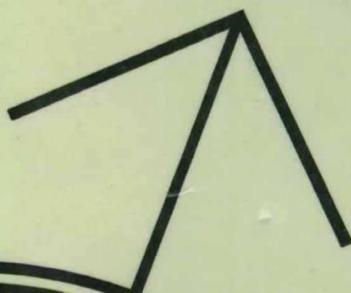


The
Curious
History of
Contraception
Shirley Green



From potions and cabbage leaves to the condom and the pill, this erudite book traces the erratic course of contraception via superstition to science. But since the ways of human beings have always been funny, this very private practice, with its very public consequences, produces plenty of humour along the way.

The ancient Egyptians had detailed recipes for pessaries – would they work today for anyone with access to crocodiles' dung? Pliny thought asparagus roots infallible, but in China they preferred the 'Thousand of Gold Contraceptive Prescription' which reads rather like an appetising menu.

Meantime in Islam, the approach was gymnastic; in the words of the famous Rhazes: 'Immediately after ejaculation let the woman arise roughly, sneeze and blow her nose several times, call out in a loud voice, and jump violently backwards seven to nine paces'.

Drawings by artists like Gillray and Hogarth, plus specimens from the depths of museum cupboards, help illustrate what must be one of the most fascinating social documents ever written.

Front cover: *Frontispiece of Carlyle's 'What is Love?' (1826) with a fully frontal Adam and Eve. This 'most obscenely indelicate work', as it was dubbed, counsels men to withdraw, and looks upon the man as 'a dishonest brute who does not attend to it.'*

Back cover: *Victorian gentleman's response to a National Life Insurance (1871) questionnaire asking for number of children. His wife had just reached the menopause..*

Cover design: *Michael Carney Associates*

GREEN

Curious history of
contraception

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The
CURIOUS
History of
Contraception

by Shirley Green

Ebury Press · London

2 075573 01



First published 1971

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Designed by Robert Hall

Photoset and printed in England by BAS Printers Limited,
Over Wallop, Stockbridge, Hants.

ISBN 0 85223 016 8

Published by Ebury Press,
Chestergate House, Vauxhall Bridge Road,
London, SW1

To Women's Lib . . . with love

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Especial thanks to Beryl Sutters, co-author of *The Fight for Acceptance*, for helping with some of the above illustrations.

‘Woman, you must speak out in *plain*
English (said the late Incomparable Lord
Chief Justice Holt, to a Wench that had
sworn a Rape against a young Fellow)
that the Court, and the Gentlemen of the
Jury, may understand you; You must not
mince the matter, but call Things by
their proper Names, you must call a
SPADE, a SPADE, and not a P—— a
Thing, nor a C—— a Colly-Flower.’

from *Eunuchism Display'd*, 1718,
written by a ‘Person of HONOUR’

Introduction

There's nothing new about contraception. In all ages and societies, couples have tried to call a halt to production after the first few bouncing babies. Sometimes the motives have been financial, sometimes medical, but usually, men and women have just found it pleasanter to have four children around them instead of fourteen. In fact, the idea of contraception being 'immoral' or 'unnatural' is new. It took our civilisation to dream it up—but then it took our civilisation to feel guilty about sex, and the two are probably closely linked. If you pay for your pleasure with non-stop pregnancy, it isn't considered quite so sinful.

Before the Flood, ancient Hebrews happily kept two wives, one for procreation and one for enjoyment. The latter drank a 'cup of roots' to render her sterile, and presumably got left behind when Noah filled his Ark. After the Flood, when Jews were trying to colonise the Middle East, 'increase and multiply' became part of national policy. Men had several wives, to say nothing of hand-maidens and concubines, and the Old Testament turned into a roll-call of layings and begettings. This orgy of procreation continued until the 3rd century B.C., when Palestine started bursting at the seams, and surplus Jews had to seek their fortunes in other lands. As a cut-back measure, men confined themselves to one wife, and considered they'd done their duty by producing a single son and daughter. And the moral guide to everyday living, the collection of writings known as the *Talmud*, gave its approval. It even managed to talk its way out of the 'increase and multiply' directive—the exhortation had only applied to men. If women took the initiative (methods included wearing a sponge, doing physical jerks to expel the semen, keeping to the 'safe' period, and drinking the traditional cup of roots), then no-one was breaking the law.

The Jews made a clear distinction between contraception and abortion. The ancient Chinese confused the two quite casually. Potions to bring about a 'disaster' get mentioned in the same breath as those to prevent the need for one, and there's no hint of disapproval. On the contrary, some of the earliest recipes were written by the Emperor Shen Nung himself, believed to have lived from 2737–2696 B.C. They get quoted well into the 16th century A.D., the only reservations being where they might prove dangerous.

The prime concern of every Chinese man was to produce sons and carry on the family line. This fulfilled his duty to the honourable ancestors, but once enough had been born to keep them happy, married couples could use their discretion, and avoid having more in any way they saw fit. Paradoxically though, the very pursuit of pregnancy led the upper-class, literate man to use contraceptive measures. He believed that if he slept with as many women as possible without ejaculating, it would strengthen his semen, so that he'd be sure of getting his wife pregnant with the resulting super-sperms when he did let rip. Withholding (i.e. *coitus reservatus*—not to be confused with withdrawing, i.e. *coitus interruptus*) took strict self-discipline. Suggested aids included 'gnashing the teeth a thousand times', 'pausing nine times after every series of nine strokes', and pretending the woman was hideously ugly. Such refinements couldn't have affected poor peasants much. They'd have had enough of a struggle supporting one woman, and for them, infant-icide would have proved the commonest 'contraceptive' solution.

Like the Chinese, Indians demanded sons of their wives, and so far as Hindus were concerned, the way to salvation was barred without them. But Indian men didn't only sleep with their wives. The 4th-century *Kama Sutra* headings



Man from the Ming Dynasty shows the 'stream of life', with the semen supposedly whizzing back up the spinal cord to the brain. All he had to do to re-route it was grip part of his testicles tightly just before ejaculation; alternatively, he could nip his *P'ing-i* point—situated just above the right nipple!

read 'Relations with Other People's Wives', 'Relations with Other People's Mistresses' and 'Relations with Courtesans', as well as explaining how to deal with routine spouses. Sex was a serious study, contraception formed a natural part of it, and erotic text-books abound with recipes for making 'those with gazelle eyes unfruitful'. Though many of them start 'The prostitute who . . .' or 'A woman who has lost her husband . . .', most of them simply begin 'She who . . .', and wives probably availed themselves of the information as much as any, once they'd produced enough children. There were no religious vetoes to prevent them, and unintentionally, various branches of Buddhism and Hinduism encouraged contraception by making *coitus reservatus* a shortcut to enlightenment. Instead of squandering their semen on this world, male followers made love in the classic attitudes of the temple carvings, but avoided reaching a climax. This enabled the sperm to return to the brain (or so they believed), vanishing into the Whole and becoming One with the Deity. Once more though, the ordinary masses relied on infanticide to keep their numbers down.

It's a fairly safe bet that ancient Egyptians, upper-class ones at any rate, preferred small families. Paintings and wall-panels always depict parents with only one or two children, and mothers are enviably slim and sylph-like. According to the Greek historian Strabo, in very ancient times ovariectomies were performed on court women to ensure they kept their figures, and a pre-occupation with appearance is certainly evident. Papyri are full of lotions to make the skin and hair more beautiful (remember Cleopatra bathing in asses' milk?), and contraceptive recipes turn up among them like routine cosmetic measures. The earliest date from around 1850 B.C., with crocodile-dung

pessaries that sound ridiculous—but could possibly have worked.

Our cultural ancestors, the Greeks and Romans, relied so heavily on abortion and infanticide that contraception took a back seat. Such ruthless pruning was understandable when living conditions were rough, but when wealth increased, large families became even less popular. Polybius's famous complaint, written in the second century B.C., sums up the Greek situation:

For when men gave themselves up to ease and comfort and indolence, and would neither marry, nor rear children born out of marriage, or at most only one or two, in order to leave these rich, and to bring them up in luxury, the evil soon spread . . .

One of the places it had spread to was Rome, where marriage had become such a chore in 131 B.C. that the Censor Q. Metellus Macedonicus was driven to address the public on the subject.

Citizens, he said, if it were possible to go entirely without wives, we would deliver ourselves at once from this evil; but as the laws of nature have so ordered it that we can neither live happy with them nor continue the species without them, we ought to have more regard for our lasting security than for our transient pleasures.

Metellus's plea fell on deaf ears, and most men continued to evade their marital duties, while women inside and outside of marriage relied on 'midwives' to perform their abortions. There was next to no contraceptive information for them to turn to, anyway. Hippocrates had only mentioned the subject in passing, and it had been left to non-medical writers like Pliny to fill the gap with pathetic old

wives' tales. 2nd-century Greek physician Soranus was one of the first to deplore abortion—and to supply serious contraceptive advice in its place. His *Gynaecology* provides the most rational measures prior to the 19th century, and he deserves to be a lot more famous than he is.

Islamic physicians borrowed heavily from Soranus, and as Arabs had been practising withdrawal from ancient times, there were no howls of moral outrage. Mahomet didn't have anything to say on the subject, so Moslems took his silence for approval, especially as the 'will of Allah' was bound to prevail. On this basis, by the time physicians of Rhazes' stature cropped up in the 10th and 11th centuries, even abortion got dealt with in a matter-of-fact manner. There was a clear distinction between contraception and abortion, however, and neither class of information was intended for 'ill-famed women.'

Christ didn't say anything about contraception either, but Christians interpreted his silence as disapproval. It's impossible not to blame St. Paul for this, because he degraded sex until it had to plead procreation, and procreation only, to justify its existence. Most of the early Church Fathers were incapable of separating contraception from fornication, and it's typical that when St. Jerome complained about people drinking 'a potion in order to remain sterile', he had single girls and widows in mind.

St. Augustine in the 4th-century was the first Christian to worry about what *married* couples got up to in bed. 'If a man has not the gift of continence [and he certainly hadn't], let him marry lawfully, lest he beget children shamefully or, still more shamefully, copulate without begetting. Though this is done even by those lawfully married: for it is unlawful and shameful to have intercourse even with one's own wife if the conception of children is avoided. Onan the Son

of Judah did this and God slew him for it.' Ironically, in view of the Pope's attitude today, Augustine spent most of his time attacking the 'safe' period, and his views became accepted Catholic thinking for the next nine centuries. They could have been worse. At least he didn't say (like Caesarius of Arles in the 6th century) that once a woman was pregnant, it was a sin to go on sleeping with her, or (like Gregory the Great in the 7th century) that intercourse at any time and in any circumstances was a sin which needed penance for its atonement, or (like St. Bonaventure in the 13th century), that even when married couples were having intercourse to produce children, it was only virtuous if they hated it.

