stainless motherhood becomes in the dirty story the subject of laughter and ridicule. The perversions of sad unfortunates are treated as ludicrous and laugh-provoking. In general, all dirty stories deny in their whole tenor that the safeguarding of the sex relationship is important or essential for the safe bringing of children into the world. They bid men and women laugh at love and decency, and find fun in the way by which God and nature ordained that little children should be conceived and born. And with sinister innuendo they point the finger of ridicule at decent people, and, as far as they can, laugh them to scorn.

Beyond all else, however, the dirty story is a betrayal of the whole of womankind. A dirty story is not levelled at any one special woman. In fact, the women of dirty stories might well be anonymous. The dirty story is levelled at womanhood, at wives and mothers and sweethearts and all those who by their sex are united with the woman who is the object of the tale's ugly attack and laughter.

Men Only.

For centuries the dirty story was passed from man to man, and kept a kind of secret among the males of the human race. The sort of man who engaged in the practice of telling and enjoying dirty stories was ashamed to have women, especially the women he loved, know how cheaply and vilely he held the things that were sacred and important to them. Prostitutes heard the dirty stories from the men who despised them sufficiently to share even the spoken evil and sin with them. But good women were supposed to be ignorant of this obscene view, with which some of the men, even of their class, regarded womankind.

For obscene stories are stories of passion, and passion is not fastidious. It cares little for a specific woman. Passion is concerned with the whole opposite sex. While a man who is really in love, loves deeply one woman, the man on flame with passion cares little for any particular woman and reaches out for woman, any woman, womankind.

So the dirty story was not directed at any particular girl in any particular time and country; it was aimed at all women, at all womanhood; at the sacredness and beauty of the human relationship in love and marriage. The heroine or victim of any story was any woman who could be tricked into evil. The dirty story had for its subject not some special, unfortunate woman, but any woman who could, by the ingenuity of man or the bad luck of circumstances, be inveigled into sin.

Laughing at Women.

The dirty story, in consequence, laughed at all womankind. It did not spare the mother of the man who told it. It had no mercy upon his wife or sweetheart. It made a joke of the exquisite way in which love leads men and women to the procreation of children. It gave the world for its laughter an ugly caricature of love; for, while love stories tell of the unselfish and generous devotion of a man for a woman, and of a woman for a man, all leading toward marriage or a splendidly brave renunciation, the dirty story tells of lust and passion, probably of two strangers drawn together like dogs in a gutter, an episode ending in a brief moment of seduction, or a husband or wife outwitted and betrayed.

Cleverness Not Needed.

Of course, the most obvious thing about dirty stories is that they require in their authors little or no cleverness. The dullest and stupidest and least educated types of people have produced most of them. Civilization has done hardly more than dress the stale and ancient obscenities in the clothes of the period.

Cleverness is just about the last thing needed for the invention of an immoral dirty story. Incongruity is too sharp and obvious for that. There is nothing very difficult about depicting a cat walking down the aisle of a church or a man in a silk hat falling downstairs. If the Supreme Court justice cares to make a fool of himself, he does not need to be clever to get a laugh. Everything is all set for the humour there. So, in the case of the dirty story, the stage is all arranged. Dolts and dullards can be funny if they care to. In fact, they are the very ones who lack the brains necessary to see the consequences of what they joke about. The fool is the perfect teller and retailer of dirty stories.

So, today, even if the ancient jests and tales are tricked out with glittering epigram and smart literary form, they are still the children of the dull-witted, alcohol-stimulated, crudely-sexed illiterates of ancient races and primitive instincts.

Stale Stuff.

With something like sadness over human gullibility, we realize that all that can possibly be said of sex in the form of dirty jokes was said perhaps five thousand years ago. The modern variants were already contained basically in the Decameron, the Arabian Nights, Petronius, the Roman novelists, and the dirty plays and stories of Greece. They were scratched in symbol and picture-writing on the walls of ancient cities.

Acceptance of the dirty story makes the listener the associate of the vilest characters. Repetition of the dirty story marks the teller as cursed with a gutter mind.

Why the first statement? Well, there are certain persons with whom decent people would prefer not to associate: rakes and seducers, adulterers and betrayers of women, prostitutes and adventuresses, fallen women, the sad degenerates who

are fit only for confinement in psychopathic hospitals.

Meet the Scum.

These types of characters do appear in serious literature. But it is left for the dirty story to present them, not as the sad, ugly, repellent people they are in life, but as happy and charming and infinitely funny.