St. Thomas Aquinas replaced Augustine as the official Church mouthpiece on marital matters in the 13th century, with his oft-quoted 'In so far as the generation of offspring is impeded, it is a vice against nature which happens in every carnal act from which generation cannot follow.' This change of emphasis left a vital loophole, and 'natural' methods of contraception, like the 'safe' period and *coitus reservatus*, were allowed to creep in. By Chaucer's time, the 'vice' had become a crime, every bit as abhorrent as abortion, and usually confused with it. The 'Parson's Tale' lumps together measures whereby 'a child may nat be conceived' and those that 'sleeth a child by drynkes wilfully', and both are condemned outright as 'homycide'. Not surprisingly, as no-one wanted to be accused of murder, contraceptive information degenerated into word-of-mouth old wives' tales in Middle-age Europe. It didn't rise above this level until the 16th and 17th centuries, and then—of all places—in staunchly Roman Catholic France. Among the 'corrupt' upper classes, the motives were probably frivolous (what court lady likes losing her figure?), but amongst the

vos bonū mutūm istū esse dicatis
sed talem ad huc in doctrina dabit
magistruū ut totus mirabitur mūdos.

8. q. 1. 2. 3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8. 9. 10. 11. 12. 13. 14. 15. 16. 17. 18. 19. 20. 21. 22. 23. 24. 25. 26. 27. 28. 29. 30. 31. 32. 33. 34. 35. 36. 37. 38. 39. 40. 41. 42. 43. 44. 45. 46. 47. 48. 49. 50. 51. 52. 53. 54. 55. 56. 57. 58. 59. 60. 61. 62. 63. 64. 65. 66. 67. 68. 69. 70. 71. 72. 73. 74. 75. 76. 77. 78. 79. 80. 81. 82. 83. 84. 85. 86. 87. 88. 89. 90. 91. 92. 93. 94. 95. 96. 97. 98. 99. 100.



stolid middle classes, they were probably economic. Valentin's play *Le Franc Bourgeois*, in 1706, has one character saying:

'Tis better to nurture with care just one child
 Than produce half a dozen and let 'em run wild,
 Till finding themselves of their parents bereft,
 They discover for each there is deuced little left.

Despite occasional protests from moralists and theologians, French people took to withdrawal and wearing a sponge in the practical, commonsense way that's always typified their approach to sex and money matters. Not so in Protestant England. Far more puritanical and idealistic attitudes prevailed, and the mere title of Daniel Defoe's book, *Conjugal Lewdness: or, Matrimonial Whoredom*, gives an indication of what the British public was in for. Defoe reckoned that 'taking Physick before-hand to prevent your being with Child is wilful Murther, as essentially and as effectually, as your destroying the Child after it was formed in your Womb.' Within marriage, it was 'nothing but Whoring under the shelter or cover of the law', and his only advice for a woman wanting to avoid pregnancy was 'no doubt she will not be troubled with Children if she *Knows not a Man*.'

The Reverend Thomas Malthus was just as helpful in his 1798 *Essay on the Principle of Population*. The principle as he saw it was that population grows in a 'geometrical ratio' (i.e., 1, 2, 4, 8), whereas food supplies only increase in an 'arithmetical ratio' (i.e., 1, 2, 3, 4). His prophecies

Albert the Great teaching St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. Albert wrote about contraception with an open mind, but his pupil branded it 'a vice against nature'; the view became official Catholic doctrine and the Pope still relies on it today.

of warfare, pestilence and famine were sufficient to get later birth-control movements named after him—but the choice couldn't have been more inappropriate. For Malthus condemned contraception in true early Church Father style: 'Promiscuous intercourse, unnatural passions, violations of the marriage bed, and improper arts to conceal the consequences of irregular connexions, clearly come under the head of vice'. In fact, his only 'positive' suggestion for controlling population was 'moral restraint'. People were to postpone marriage 'from prudential motives, with a conduct strictly moral during the period of this restraint.'

Malthus was not a working-class man, or he'd have seen the absurdity of preaching celibacy. The Industrial Revolution was gathering momentum, and people were living in such appallingly overcrowded conditions that if they didn't marry young, they'd only fall into vices far worse than contraception, like incest, rape, abortion and infanticide. Francis Place, on the other hand, appreciated their situation because he'd shared it. He'd managed to fight his way out of the squalor to become a successful tradesman, and when he tackled the population problem, he took it front on. Anonymously addressing the first of his 'diabolical handbills' in 1823 'To the *Married* of Both Sexes', he told husbands to use withdrawal and wives the sponge, in plain, straightforward English. And hoping for support, he sent a first copy to an 'ardent friend of the working people', social worker Mary Fildes. Her reaction was typical. She called it a 'flagrant . . . attack upon the morals of the community', and submitted the 'infamous transaction' to publisher

Francis Place, whose 'diabolical handbills' in 1823 suggested withdrawal for husbands and the sponge for wives. The sponge was to be 'as large as a green walnut, or small apple', would not 'diminish the enjoyment of either party', and should be used 'rather damp, and when convenient a little warm'. Place himself fathered fifteen children, five of whom died in infancy.





Richard Carlile, in the hopes of discovering its authorship.

Carlile was closer to the handbill's source than she'd imagined, and by 1826, he was publishing his own *Every Woman's Book* on contraception. Unlike Place, who'd soberly addressed himself to married people, Carlile's 'English Duchess' who never 'goes out to a dinner without being prepared with the sponge' smacked unmistakably of promiscuity—but the opposition was incapable of seeing a distinction. Both authors (along with Jeremy Bentham, who'd once briefly alluded to the sponge), were branded as a 'gang of persons determinately and brutally bent on the destruction of all loyal, religious, and moral feelings, in the lower and middle classes of this our great and happy land'. In fact, if anything Place came in for the ugliest attacks, and one journal wrote of his handbills: 'If the reader require anything to disgust him with the foregoing filth, let him go herd with wolves and monkeys: he is unfit for human fellowship.'

The same pattern of events was taking place in America. When Robert Dale Owen published his *Moral Physiology* in 1831, he expected 'abuse from the self-righteous . . . misrepresentation from the hypocritical, . . . reproach even from the honestly prejudiced'—and he got them all. One Boston editor described his sober and unsensational treatment of withdrawal, the sponge and the condom, as 'a mean, disgusting, and obscene book, filled with arguments that would disgrace the tenants of a brothel.' Dr. Charles Knowlton's *Fruits of Philosophy* fared even worse the next

Richard Carlile went one better than Place in his 1826 *Every Woman's Book*. He gave gossipy accounts of an English Duchess who 'never goes out to a dinner without being prepared with the sponge', and French and Italian women who 'wear them fastened to their waists, and always have them at hand'. His vulgar approach upset plenty of people—including his own wife.

year. Not only was his recommendation of the syringe proclaimed a 'Complete Recipe' for a 'Strumpet', but Dr. Knowlton was sentenced to three months' hard labour on the strength of it.

Despite occasional legal intervention, for the next few decades contraceptive knowledge percolated quietly down through American society, until by 1867, the Reverend John Todd, in his dramatically titled *Serpents in the Doves' Nest*, could complain that *only* children were common, and parents openly boasted of having no more. According to him:

There is scarcely a young lady in New England—and probably it is so throughout the land—whose marriage can be announced in the paper, without her being insulted within a week by receiving through the mail a printed circular, offering information and instrumentalities, and all needed facilities, by which the laws of heaven in regard to the increase of the human family may be thwarted.

Anthony Comstock soon put a stop to all that. An ex-grocer's clerk with a 'mission' in life, he managed to push a bill through Congress in 1873 making it illegal for anyone to send contraceptive information through the post. And he set himself to trap offenders personally. When he wasn't paying prostitutes to parade in front of him naked so that he could charge them with indecent exposure, he sat down and wrote decoy letters to chemists and doctors. Within a decade, his New York Society for the Suppression of Vice had made seven hundred arrests, and confiscated so many copies of a Dr. Foote's *Words in Pearl* that not a single one remains to this day. This kind of persecution scared off most people, and it wasn't until Margaret Sanger arrived on the



Anthony Comstock, perpetrator in the 1870's of America's 'blue laws', which turned anyone who sent contraceptive information through the post into a 'criminal'. He liked making his arrests personally—and left an incredibly long legacy in some States. As late as 1961 attempts to open a birth control clinic in Connecticut resulted in arrests, fines and closure.

scene in the 20th century that anyone was really prepared to take Comstock on. She fired her first major broadside in 1914, with a birth control issue of her monthly newsheet *The Woman Rebel*. This was promptly banned, and the popular press amused themselves with headlines like 'WOMAN REBEL' BARRED FROM MAILS . . . They should be barred from her and spelled differently.' Undeterred, she set about getting her pamphlet called *Family Limitation* printed—no easy matter when even a 'liberal' printer gulped at the sight of it and muttered 'it's a Sing-Sing job'. Copies of the book were distributed by hand from various centres, but when an outraged Comstock set off to arrest her, she'd already fled to England to prepare her defence case. Equally undeterred, Comstock returned home and wrote a decoy letter to her husband, with the result that *he*

was arrested for sending a copy of *Family Limitation* instead. William Sanger gave his wife the following account of Comstock's tactics:

He seemed anxious to enter into a discussion of the case . . . I refused to say anything, saying that I wished to consult my attorney.

He replied that lawyers are expensive and only aggravate the case, and, patting me on the shoulder, said he advised me, like a brother, to plead guilty, and he would recommend to the Court that I be given a suspended sentence . . .

It was also mentioned that if I would give your wherabouts I would be acquitted.

Comstock died within a fortnight of William Sanger's trial (at which the judge called Sanger a 'menace to society' and sentenced him to thirty days in jail), but neither he nor his methods would lie down. When Mrs. Sanger attempted to open a birth control clinic in 1916, a 'decoy' patient turned out to be a policewoman, and the establishment was closed down. History repeated itself in 1929, only this time, the law went too far. Policewomen over zealously confiscated private case-histories, and this breach of medical etiquette stirred up public opinion to such an extent that the head of the Policewomen's Bureau was sacked. Birth control clinics started springing up all over the place (there were nearly eighty by 1932), but Comstock still went on twitching in individual States. In Connecticut, it wasn't until 1965 that his laws were declared 'unconstitutional', and married people could use contraceptives without the possibility of arrest!

In England, the legal battle was won much sooner. Place and Carlile had broken the ice to such an extent that a

fairly constant stream of contraceptive advice followed them, though this ranged from the frivolous to the sincere. A shilling booklet *On the Use of Night-caps* extolled the use of condoms with crude humour. Written in the 1840's 'By a Married Man with Six Children!', it recommended placing 'over the gentleman's gentleman a *very fine nightcap*'. The wife might have a fit of the giggles when she first saw it, but 'Let it be tried *on*, and the experiment would not be found complete without its being tried *in*'. Dr. George Drysdale (not to be confused with brother Charles, mentioned below) took a more responsible approach in his *Physical, Sexual, and Natural Religion* in 1854. Published anonymously to avoid upsetting his mother, it contained a critical assessment of all current contraceptive methods, and maintained that they were far less 'unnatural' than practising sexual abstinence. If he'd admitted to authorship, he'd have been in for a pretty rough time anyway. All the young Viscount Amberley (Bertrand Russell's father) did was to find his book 'most interesting', and to take the chair at an 1868 meeting 'On the Happiness of the Community as Affected by Large Families'. This was enough to get him accused of 'unnatural crimes', and counselling the pure wives and mothers of England to degrade themselves 'below the level of brutes'. When he protested, the *Medical Times and Gazette* replied: 'The moral is, that if people will amuse themselves with dirt, they must not wonder if they get splashed.' As for the Roman Catholic Bishop of Liverpool, he got quite carried away in the pulpit, and accused poor Amberley (now nicknamed Vice-Count), of suggesting de-population 'by stifling children in their birth'.

It was this kind of atmosphere that finally galvanised the police into action. Knowlton's *Fruits of Philosophy* had been selling in England for years, but in 1876, they arrested a



Public opinion was as anti-contraception as the Church in 1868. When Viscount Amberley (Bertrand Russell's father) made a few harmless remarks about restricting large families, he was promptly nick-named the 'Vice-Count'. 'No more babies,' the balloon has him saying, as he sells 'depopulation mixture' in this cartoon. 'Never mind your marriage vows, never mind poisoning your mind or your Wives . . .'

bookseller for selling an edition with 'obscene' illustrations. He wasn't prepared to do battle, but Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant were. They set out to make a test-case of it, and were duly brought to trial in 1877 for publishing their own edition. Dr. Charles Drysdale said in their defence that 'one of the greatest social crimes a man could commit' was to over-burden his wife with child-bearing. The judge was sympathetic, and the jury argued for one hour and thirty-five minutes before returning an ambiguous verdict. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant appealed, and Bradlaugh even managed to sue the police successfully for all the copies of *Fruits* that had been seized prior to the trial.

This defeat left the way open for British birth controllers. When Marie Stopes opened the first London birth control clinic in 1921, the police turned a blind eye—although *The*

Times refused to announce the birth of her son in its Births-and-Deaths columns. Public opinion moved painfully slowly, and for utter rubbish, it would be hard to beat the following statement contained in 1949's Royal Commission on Population report:

There is much to be said for the view that a failure of society to reproduce itself indicates something wrong in its attitude to life which is likely to involve other forms of decadence. The cult of childlessness and the vogue of the one-child family were symptoms of something profoundly unsatisfactory in the *zeitgeist* of the inter-war period, which it may not be fanciful to connect with the sophistications and complacencies which contributed to the catastrophe of the second world war.

Even today, there's still a moral blockage. Despite provisions in the National Health Service (Family Planning) Act 1967, which authorises all local authorities to run family planning clinics, only about a third of them are prepared to do so.

Meantime, the religious picture has been changing and the Church of England's reluctant shift of attitude can be traced through the Lambeth Conference of Bishops. In 1908, it earnestly called 'upon all Christian people to discountenance the use of all artificial means of restriction as demoralising to character and hostile to national welfare.' By 1914, *The Misuse of Marriage* gave grudging approval to the 'safe' period, and prompted the Bishop of Southwark to write:

I hold that if you relax the idea that intercourse has any other purpose ultimately behind it except the production of children . . . you open a door to the lowering of the whole idea of the union between the man and the woman.

Someone did point out that this meant a man might only be able to make love to his wife seven or eight times during his entire marriage, but the Bishop returned an unruffled: 'Well, what is the harm of that?'

The 1920 Lambeth Conference condemned 'unnatural' methods again, but it was the King's physician, Lord Dawson of Penn, who hit the headlines. He announced: 'The love envisaged by the Lambeth Conference is an invertebrate, joyless thing—not worth having . . . Birth Control is here to stay.' 'LORD DAWSON MUST GO' clamoured the *Sunday Express*, adding, in that brand of journalism that never seems to change: 'The King's Physician appears wearing the grimy mantle of Malthus, the greasy robes of Bradlaugh and the frowsy garments of Mrs. Besant!'

The Bishop of Southwark and the *Sunday Express* were on the losing side. In 1930, the Conference approved contraception 'in those cases where there is . . . a clearly-felt moral obligation to limit or avoid parenthood, and where there is a morally sound reason for avoiding complete abstinence.' By 1958, the approval was entirely unqualified.

While the Church of England progressed, the Roman Catholic Church marked time. If anything, in fact, it moved backwards. There's evidence to suggest that 19th-century priests connived at contraception, and in one instance they were expressly instructed to. When Bishop Bouvier of Le Mans wrote to the papal authorities in 1842, troubled about having to tell people they'd committed a deadly sin, the Curia Sacra Poenitentiarum replied that he need not inquire into marital practices unless his opinion was called for. By 1930, however, Pope Pius XI was taking a much tougher line in his *Casti Connubii*. This swung right back to St. Thomas Aquinas, condemning all forms of contraception bar 'periodic continence' as 'against nature', and Catholic attitudes



Sex was an integral part of Indian religion, and in some sects, contraception played a leading, if unintentional, rôle. Men made love to 'those of the banana thighs' but avoided ejaculation, so that the semen could return to the brain and 'become One with the Deity'.

haven't budged since. Contraception is still seen as unnatural, regardless of the fact that most primitive peoples have practised it, and regardless of the fact that if you live up a high mountain, your fertility rate is going to drop naturally whether you like it or not. Inevitably some Pope is going to have to change his tune, but meantime, in most Catholic countries there are more abortions than births.

What has the medical profession had to say for itself all this time? Just after the Amberley affair, the *Lancet* stated its case quite clearly.

A woman on whom her husband practises what is euphemistically called 'preventive copulation' is . . . necessarily brought into the condition of mind of a prostitute . . . As regards the male, the practice, in its actual character and in its remote effects, is in no way distinguishable from masturbation.

Small wonder that when Dr. H. A. Allbutt published his *The Wife's Handbook* in 1886, he was struck off the medical register. It's worth quoting another tirade from an 1887 *Lancet*, just to show how little help a woman could expect from her family doctor.

This abomination (i.e., contraception) has lately forced itself into notice in a manner which can no longer be ignored by clean people. In common with most medical men I have had some hazy notion that . . . there has been for many years an illicit traffic in various preventatives of pregnancy. Now and again such information is cunningly worked up into an advertisement, and meets the eye amongst such innocent company as the last fashion in sanitary undergarments and the latest fad in tinned beef. But I had yet to learn that the druggist's shop was the centre from which such drugs and instruments were now distributed, accompanied with the fullest directions in plain matter-of-fact language . . . Catalogues of the various articles are issued, numbered in regular order; . . . the drugs are put in little boxes and large—a reduction on the larger size; . . . travellers go about the country showing their samples, and . . . catalogues are distributed by post to probably every address in the trade directory; and . . . there is also a pamphlet for home reading, written as a dialogue between two men—the one prosperous and happy, and the other poor and needy in everything except a large family.

You, Sirs, may easily plead that this subject is not one a decent man would care to handle with a pair of tongs; but I trust you will agree with me in the hope that . . . the medical profession . . . must never identify itself in this matter, however indirectly; and that . . . if this evil is to

continue, at all events it shall never exist as a sidewing of the healing art.

Feelings were the same in America. Physicians were having 'nothing to do with the nasty business', though a Dr. Thomas E. McArdle tried to scare women off contraception in 1888. His paper on 'The Physical Evils Arising from the Prevention of Conception', asked:

Can anything be done by us to save women from the uterine disorders so probably consequent upon the adoption of methods to prevent conception? We all, of course, tell those who consult us that there is no specific for the prevention of conception other than total abstinence. But are we emphatic enough in our assertion that such measures are harmful to soul and body?

The majority of doctors were. Contraception was held responsible for cancer, ovarian dropsy, sterility, mania leading to suicide, and worst of all in the opinion of Dr. Routh, 'the most repulsive nymphomania'. It was inexcusable, and it didn't make any difference if a woman's health would be endangered by a further pregnancy. As the *Lancet* had written earlier:

If a woman is aware that her pelvis is so deformed that it is physically impossible that anything can pass through it and retain life, why is she at liberty to continue connexion with her husband when she knows that the inevitable consequence will be the destruction of her child? Would it not be a merciful act to place a penalty upon that woman's becoming again pregnant, being morally on her part a case of murder?

It's easy to blame everything on the Victorian era, but for

sheer brutality, the following excerpt from a letter to the *Lancet* remains unsurpassed. It was written in 1960.

Sir, Although long threatened I hope some others groaned to learn from the daily press that an oral contraceptive has reached clinical trial in Birmingham . . .

I see no difference in this approach from the requests of those earnest young men who occasionally arrive in the consulting-room and ask if their *vasa* can be tied. We are surely agreed what we do with them: say no, politely, and if that fails to sink, ask them what kind of animals they think we operate on.

The medical profession, along with St. Paul, has got a lot to answer for.

I The Ancient Art of Withdrawal

Withdrawing the penis from the vagina just before ejaculation (officially known as *coitus interruptus*) is the oldest contraceptive technique in the world. It's the most widespread too, probably because all it takes is split-second timing and plenty of will-power.

When Onan spilled his seed

The Ancient Hebrews obviously had both. Earliest known practitioner was Onan, and though for some inexplicable reason 'onanism' has come to mean masturbation, the following verses from Genesis make it quite clear what he was up to:

Then Judah told Onan to sleep with his brother's wife, to do his duty as the husband's brother and raise up issue for his brother. But Onan knew that the issue would not be his; so whenever he slept with his brother's wife, he spilled his seed on the ground so as not to raise up issue for his brother. What he did was wicked in the Lord's sight, and the Lord took his life.

Most people have taken this to mean that the Lord was infuriated by contraception. Even Rabbis condemned withdrawal, or as they preferred to term it, 'ploughing in the garden and emptying upon the dunghill'. But Onan's real crime probably lay in flouting the levirate marriage custom. This decreed that when a man died without sons, his brother had to marry the widow, and give her sons that could be brought up under the deceased man's name. Onan didn't want to produce children 'by proxy', so he tried to wriggle out of his responsibilities. And this could be what God struck him down for—his disobedience rather than the way he disobeyed. (The poor widow-woman by the way, got a pretty raw deal all round. When Onan's younger brother

grew up he didn't even marry her, so she dressed up as a prostitute, waylaid father-in-law Judah, and made up for lost time by giving birth to his twins.)