The dirty story asks us to welcome these people as associates of our mental life. We admit them when they come knocking at our ears, though we should, in all probability, die rather than admit them to our houses and our personal society. Indeed, when the dirty story appears at the dinner table or at a party, among groups of people anywhere, it is as if these rotted sinners, fresh from their lust and adultery and seduction and passion, had been admitted as welcome guests.

At Their Worst.

There are, besides, scenes and situations and human emotions and actions so sinful and vile and evil that decency shuts them away in darkness. Even the sinful do not easily lose their sense of shame. Shakespeare summarized this in the statement that lust and light were deadly enemies. The dirty story, however, flinging all human decencies to the winds, drags these situations out into the light and bids the sinners do their vilest actions in broad day or in the soft light of carefully lighted candles. And it bids the spectators applaud the lecherous conduct with their laughter.

Speech Betrays.

“As a man thinks,” runs the ancient truism, “so he is:” “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” One needs only to quote the two immortal phrases, and their application to the teller of dirty stories, or to the man or woman who welcomes them, is terrifyingly obvious.

If a man thinks laughingly and approvingly of vile people and evil situations, if he finds joy and mirth in passion and adultery and seduction and degeneracy, what precisely can be said of his mind? What are we to think of his heart? And, having given a swift glance toward mind and heart, we dislike to think what he himself must be in ideals and desire and perhaps accomplished actions.

From approval to action has always been an easy step. That is why men of evil intent have consistently worn down the defences of innocence with the battering of the dirty story. One cannot laugh at criminal passion without swaying slightly toward it. Adultery remains funny in theory only a short time. The seducer in the story is a model for the seducer in life. And so, as history and human experience very clearly indicate, men have thought and men have acted.

If a woman is asked to laugh at the betrayal of one of her sex, the story teller, more than likely, will be happy if she follows the same betrayed course. Laughter at virtue cannot be long continued without laughter shaking the high defences of virtue.

Consequence or Cause?

Whether the dirty story is the cause of immorality or merely a sign of immorality already existing is a question that can be debated. But not for long. The point on which both sides will agree is that immorality in fact and a contemptuous attitude toward marriage and love and motherhood and the loyalty of husband and wife and the whole of womankind inevitably accompany a widespread prevalence of the dirty story.

Pagan nations that have been notoriously lustful have been ardent devotees of the dirty story. The modern pagan groups of society that have, with gusto and a great smacking of their lips, revived those ancient dirty tales are precisely the same groups that run quickly to divorce, regard the sex relationship as a matter of light and casual bond, and profess an open contempt for what they like to call convention and an outmoded morality.

However, the debate can be settled with one simple fact. Though the dirty story may arise out of the heart of a nation or people already badly corrupted, that same dirty story, passed along, quickly corrupts the next generation, and spreads the practice of lust and the free exercise of passion as almost nothing else can. Through the dirty story the small boy and

the growing girl learn. The dirty story may flow from a contempt of love and marriage and womankind and little children; it is one of the most powerful means of keeping this contempt alive and active.

Ashamed and Afraid.

The biggest difficulty in the way of handling this situation of the dirty story and its modern prevalence is the fear of what the teller will think of us. We moderns are quite too sensitive about hurting the feelings of people who should be hit over the head with a club. We are ridiculously careful not to offend those whose whole manner is offensive.

A young woman, let's say, is with a party of friends. One of the group, a young man, tells a dirty story. If the girl had the sense of a child of five and the courage of a young rabbit, she would let him know that she considered his story an insult. It is that and nothing less. Why should he think that she would enjoy a yarn that drags into her company rakes and prostitutes, or that calls for laughter because another young girl has been seduced and betrayed? And what guarantee has she that the man who tells such a story with relish and approval would not expect her to relish and approve the same course of conduct applied to herself? She is a fool to permit it. And it is regrettable that the good manners of the world are not all on the side of the clean-minded and the decent-tongued.

His Future Wife.

A young man is in love with a young woman. He realizes quite clearly that the very relationship which, degraded and caricatured in the dirty story, will, if he marries the girl, be some day sanctified and consecrated by a sacrament, following a great and beautiful love. A dirty story is told. The girl laughs approvingly.

What can he think? The girl likes the association of vile people introduced to her in the story. She responds eagerly to the filthy scene presented. She regards her sex relationship, which he hopes to offer her in marriage as the divinely ordained way of expressing love and begetting their children, as the subject for obscene laughter. She finds adultery and seduction, not degrading, but funny.