Later Rabbis did interpret the story in terms of social customs. They approved of withdrawal where a woman's health might suffer from pregnancy, or in Rabbi Eliezer's A.D. 100 euphemism, allowed a man to 'thresh inside and winnow outside'.

How to become an Immortal

The Ancient Chinese wouldn't have done anything as barbaric as spill *their* seed. Men believed its supplies were strictly limited and hoarded it up however many women they slept with. In fact, they slept with as many as they could get hold of, but without ejaculating, because they believed that a woman's *yin* essence (vaginal secretions) would strengthen their *yang* essence (semen). This had two purposes. It meant that when they wanted to get a woman pregnant they'd be sure of top-quality sperm, and it also meant that they'd live to a ripe old age. As one sage wrote ruefully:

The Yellow Emperor had intercourse with twelve hundred women and thereby became an Immortal. Ordinary men have but one woman, and that one suffices to make them perish.

The Plain Girl explained the matter more fully around the 6th century A.D.

If a man engages once in the act without emitting semen, then his vital essence will be strong. If he does this twice, his hearing and vision will be acute. If thrice, all diseases will disappear. If four times, his soul will be at peace. If five times, his blood circulation will be improved. If six

times, his loins will become strong. If seven times, his buttocks and thighs will increase in power. If eight times, his body will become glossy. If nine times, he will reach longevity. If ten times, he will be like an Immortal.

The snag was, of course, that he had to do it ten times in the same night and with ten different women. How was he supposed to control himself, especially when he had to stay inside each woman as long as possible to absorb the maximum amount of *yin*? A 1598 Ming text suggested:

Every man who has obtained a beautiful 'crucible' will naturally love her with all his heart. But every time he copulates with her he should force himself to think of her as ugly and hateful.

A nip in the bud

If this failed, he could try the advice in the *Classic of the Immortals* from about a thousand years back:

The way to make the semen return to enforce the brain is thus. When, during the sexual act the man feels he is about to ejaculate, he must quickly and firmly press with fore and middle finger of the left hand the spot between scrotum and anus, simultaneously inhaling deeply and gnashing his teeth scores of times, without holding his breath. Then the semen will be activated but not yet be emitted; it returns from the Jade Stalk and enters the brain.

As it happens, the semen only quits the Jade Stalk for the bladder, and passes out quite harmlessly the next time the man urinates. This extraordinary practice (officially known as *coitus obstructus*) does work for anyone with the nerve to grip his testicles tightly. Indians seem to have known all

about it, though Kokkoka, who mentions it in his pre-14th-century Sanskrit *The Secret of Sexual Desire*, only suggests it as a delaying tactic, so that the woman can catch up with her orgasm.

If one at the time of sexual enjoyment presses firmly with the finger on the fore part of the testicle, turns his mind to other things, and holds his breath while doing so, a too rapid ejaculation of the sperm will be prevented.

The method's still in use now, and though doctors consider it harmful, a 1953 *International Journal of Sexology* reported a couple who'd practised it successfully for thirteen years.

The master and the slave girl

Greeks and Romans don't seem to have known about *coitus interruptus*, let alone *coitus obstructus*. They probably couldn't be bothered. Abortion and infanticide were solving their population problems quite efficiently enough. Arabs, on the other hand, had long been familiar with withdrawal. They called it *azl*, and it was routine procedure when a master slept with a slave girl—perhaps because offspring could have claimed rights of inheritance. Feelings were mixed when it came to wives. Al-Ghazali, in his 11th century *Good Manners concerning Coitus*, wondered if withdrawal was quite in keeping with the spirit of marriage, but even he agreed it was necessary in cases of 'financial hardship', or when the husband's 'continued enjoyment of marital rights' was being put in jeopardy.

As for Mahomet, he hadn't found the spilling of seed 'wicked in his sight', or if he had, he'd neglected to say so. This meant that physicians had a free hand to discuss contraception, and Rhazes made the most of it towards the end

of the 9th century. Rhazes was a Persian (nobody knows when he was born, but he died in A.D. 923), blessed with the Arabic name of Abu Bakr Muhammed ibn Zakariya al-Razi. He compiled several encyclopedic works, wrote a famous treatise on measles and smallpox, and included the following in his *Quintessence of Experience*:

Occasionally it is very important that the semen should not enter the womb . . . or, if it has entered, that it should come out again. There are several ways of preventing its entrance. The first is that at the time of ejaculation the man withdraw from the woman so that the semen does not approach the *os uteri*. The second is to prevent ejaculation, a method practised by some.

Parting is such sweet sorrow

Avicenna was the next Islamic physician to turn his attentions to withdrawal. He was born Abu Ali-al-Husain ibn Abdallah ibn Sina, at Bukhara in 980, dying in Africa at the age of 57. During his life, he tackled mathematics, astronomy and philosophy, as well as compiling vast medical encyclopedias. His *Canon* alone contained about a million words, so it's a little disproportionate that the only words he could spare for *azl* were to recommend: ' . . . the quick separation of the two individuals.' Zain al-din Abu-l-Fada'il Ismail ibn al-Husain al-Jurjani, another Persian, who lived in the first half of the 12th century, only wrote a quarter of a million words in his *Treasure of Medicine Dedicated to the King of Khwarazm*, but he managed to say:

One plan is for the man at the time of intercourse and of the seminal emission to abstain from holding the woman close to himself, to raise her thighs, and rapidly to come apart from her.

Middle-age Europe was in the Dark Ages compared to Islam. Around 1400, Chaucer was taking the stock Christian view that to practise contraception was the same as to commit murder. He even referred to withdrawal in his 'Parson's Tale', saying that when men 'shedeth hire nature in manere or in place ther as a child may nat be conceived . . . yet is it homicide'. This rigid attitude dried up any serious contraceptive information at source, and for centuries Europe had to rely on superstitions.

Watching for the tidal wave

The French were the first to defy the Church and decide that sex was for pleasure as well as propagation. Predictably the moral rot set in at the top, and according to Henri Estienne in 1566, only noble ladies used means of preventing pregnancy. Disappointingly, he didn't tell which. Brantôme (1540–1614) was much more explicit, and told of wives who didn't mind their husbands 'making as merry as possible inside them' as long as they didn't receive any of the semen. Or in the words of 'une Grande' to her 'serviteur', 'Disport yourself and give me pleasure; but take care not to sprinkle me inside, not with a single drop, or it will be a matter of life or death'. Of course the man had to be *sage* and watch out for the 'tidal wave'. In 1655, *L'Escole des Filles*, dedicated to all 'Belles et Curieuses Damoiselles', made the same suggestion in dialogue form between Suzanne (experienced older woman) and Franchon (eager young virgin). Suzanne told of young men who contented themselves with ejaculating between their lovers' thighs, buttocks, breasts or hands. 'Après?' asked Franchon breathlessly. Suzanne continued with girls who allowed their lovers entry and freedom of movement in their vaginas, provided they withdrew when smartly slapped.

The sexual atmosphere in France was far freer than in England, and aristocratic know-how met little resistance as it spread downwards. By 1782, Père Féline was lamenting that 'This wretched frame of mind is common to rich and poor . . . so it is the fatal cause of the damnation of a good many people.'

England lagged far behind. 18th-century rakes may have worn condoms to protect them from V.D., but the average man remained ignorant, while the average wife had babies. It wasn't until 1823 that contraceptive knowledge reached a wider audience, with the first of the 'diabolical handbills' by Francis Place. Place was a working-class man who'd been a fighter for the rights of the poor all his life. At the age of 21, he'd lost his job (he was a leather-breeches maker at the time, but eventually became a successful tailor) for organising strike pay for fellow-workers. Later, he worked on a scheme for free elementary education, and he was continually mixing with political radicals—a trouble-maker if ever there was one. What enraged people about his handbills as much as anything was that they were so easy to understand. Called *To the Married of Both Sexes*, they gave straightforward instructions on how to use a sponge (see Chapter 5), and continued:

The other method resorted to, when from carelessness or other causes the sponge is not at hand, is for the husband to withdraw, previous to emission, so that none of the semen may enter the vagina of his wife.

A much more genteel method

Place later dropped withdrawal, much to the disgust of a reader signing himself I. C. H., who had a similar but much more genteel method to recommend. Called *La Chamade* (the Retreat), *La Prudence* or *La Discretion*, it contained

'nothing injurious to the health, nothing offensive to the nicest delicacy'. I. C. H. began by pointing out that when a man is about to ejaculate, he 'not only advances instinctively as far as possible, but even struggles violently to get farther and thus gives an impulse to the seed, so as sometimes to throw it into the womb . . .'. His suggested remedy lay in a partial withdrawal, whereby the man 'at the moment of spending' jerks over to the left, 'by which motion he not only in some measure extricates the part, but gives it also a slanting direction . . .'. For people who doubted the speed of their reflexes, he was ready with the following dialogue:

Those to whom this is made known for the first time always object that 'I do not perceive the moment, and if I did, it would be impossible to escape.' The answer is 'You have not hitherto attended to it; attend, and you will observe it.' 'But it comes so quickly that there is no time to escape'. It does indeed come so quickly that to escape altogether is impossible, but fortunately that is not necessary . . .'

I. C. H. concluded with an interesting aside on contemporary Englishmen:

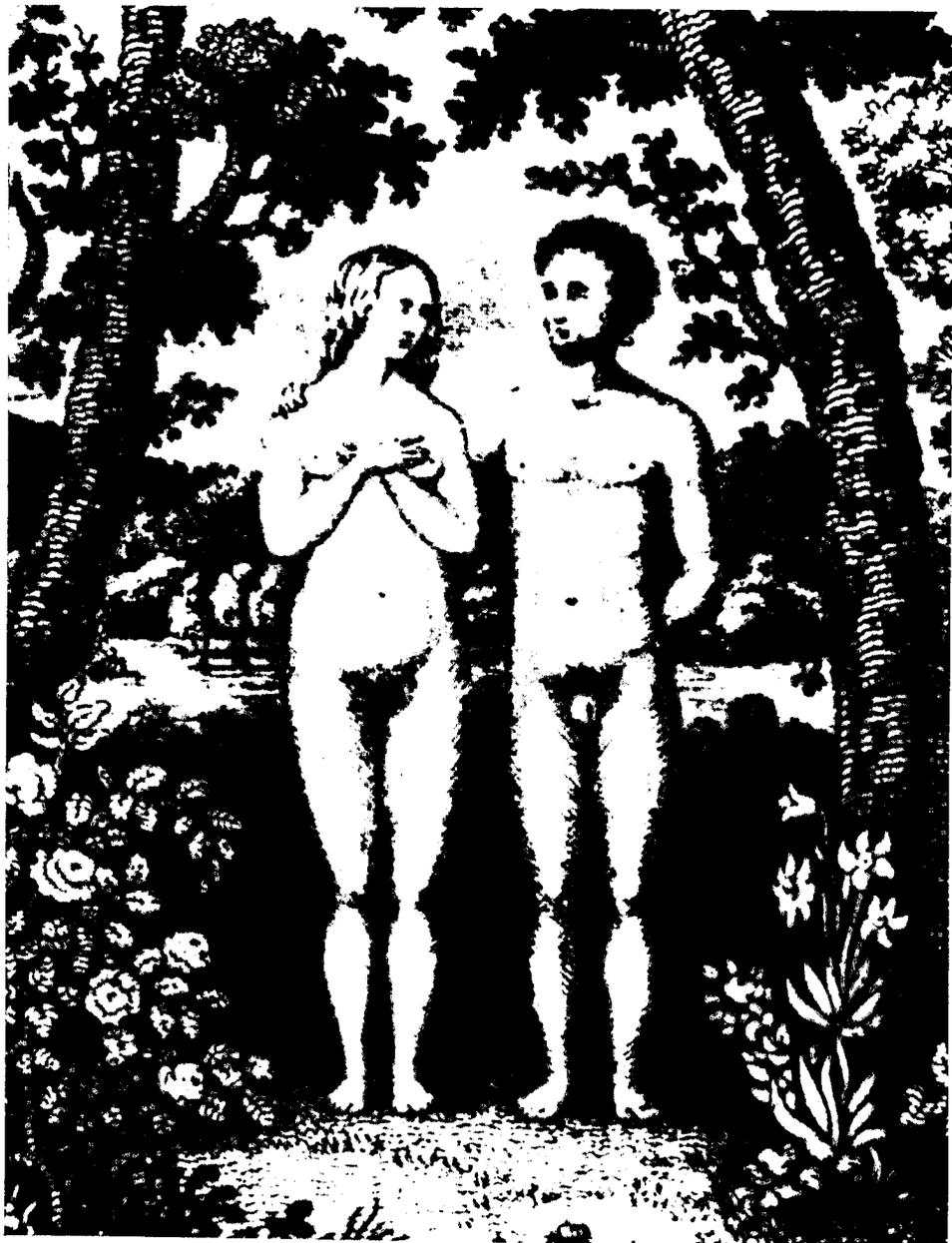
La Belle Discretion is little known in England, because, when the English go abroad; they take with them, amongst their other national habits, that of associating almost entirely with women of the town, and besides, their character for obstinate prejudices, and the most perverse and ignorant self-will, is so firmly established, that women of honour will rarely trust themselves to the discretion of an Englishman, but will require the odious and unhealthy preliminary, called, *moucher la Chandelle* [snuffing the candle—the condom?] or some gross mechanical precaution.'

A Licence to Love?

For about a year, printer Richard Carlile opposed Place and his contraceptive views. Another working-class radical, he was fighting for freedom of the press, and spent years in jail for publishing 'seditious' books like Thomas Paine's *The Rights of Man* and *The Age of Reason*. In his opinion, fear of pregnancy was the greatest preserver of chastity, and without it, there would be a 'general gratification of this common desire.' As he wrote to Place: 'No one shall persuade me but that healthy girls, after they pass the period of puberty, have an almost constant desire for copulation.' Later he admitted that 'I felt and wrote like a prude on the subject; for I always was a bit of a prude.' Then, with the zeal of the newly converted, he published *What is Love?* in his journal *The Republican*, and reprinted it in 1826 as *Every Woman's Book; or What is Love?* By happy coincidence, another *Every Woman's Book* appeared that year—a cookery book—so some housewives may have found a few recipes they didn't bargain for.

Carlile ran through the various types of contraceptives available, and considered complete withdrawal a 'certain means', adding '. . . some women, particularly those of the Continent, will make it a part of the contract for intercourse, and look upon the man as a dishonest brute who does not attend to it.' For those who couldn't manage it, he recommended partial withdrawal, with the man 'lying in a parallel line on the female, leg on leg, at the time of emission', so that the semen got emitted below the womb instead of directly into it. Carlile rightly felt a bit dubious about that one.

Most people steered clear of Place and Carlile and tried not to get involved in the sordid subject of contraception. Only a few brave individuals were capable of approaching



Full frontal nudity on the frontispiece of Carlyle's 1826 *Every Woman's Book*, which placed great faith in withdrawal as a means of contraception. 'Some women, particularly those of the Continent, will make it a part of the contract for intercourse, and look upon the man as a dishonest brute who does not attend to it,' he confided to his readers.

it rationally instead of in a welter of confused emotions. John Stuart Mill was one of them (and when he died, Gladstone withdrew support from a proposed public memorial because of it). At the tender age of 17, Mill was traipsing round London distributing Place's handbills, and writing that contraception was no more unnatural than putting up an umbrella against the rain. In 1841, he quite possibly wrote *Notes on the Population Question* under the name of 'Anti-Marcus'—an understandable caution, as some birth control pioneers spent large slices of their lives in jail for 'obscenity'. This preferred withdrawal, as 'all other methods that have yet been devised are apt to be highly offensive to the delicacy of women.' It couldn't have had much success, though. By 1868, he was still writing:

The idea, in this country, never seems to enter any one's mind that having or not having a family, or the number of which it shall consist, is wholly amenable to their own control. One would imagine that children were rained down upon married people, direct from heaven, without their being art or part in the matter . . .

How the New World lost its innocence

Across the Atlantic, America was beginning to join the fray. Red Indian tribes had always been happy to have children (but see Chapter 6), and continued so, according to one 1891 report stating that 'the very young women are eager to become impregnated, that they may not be compelled to go to the Government school.' However, the New World lost its innocence with the arrival of the Puritan Fathers in the Mayflower. Governor Bradford's *Of Plimmoth Plantation*, a history of the colony written between 1630 and 1650, tells the story of a devout young man, who asked the local minister to look over his intended bride, because he wanted

to make the right choice in the eyes of God. After several private conferences the minister recommended her warmly—and not without cause, as it subsequently turned out. For once the bride-to-be had become a wife, and realised what marriage was all about, she confessed that he had ‘overcome her, and defiled her body.’ Bradford forbears to give the full circumstances ‘for they would offend chaste ears to hear them related, for though he satisfied his lust on her, yet he endeavoured to hinder conception.’ Of course it can only be guesswork, but his endeavours probably took the form of withdrawal.

It wasn’t until the 19th century, when the works of Place and Carlile began to make their mark, that America played an important part in contraceptive history. Robert Dale Owen started the ball rolling—and in fact—he wasn’t an American at all. He was a Scotsman, and he’d arrived at New Harmony in Indiana with his father, to start up an ‘ideal’ community. At first, he tried his hand at manual labour (it was a communistic society and he felt guilty about having brains), but he proved so hopeless, he was forced to edit the *New Harmony Gazette* instead. Later (when the ideal community broke up), he edited the *Free Enquirer*, and turned it into the most radical paper of his day. It was with this background that he read Carlile’s *Every Woman’s Book*. And as it happened, all he did was express his verbal approval, and refuse to publish it because ‘prejudices’ would destroy its ‘present usefulness’. Nevertheless, two years later an anonymous pamphlet appeared in New York entitled: *Robert Dale Owen Unmasked by His Own Pen: Showing His Unqualified Approbation of a Most Obscenely Indelicate Work . . . Destructive to Conjugal Happiness—Repulsive to the Modest Mind . . . and Recommending the Promiscuous Intercourse of Sensual Prostitution*. This stung him into retaliation. By 1831, he’d

published his own *Moral Physiology*, dealing with withdrawal, the sponge and the condom.

What every gentleman should know

According to Owen, withdrawal was a 'point of honour', and 'a Frenchman belonging to the cultivated classes, would as soon bear to be called a coward, as to be accused of causing the pregnancy of a woman'. In fact, such a faux pas would 'shut him out for ever from all decent society . . .' He backs up his advice with the first contraceptive case histories ever:

I knew personally and intimately for many years a young man of strict honour . . . who 'having consulted with his young wife, practised this restraint . . . with perfect success . . . He told me, that though he felt the partial privation a little at first, a few weeks' habit perfectly reconciled him to it . . .'

Another 'respectable and very intelligent father of a family' residing west of the mountains, had practised withdrawal for seven or eight years and produced no further children. Again; 'custom completely reconciled him to any slight privation.' Back in England, the anonymous author of *On the Use of Night-Caps* (an advertising-disguised-as-editorial tract for condoms) was not so easily convinced. He thought Owen and his ilk must be cold-blooded, adding 'How a gentleman . . . could make a practice, in the very moment of unutterable ecstasy, of withdrawing from the arena, is more than I can conceive.'

Tasting the honey without wounding the flower

America may have been slow in getting started, but it soon embraced the cause with religious fervour. Literally so. One

John Humphrey Noyes (1811–1886) appointed himself ‘God’s true representative’ to preach the gospel. His creed was that near relation of *coitus interruptus* and *coitus obstructus*—*coitus reservatus*, where ejaculation never takes place, and the penis stays in the vagina until it subsides. Despite claims of divine inspiration, Noyes didn’t invent this method. As we have seen, the Chinese beat him to it by thousands of years, and back in 17th century Japan, Yokiken Kaibara recommended it for old men who couldn’t afford to waste their strength. Even in England, ‘Walking Stewart’ (1749–1822), an eccentric who took nearly forty years to cross four continents, may have used it after the age of 60 to conserve his ‘vitality’. He contented himself with ‘female dalliance’, but doesn’t make it clear exactly how he dallied. At any rate, it was ‘without injury to their sex, and without danger to my own constitution’, and enabled him to ‘taste the honey without wounding the flower.’

Nevertheless, Noyes was the first to value it as means of preventing pregnancy. He needed to, with the kind of religious community he’d set up at Oneida in 1848. Based on ‘complex marriage’, every man was free to be the ‘husband’ of every woman. Or in his words: ‘In a holy community there is no more reason why sexual intercourse should be restrained by law, than why eating and drinking should be . . . I call a certain woman my wife; she is yours; she is Christ’s; and in Him she is the bride of all saints. She is dear in the hands of a stranger . . .’ Noyes had authority to arrange matings to improve the stock biologically. This was important, as he believed he had been chosen by God to create a new race. But where sexual intercourse was ‘a purely social affair, the same in kind with other modes of kindly interchange’, women were at liberty to accept or reject their would-be lovers. Community members seem to



Playtime at the American Oneida community. 'In a holy community there is no more reason why sexual intercourse should be restrained by law, than why eating and drinking should be', claimed 19th-century founder John Humphrey Noyes. Matings were arranged for breeding purposes, but where sex was a 'purely social affair', it was a free-for-all, with men practising 'male continence' to avoid confusing the issue.

have been fairly obedient to the rule of 'ascending fellowship' however, whereby older members were paired off with younger ones. Regarding this, one scandalised visitor in 1870 wrote 'The majority of the old women are hideous and loathsome in appearance, and it seems to me the most horrible fate in the world to be linked with one of them'.