He has two courses—one to delude himself that she is so thoughtless or ignorant that she laughs without grasping the point of the story; the other, to conclude that the girl with whom he hopes to share his life regards crimes against sex as very funny, that she does not mind his assumption of an attitude which degrades and pollutes her own sweet womanhood.

The Sacred Power.

The Church, quite rightly, has held in high respect the creative power with which God has invested a man. It regards sex as sacred, because essential to the future of the race. It consecrates with a Christian sacrament the operation of that power. Its renunciation can be dedicated to God by a vow of religion. A dirty joke makes this divine power a soiled and disgraceful thing, reducing it to gutter level.

With few human organs is there more of sacred association than with the tongue of a man or a woman. That small organ is capable of bringing to the human race and to each individual in its moments of deep happiness, opportunities for great joy.

The tongue of the teacher passes on wisdom. The tongue of the poet sings of beauty and high ideals. The tongue of the mother chants her lullabies and teaches the child the richness of her own soul. The tongue of the lover speaks of romance, and into a few impassioned words pours the depths of his inmost soul. The tongue of a woman was given for sympathy and love. The tongue of a man rings with courage and aspiration. The tongue of the leader summons to high achievement. The tongue of the priest calls God from heaven and banishes sin from the soul.

The tongue makes possible the sweet association of friends and the dear intimacies of love. The tongue passes on from age to age our history and the record of our race.

And for a Catholic, the tongue is the red satin cushion upon which rests the Son of God, hidden lightly in the bread of the Eucharist.

Dripping Poison.

Then comes the tongue of the teller of dirty tales, dripping its poison and spilling its filth. Like a blood-red stiletto, it stabs innocence and kills purity. It awakens evil thought and inspires temptation. It passes on from ear to ear, from soul to soul, the rotten dreams and imaginings of diseased and repulsive minds. It tempts to sin as not even the devil himself can tempt. It cries aloud against the sacred associations of a man and woman, and mocks at all the unborn children of the world. It is beyond almost all else, the sower of evil and the spreader of death among souls.

If the degradation of a noble organ is always a terrible thing, we need not do more than indicate what the degradation of the tongue means when this organ, destined by God to spread truth and promote friendship and knowledge and hope and love, becomes the instrument for broadcasting the dirty story.

Their Work Goes On.

One terrible quality about the dirty story is its seeming deathlessness. Dirty stories never die. They go on and on through the centuries and move endlessly across the world. Any man who tells a dirty story may be sure that he has given an impetus to a source of evil that he will never be able to stop or withdraw.

The dirty story tossed out into the world continues its work without apparent interruption. It passes from mind to mind, from tongue to tongue, from soul to soul. A thousand years after its evil birth, still vigorous, still strong, still rotten, but never completely disintegrating, always decaying but never dead, it goes about its work of pollution and ruin.

Can anyone in his right mind and with even a slight perception of what he does, willingly accept the responsibility for pushing on its way such a deathless source of evil? Even if he had no faith nor hope nor belief in the supernatural, he could not easily burden his conscience with an act the consequences of which seem to be without end.

Against the Pure Christ.

About the condemned Christ rose the babel of hideous voices. Loudly and vehemently the tongues of evil men and women clamoured for His death. If impure thoughts crowned Christ with thorns, if impure acts laid the scourge upon His back, we may be certain that impure tongues long accustomed to dirty stories clamoured loudly for His death.

Certainly, the only possible way in which the dirty story, the filthy joke, the rotten tale could be associated with the sweet-spoken, pure-minded, lovely-tongued Christ would be as one of the major causes of His death. The evil tongue would inevitably be silent in His presence. It would not dare to spill its hideous burden where He could hear. But it would not long hesitate to cry aloud for the death of the pure Christ Whom every dirty story grotesquely, wantonly insults.

Pro Lucifer.

No, there is no place in decent Christian society for the dirty story. In fact, it is out of place in any society that lays claim to the decencies of life.

It disgraces even the gutter and dive and brothel from which it sprang. It is an inhuman and anti-social thing, fit only for the most bitter enemies of mankind. And those bitter enemies must find it infinitely charming and refreshing. Since Lucifer and his hosts hate mankind with an abiding hatred, since anything that degrades and despoils men and women is dear to them, how they must rejoice that the dirty story has taken its place in modern society! We can fancy the devils, in mock gratitude, bowing before the teller of the dirty tale. They have found in him (and horrible to confess, in her) a powerful ally. Almost they can entrust to him and her their work of polluting human souls. They can be grateful to the man and woman who, through the repetition of the dirty story, have helped them to do their work against God and the human race.