To those who thought 'male continence' an inferior substitute for the real thing, Noyes opposed:

Suppose then, that a man . . . should content himself with simple *presence* continued as long as agreeable? Would there be any harm? . . . I appeal to the memory of every man who has had good sexual experience to say whether,

on the whole, the sweetest and noblest period of intercourse . . . is not that *first* moment of simple presence and spiritual effusion, before the muscular exercise begins. But we may go farther. Suppose the man chooses . . . to enjoy not only the simple *presence* but also the *reciprocal motion*, and yet to stop short of the final *crisis*. Again I ask, Would there be any harm?

He compared the situation to a stream in the three conditions of a fall, with still water above the rapids, a course of rapids above the fall, and finally the fatal fall itself. A 'skilful boatman' could risk venturing into the rapids, but Noyes warned that struggling against the current to avoid getting swept away, would 'give his nerves a severe trial'.

When the kissing had to stop

While he rhapsodied about 'the refining effects of sexual love', the outside world was getting restive. He saw his community as somewhere where 'amative intercourse' would have place among the fine arts, taking rank above 'music, painting, sculpture etc.', and leaving 'as much room for cultivation of taste and skill in this department as any'. But a local Professor denounced it as a 'Utopia of obscenity' and an 'outgrowth of lust'. It did have its dirty old men, but they were dealt with drastically, like the unfortunate William Mills. In his sixties and with an old and ugly wife, he tried bribing all the young girls with candy and alcohol—but was cast out into a snowdrift for his pains. Unfortunately, Noyes himself didn't behave much better in his later years. He fathered eight children after the age of 58, making himself an easy target for opponents. And as outside pressure built up, the community began to crumble. First to go was 'complex marriage'; next the simple form of

communism that had been practised. Monogamy and private property came back hand in hand, until by 1881, the community had turned into a joint-stock company manufacturing mousetraps and silverware. Though it may not be the gift to posterity Noyes had intended, you can still buy Oneida cutlery today.

An intellectual exercise

Noyes' fame spread across the Atlantic in his time, where 'Recently in England a group of eight intellectuals put male continence to the test for several months, and I have a very beautiful statement from the lady promoter in which she says "I have never seen anything but good come from this training".' Described as Case No. 1,001 in Marie Stopes' *History of Contraception*, the Noyes convert explains: 'It was not until at 53 I was married and could test the Oneida method, but when I did so, I found it easy, healthful, safe, and all that could be desired.' Marie Stopes' own definition of male continence is mind-boggling: 'The union is protracted, and the erection, after being active for a length of time varying from twenty minutes to ten hours, naturally subsides before withdrawal from the vagina.'

Noyes might have departed, but male continence went on under more exotic names. Dr. Alice Bunker Stockham (1833-1912) called it 'Karezza', and wrote a book by that name. She blamed *coitus interruptus* for numerous horrors, including impotence, nervous diseases, and even sterility. On the other hand, *coitus reservatus* offered 'the highest possible enjoyment, no loss of vitality, and perfect control of the fecundating power'. Her idea of 'Karezza' was spiritual rather than physical. Days of 'thoughtful preparation' should precede each act of intercourse—which was scheduled to last one hour. Intervals of two to four weeks, or

even better, three to four months, were recommended in between encounters, and all lustful thoughts were to be banished.

How to have a continual honeymoon

George Noyes Miller (1845-1904) called it 'Zugassent's Discovery'. He promoted this 'pure and innocent' method of limiting families with personal testimonials. The 24-year-old J. G. wrote: 'I have had a continuous honeymoon for years'; 70-year-old W. S. F. contributed: 'Thanks to 'Zugassent's Discovery', my health is good, and I am as vigorous sexually as ever I was. My only regret is that I was not informed of it earlier in life.' L. S. T. supplied the female viewpoint.

My prosaic and sometimes indifferent husband has changed by a heavenly magic into an ardent and entrancing lover, for whose coming I watch with all the tender raptures of a schoolgirl. His very step sends a thrill through me, for I know that my beloved will grasp me and clasp me and cover me with kisses . . . My lover! my hero! my knight! my husband! I date my marriage from the time that he became a student of 'Zugassent'.

Male continence didn't have a specific name in Italy, but according to Bloch's *The Sexual Life of our Times* (his times were the turn of the century), something similar was going on there. He describes 'the prolongation of sexual enjoyment by means of *repeated* interruptions of the act, followed by *renewed* erections'—and considered it 'extremely harmful'. To be fair though, he quotes Fürbringer as saying that far from causing any ill effects, some men were sufficiently relaxed 'to find time during the act for smoking and reading.'

Could Onan have died of natural causes?

Coitus reservatus fans defended their technique as harmless—but placed common-or-garden *coitus interruptus* on a par with masturbation. These two ‘vices’ were always getting bracketed, and the French moralist Bergeret didn’t bother to distinguish between them when he condemned ‘conjugal onanism’ in 1868. As masturbation was being blamed for everything from indigestion to death (if you don’t believe it, read Chapter 9), it didn’t take long for dire predictions to rub off on withdrawal generally. In England, Dr. George Drysdale held the practice responsible for sexual enfeeblement, nervous disorders and congestions in men; in America, Mrs. Eliza Duffey blamed it for tumours, inflammations and ulcers of the uterine system in women. But by the turn of the century, the false alarm was dying down. When David Booth pressed a patient to describe her post-*coitus-interruptus* feelings in 1906, she gave the far less sensational answer than ‘she felt she wanted to sneeze and couldn’t.’

Despite all its failings (and it’s been estimated that over a full year, it’s likely to fail 18 out of every 100 couples), withdrawal remains a world-wide method of contraception. In the United Kingdom it even rivals the Pill in popularity, and some surveys indicate that no less than 1,580,000 swinging Britishers are still happily following in Onan’s footsteps.

2 Physical Jerks versus Inertia

Sex hasn't always been a relaxing pastime. From antiquity onwards, women have been expected to leap about in the hopes of dislodging the semen—rather vain hopes, when you consider the evidence. For looks couldn't be more deceiving where the average male ejaculate is concerned. It may only amount to a miserable half-teaspoonful—but that half-teaspoonful's seething with anything from 200-900 million sperms—all dead set on getting home and dry—and needing only thirty seconds to nip into the safety of the cervix.

A shaky proposition

Hippocrates seems to have started it all, or if not Hippocrates (this most famous of all Greek physicians lived from 460–377 B.C., but little if any of his original writings remain), one of his many contemporary imitators. *On the Nature of Women* states:

After coitus, if a woman ought not to conceive, she makes it a custom for the semen to fall outside when she wishes this.

It doesn't go into details, but elsewhere, the writer tells of a promiscuous girl musician who'd been using the method successfully for some time. However, one day she 'noticed that the semen had not flowed out', and told her remarkably tolerant husband about it. 'The report' says the writer 'even got to me'. Again, he doesn't go into details, so we've no way of knowing how she usually jettisoned her load, but if the Hippocratic suggestion for procuring an abortion is anything to go by ('jumping so that the buttocks are touched by the feet') it was probably fairly strenuous.

Strenuous efforts *during* intercourse sound a far more attractive proposition, although Roman poet Lucretius (99–55 B.C. and recommended reading for A-level Latin

takers) disapproved of them strongly. It wouldn't be part of the school set text, but he thought 'effeminate motions' hindered conception by driving 'the furrow' (i.e., vagina) out of the direct course and path of 'the share' (i.e., penis). 'And thus' he continued piously 'for their own ends harlots are wont to move, in order not to conceive and lie in child-bed frequently, and at the same time to render Venus more attractive to men. This our wives have surely no need of.' On the contrary, wives were expected to crouch obediently 'after the manner of wild beasts and quadrupeds, because the seeds in this way can find the proper spots . . .' Dreary breeding was their honourable lot, which is probably why Antony was busy preferring Cleopatra to Octavia around the time Lucretius was writing.

Soranus was the next great physician to think of shaking the sperm away. Another Greek, he lived from A.D. 98–138, studied at Alexandria, and practised in Rome under the same Hadrian that built the wall. He wrote about forty treatises, all exceptional for their good sense and rationality, so it's a pity our first quote has to be so ludicrous. His *Gynaecology* suggests:

. . . the woman ought, in the moment during coitus when the man ejaculates his sperm, to hold her breath, draw her body back a little so that the semen cannot penetrate into the *os uteri*, then immediately get up and sit down with bent knees, and in this position, provoke sneezes.

Twist and Shout

Ancient Hebrews probably went through similar contortions, because the *Talmud*, the traditional body of Hebrew law, lists violent twisting movements as a means of preventing pregnancy. However, it was left to 9th to 10th-



RASIS

century Islamic physician Rhazes to detail just how violent:

. . . immediately after ejaculation, let the two come apart and let the woman rise roughly, sneeze and blow her nose several times, and call out in a loud voice. She should jump violently backwards seven to nine paces.'

As if this wasn't enough, if she still suspected she was pregnant, 'She should indulge in violent movements and vigorous sexual intercourse. Joking too is useful'.

Avicenna added one vital proviso a century later: the woman must be sure to jump backwards, because 'jumping and leaping *forwards* causes the sperm to remain.' And al-Jurjani realised that men might have to take the initiative with sleepy women:

When the male does come apart from her, he should order her to have a good shake seven times. When they get up, he should again try to make her expel the semen. For this he should cause her to sneeze.

Seven of course, is a magical number—not much use in contraception, if all the seventh sons of seventh sons are to be credited.

Islamic physical jerks arrived in Europe via Albert the Great—a bishop, the most learned man of his day, compiler of two vast encyclopedias, and ironically, the teacher of St. Thomas Aquinas (see Introduction). In view of 14th-century Church attitudes, Albert could hardly put over contraceptive information as such, so instead, he listed the 'human errors' that could prevent a couple from having a

Islamic physician, Rhazes, writing as the 9th century merged into the 10th, took an energetic approach to contraception. Ways for expelling semen from the vagina ranged from jumping 'violently backwards' to sitting 'upon the tips of the toes' and squeezing the navel with the thumb.



AVICENA

much-desired child. And one of them was for the woman to dislodge the semen by getting up after intercourse and jumping about. Similarly, Culpeper in his 17th-century *Aristotles Compleat Masterpiece* (not very complete, because it ignores Aristotle's contraceptive recipes) offered advice in a back-handed way. He covered himself with:

Tho' there are some that desire not to have children, and yet are fond of nocturnal embraces, to whom these directions will be in no way acceptable . . .

and then told them to *avoid* coughing, sneezing or making energetic movements after intercourse if they wanted to *promote* pregnancy.

I could have danced all night

The same notion cropped up in 19th-century America, apparently independently. Dr. Russell Thacher Trall claimed inspiration from the 'movement cure' practised in the Friendly Islands and Iceland, where:

some women have that flexibility and vigour of the whole muscular system that they can, by effort of will, prevent conception.

Suitably amended for less supple American matrons, it was suggested in his 1866 *Sexual Physiology*, a runaway best-seller that must have had many great-great-grandparents performing 'sudden and violent motions'. Trall continued:

. . . sometimes coughing or sneezing will have the same effect. Running, jumping, lifting and dancing are often resorted to successfully.

Avicenna, 11th-century Islamic physician, also believed in jumping backwards, but emphasised that 'jumping and leaping *forwards* causes the sperm to remain'. He had recommendations for men, too. They should anoint their penises with oil to prevent conception.

Contemporary Italian women were confining their antics to coughing. Dr. Allbutt's 1886 *The Wife's Handbook* describes the method as told to him by an Italian priest—a priest who, incidentally, found nothing to condemn. Catholic attitudes only seem to have hardened fairly recently.

Even in this century, primitive peoples have kept physical jerks going—they do have a commonsense basis after all—because the less sperms left inside the vagina the less the chances of pregnancy. A Resident Magistrate tells that in the Trobriand Islands in the 1930's:

. . . I have been informed by many independent and intelligent natives that the female of the species is specially endowed or gifted with ejaculatory powers, which may be called upon after an act of coition to expel the male seed.

Last one into bed . . .

Other reports deal with Australia. While native women of Port Darwin rippled the muscles of their stomachs to produce the same effect, in the North, they were adept at 'hurling forth the semen'—especially after sleeping with white men. As for the Marquesans in the Pacific (don't read this if you're squeamish) one anthropologist described a far more novel way of removing the sperms:

When a group of men went out with one woman, and had intercourse with her in rapid succession, publicly, which was a common amusement, the last man had to suck the semen from her vagina .

This couldn't have proved too successful, because the report continues with descriptions of abortions, reaching the sinister conclusion:

There seem to have been few casualties by this method, for the people were expert anatomists, due to the knowledge gained by cutting up bodies to eat.

Though there must have been an awful lot of exhausted women through the ages, there were probably just as many bored ones—but for two completely opposed reasons. The Lucretius school of thought believed that female passivity encouraged pregnancy. The oriental school of thought believed that female passivity discouraged pregnancy.

St. Thomas and the missionary position

When Lucretius disapproved of 'effeminate motions' during intercourse, he was probably disapproving of sex altogether. This was certainly the case with Christian writers. From St. Paul onwards, the only excuse for such an undignified performance was to produce children, and even then, some theologians thought you had to loathe it. This must have been difficult for men, because they'd have had to experience pleasure, albeit 'guilty' pleasure, to get an erection at all. But it wouldn't have been so difficult for women, because they're far more of a problem to arouse sexually in the first place. Female enjoyment stems from the clitoris, the small external flap of flesh that Realdus Columbus 'discovered' in 1593, marvelling that 'so many noted anatomists overlooked so pretty and useful a thing.' And unfortunately it's so small that the penis (quite irrespective of length, which is something most men fail to realise) can easily overlook it too. This means that often, the only way a woman can achieve pleasure is by dictating the action herself. She knows which movements are stimulating her clitoris, and can make sure they're repeated, with a gradual build-up of excitement. The Chinese book of *I Ching* illustrates the penis/clitoris

difference perfectly by comparing man's sexual experience to fire and woman's to water.

Fire easily flares up, but is easily extinguished by water; water takes a long time to heat over the fire, but cools down very slowly.

Well, Christian theology did its best to ensure that women never even started heating up. St. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, insisted that they lie flat on their backs, i.e., in the 'missionary' position that gives least scope for a woman's satisfaction. Any other positions were 'sinful', ostensibly because the semen might fall out, but effectually, because they'd allow a woman to contribute to the sex act, and keep moving around until she reached a climax.

'They are extraordinarily passionate'

Secular writer Musitanus didn't insist on any particular position when he wrote his *Women's Diseases* in 1709. Provided women cringed away from the experience and drew back their buttocks, they should manage to get respectably pregnant.

Passionate coitus is to be avoided, for it is unfruitful. Sometimes the woman does not draw back her buttocks, and conquers, as is the custom of Spanish women, who move their whole body when they have intercourse, from an excess of voluptuousness (they are extraordinarily passionate), and perform the Phrygian dance, and some of them passionately sing a song, which in Spanish is called 'Chaccara', and on account of this Spanish women are sterile.

This philosophy had its final flowering in Victorian England, where frigid women produced enormous families,

which of course, would have been just as enormous if they'd enjoyed themselves. There was little chance of that, though. Girls were brainwashed into believing that only loose women were capable of sexual pleasure, and their husbands would have been shocked if they'd shown any. Just one generation after Carlile had noted 'an almost constant desire for copulation' in healthy girls, the much respected venerologist William Acton was writing confidently in 1857: '... the majority of women (happily for society) are not very much troubled with sexual feelings of any kind.' He went on to describe his ideal woman (perhaps the wretched Mrs. Acton?) as follows:

She assured me that she felt no sexual passions whatsoever; that if she were capable of them, they were dormant. Her passion for her husband was of a Platonic kind . . . I believe this lady is a perfect ideal of an English wife and mother, kind, considerate, self-sacrificing, and sensible, so pure-hearted as to be utterly ignorant of and averse to any sensual indulgence, but so unselfishly attached to the man she loves as to be willing to give up her own wishes and feelings for his sake.

Staggering the orgasms

Not all women were sacrificial lambs, but plenty of them were prepared to feign sexual disinterest. This time though, they were trying to *avoid* pregnancy. The general idea was that when a woman had an orgasm, her womb sucked in the sperm with a cataclysmic muscular spasm. In other words, all she had to do was avoid reaching a climax, or at least manage to stagger it so it didn't coincide with her partner's, for conception to become an impossibility.

Chinese women seem to have avoided orgasms altogether.

They practised *kong-fou*, which entailed total passivity, and 'turning the mind to other things'. Women on Buru Island were still doing the same thing early this century, and travellers, especially if they'd been fed on the myth of the passionate savage, must have been disappointed to find them 'maintain a passive and indifferent state for the purpose of avoiding impregnation.'

Most women, however, were allowed to have an orgasm provided they watched their timing. Back in 11th-century Islam, Avicenna had insisted that 'the partners should avoid simultaneous ejaculations', and al-Jurjani had echoed him with 'They should try to avoid the orgasm being simultaneous.' Albert the Great had imported the idea to England, by listing failure to come together as one of his 'human errors'. But the 17th-century *L'Escole des Filles* gives the subject its most explicit airing. Suzanne tells Franchon that the two ejaculations must come 'one after the other,' because it's common knowledge among doctors that coming together results in pregnancy. 'This explains', she adds regretfully, 'why it feels so much better that way'.

Old wives' tales die hard, and this one has proved incredibly tenacious. In a 1970 woman's magazine agony column, a 19-year-old wife writes: 'We want a baby, but my husband always seems to reach a climax before I do. I'm worried because my friends say that I cannot conceive this way'. And according to Queen of the British Problem Pages, Marjorie Proops, the belief is well-entrenched among today's sex-instructed teenagers—proving, if nothing else, that human nature never changes.

3 The Venerable Pessary

Stopping sperms getting in or trying to shake them out are basic ploys in the art of making love but not babies. Letting them in but trying to slow them down—or even kill the persistent swimmers off—is a far more sophisticated approach. Not many primitive peoples have hit on it, and then probably more by accident than design. Achenese native women in Sumatra, for instance, used to insert pessaries kneaded from local plants, which turned out to be rich in sperm-neutralising tannic acid. They even managed to put them into their vaginas at the right time, i.e., before instead of after intercourse. (If that sounds obvious, history is full of women locking the stable door after the horse has bolted.)

Rolling your own

The oldest 'civilised' pessaries are Egyptian, though the ingredients (a few are missing because the papyrus was pieced together like an incomplete jigsaw) couldn't be cruder.

To prevent (conception) . . . Crocodile's dung cut up on auyt-paste . . .

Another medicine: 1 henu (pint) of honey. Place in the vagina; this is to be done with natron.

Another . . . upon auyt-gum, to be placed in the vagina.

They turn up in the Petri Papyrus of 1850 B.C., discovered by a 19th-century Englishman who dismissed the contents as 'obvious quackery'. But to interpret: the first recipe contains crocodile's dung and a paste-like substance, which could be rolled into a pessary and placed in the vagina. The dung might tend to neutralise the sperm (it's slightly alkaline, as Mr. Himes—author of the classic *Medical History of Contraception*—found out with Cuban crocodile samples from New York zoo); the paste-like substance

would slow down the sperm. The second recipe contains honey—and plenty of it. A pint would grind the liveliest sperms to a halt, if it didn't grind the man to a halt in the first place; the natron would tend to constrict the entrance to the womb. The third recipe recommends something on another gummy substance—but there's a gap in the papyrus when the critical something should be.

Three hundred years later, in 1550 B.C., the Ebers Papyrus was proving even more advanced. It suggested:

Tips of acacia

D'r.t'

Triturate with a measure of honey, moisten lint therewith and place in her vulva.

The honey we know about already. Fermented tips of the acacia shrub produce lactic acid—used in contraceptive jellies to this very day—so with lint providing a physical barrier as well, the chances of success would be extremely high. However, this represented a contraceptive peak for Egypt. By the time of the Berlin Papyrus, in 1300 B.C., things had gone rapidly downhill, with the writer mentioning sperm-slowing grease—but telling the woman to swallow it.

She knew what to do

It's hard to imagine Cleopatra doing anything so irrational, but she must have done something, because she only produced enough children (a son by Julius Caesar, and twins and a son by Mark Antony) to cement relationships with her lovers, instead of putting a strain on them. Of course, they may have made their own contraceptive suggestions. They'd both have been familiar with Aristotle's *Historia Animalium*, which tells women to anoint 'that part of the

womb on which the seed falls with oil of cedar, or with ointment of lead or with frankincense, commingled with olive oil.' Aristotle was one of the few classical authors to approach reproduction in a scientific light. Plato's most famous pupil, he lived from 384-322 B.C., and used the logic he's so renowned for by drawing direct comparisons between animals and humans. And although this resulted in at least one drastic error (see Chapter 7), he had a reasonably sound grasp of the basics.

Later classical writers had none whatsoever, though it didn't stop them making 'authoritative' statements. Fortunately for Cleopatra, Julius Caesar (102-44 B.C.) and Mark Antony (83-30 B.C.) lived too soon to be influenced by the ramblings of their fellow-countryman Pliny (A.D. 23-79). Pliny's *Natural History* ran into a quarter of a million words, which was typical of his approach to writing, and there's no knowing where it would have ended if Vesuvius hadn't erupted and obliterated him along with Pompeii. As for his approach to contraception, most of it was aimed at putting people off sex altogether. This couldn't have proved too successful with orgy-prone Nero, who was ruling at the time. A typical Pliny snippet reads:

According to Osthanes, if a woman's loins are rubbed with blood taken from the ticks upon a black wild bull, she will be inspired with an aversion to sexual intercourse.

It never occurred to him to be critical, and he gossiped on about lizards drowned in a man's urine, and drinking snails excrement in oil and wine. Even when he quoted Aristotle's cedar oil as something that would 'effectually prevent conception', he went and spoiled it all by telling the man to put it on his penis.

'Too late' was the cry

His contemporary Dioscorides wasn't much better. This Greek physician had an enormous influence on Europe, and when printing was invented, his works appeared in about seventy editions. He was responsible for several superstitions; also for getting the pessary a bad name. Because he claimed that pepper 'appears to prevent conception if it is introduced as a pessary *after* coitus'. From Dioscorides onwards, 'too late' must have been a universal cry.

2nd-century Soranus had a far better understanding of his subject. He said:

Further, conception is prevented by smearing the mouth of the womb with sour oil or honey or cedar gum or opobalsam, either alone or mixed with ceruse (white lead), or with ointment which is prepared with myrtle oil and ceruse, or with alum, which is likewise to be watered before coitus, or galbanum in wine.

He listed even more exotic recipes, which wouldn't have been as foolish as they sound if the fruit acids had proved spermicidal.

Unripe gallnut, pomegranate pith, ginger. Take of each two drachms, make into little balls of pea size, dry in the shade, and use as pessaries before coitus.

Or: Pulverise the pulp of dry figs with natron and use it in the same way.

Or: Pomegranate skins with gum and rose oil to equal parts.

But even Soranus blotted his copy-book. He described an elaborate pessary and gave the instructions: 'Withdraw after two or three hours, and then coitus may take place.'

A time and a place for everything

By now the before-or-after-in-the-vagina-or-on-the-penis confusion was getting into full swing. 4th-century Greek physician Oribasius wrote in his *Medical Collection*:

. . . when one wants to prevent conception before copulation one anoints the virile part of the man with 'hedy-some' juice. The application of a pessary after coitus of ground-up cabbage blossoms prevents the semen from congealing . . .

There seemed to be no way of stopping the misconception from spreading. The axis of learning was shifting from Rome to the East, and by the 6th century, the only place for a Greek physician as renowned as Aetios of Amida was at the court of Byzantium. Ladies there proved as eager as any to escape the burdens of pregnancy, but despite his good intentions, Aetios wouldn't have been much use to them. His 'barley-sized pessaries' were to be put on the cervix 'for two days immediately after the end of menstruation'. The woman had to 'remain quite tranquil for a day, and then have sexual congress, not before'. And he added modestly 'This contraceptive is infallible'. Other pessaries needed inserting beforehand, but had to be withdrawn '. . . after two hours, and then have coitus'. Timing wasn't the only issue he was confused on. He said:

The man ought to smear his penis with astringents, as for example, with alum or pomegranate or gallnut triturated with vinegar; or wash the genital organs with brine, and he will not impregnate.'

It would be funny if it wasn't so sad. Aetios had inadvertently discovered one of the most effective vaginal spermicides of all time—vinegar—and it wasn't destined to get

rediscovered for about another thirteen centuries.

Dioscorides and his successors probably didn't reach India, where the 8th century *Bridhadyogatarangini* said:

The prostitute who has intercourse with a man, after having inserted into her vagina a piece of rock salt dipped in oil, never conceives.

She wouldn't have done either, because rock salt is a very powerful spermicide—ordinary table salt, too, come to that. Just $2\frac{1}{2}$ tablespoonfuls in a pint of water should knock any sperms for six—but it's painful for the woman and causes sterility as well. Local produce varied other pessaries slightly. Honey got mixed with ghee, but the timing chaos still managed to put in an appearance:

A woman who has lost her husband, or whose husband has abandoned her, may, at her ease, have intercourse with anyone. She should afterwards insert into her vagina a foetus-preventing tampon of Ajowan seeds and rock salt ground in oil.

The more the merrier

Islamic physicians would have been familiar with classical sources, and they had plenty of their own information to add. With pessaries, it was a case of the more the merrier, and 9th-century Rhazes alone suggested at least seventeen pessaries that women could “apply to the *os uteri* before introgression’. Contents ranged from ‘cabbage’, ‘pitch’ and ‘ox-gall’ to ‘animals’s ear wax’ and ‘whitewash’. You paid your money and you took your pick, and you could even use ‘elephant’s dung’, which bulk supplies must have made far more popular than crocodile’s. 11th-century Avicenna repeated most of them, but hedged his bets by telling women

to insert pessaries *before* and *after* intercourse, and anoint the man's penis as well.

The woman must also be careful to smear tar in the vagina before and after coitus and to anoint the penis with it . . .

Many of his pessaries were complicated. They'd have demanded lengthy preparation and expensive ingredients—especially where mandrakes were called for. Mandrakes had long been sought after to promote *fertility*, which is why Jacob's wives Leah and Rachel fought over some in the Book of Genesis. (In the end, they arrived at a peaceful compromise by rejigging the conjugal timetable, with Rachel saying 'Very well, let him sleep with you tonight' in exchange for them.) Of course, the mandrake root was the important part. It was shaped like a small human being, and was supposed to screech eerily when it was uprooted. By classical times, the only way it could be dragged out of the ground was by a dog, 'a black dog that has no patch of white', and the poor animal always dropped dead in the process. It passed straight into European folk-lore, to be immortalised by 17th-century poet John Donne, with:

Goe and catche a falling starre,
Get with child a mandrake root . . .

and Charles I's herbalist John Parkinson, who reported Womandrakes, too.

A slow downhill slide

Getting back to Islam, anointing the penis stayed fashionable for some time. Oil of sesame was ideal, because the man's semen 'will not stick within the vulva, but will slip out again'. So was the 'expressed juice of onion', though if



Dioscorides' 2nd-century *Herbal* was a standard medical textbook well into the 16th century. This illustration typifies its contents. He's being handed a mandrake, supposed to promote fertility, and only capable of being uprooted by a dog, which dies (note the death throes) in the process.

it wasn't available, a tampon impregnated with seeds of leek and inserted into the woman would do just as well. The elephant's dung pessary made its final bow in the 13th century, but the last mention of the cabbage-pessary went radically wrong—the woman was told to eat it.

By the 16th century, Islamic contraceptive wisdom had degenerated into a hopeless mumbo-jumbo of magic numbers, amulets and superstitions. It was only rivalled in Europe, where people were too busy reading the apochryphal *Secrets* of Albert the Great (see Chapter 8) to bother with practical methods. Only one man seems to have been talking sense—and nobody listened. Anthony Ascham's 15th or 16th century manuscript suggested putting into the vagina a mixture of oil of spindle (which contains benzoic and acetic acids) with honey and pitch. As for the lonely reference of Musitanus in 1709, it has an English country garden charm, but the usual mis-timing would have made sure it didn't work.

It is said that either crocus or mint prevents conception, if introduced into the vagina immediately after intercourse . . .

Perhaps that's why the pessary sank into oblivion, because it didn't get 'invented' again until the 19th century.

Mr. Rendell's invention

Dr. H. A. Allbutt records the event in his 1886 *The Wife's Handbook*.

Mr. W. J. Rendell, Chemist, 26 Great Bath Street, Farringdon Road, London E.C., has invented some quinine pessaries which dissolve. They are sold at 2s. per dozen . . . There is nothing but quinine and cacao-nut butter in these pessaries, consequently nothing to irritate

either the woman's vagina or the male organ. It is but right to say that these pessaries are at present only on trial. Time will show whether they can be relied upon to prevent conception.

Time showed they were reasonably reliable, especially when used with some other method of contraception, but nasty rumours circulated nevertheless. Just as the extraordinary notion gained ground that 'there's a dud in every packet of condoms', so pessaries were supposed to have a vital ingredient missing. Marie Stopes, in her 1926 *History of Contraception* writes:

Although announcements are made by individuals from time to time to the effect that the makers of these articles are in league with the anti-birth controllers, and make individual pessaries that contain no quinine, such statements have never been authoritatively substantiated, and in my opinion they are deliberately spread by the opponents of birth control.

If women still felt uneasy the solution was simple. They could take to their kitchens and cook their own. Ingredients needed were:

Cocoa butter	$\frac{1}{4}$ lb.
Borax	5 dr.
Salicyclic acid	1 dr.
Quinine bisulphate	$1\frac{1}{2}$ dr.

The cocoa butter was to be 'melted over a slow heat' and everything else was to be 'stirred in with a wooden spoon'. When cool, all that remained was for the congealed lump to be cut up into pieces like fudge—and put out of reach of the children.

After the event

The idea of washing away and/or killing off the sperms once they'd entered the vagina is fairly recent. 2nd-century Soranus did say 'She should then wipe out the vagina carefully', but he didn't tell her how to or with what. And it certainly doesn't seem to be a case of doing-a-what-comes-naturally, because instances of douching among primitive peoples are rare. The 1908 writer of *Untrodden Fields of Anthropology* tells of natives using a solution of lemon juice (in fact, 1 tablespoonful of juice to a pint of water makes an efficient spermicide) 'mixed with a decoction of the husks of mahogany nut.' Around the same time, in what was then the Dutch East Indies, 'many women belonging to the better class use after coitus cold water douches'—though they'd have had to use plenty to produce results.

Douching probably proved unpopular because (apart from the fact that it's extremely unreliable), it's so tricky getting the liquid into the vagina. But at least one French prostitute had the tricks of the trade at her fingertips. When French satirist Mathurin Régnier ungallantly rifled through her possessions in the year 1600, he found a syringe, and three flasks of lye water—which is a weak nitric acid. (He also found a chipped cauldron, four boxes of ointment, a sponge—see Chapter 5—a probe, and a little bag of anti-VD mercury powder). Prostitutes weren't the only ones with the necessary know-how, because Parisian Madame de Sévigné was well-versed in the spermicidal uses of alum. In 1671, she was staggered to find *restrigens*, as she called it, unknown in Provence, where her recently married daughter had gone to live. 'Alas!' she exclaimed in a letter, 'What do the poor husbands do?' and she proceeded to explain its contraceptive uses for the benefit of at least one poor husband. She didn't explain its other uses, however. Alum is an

astrigent that tightens the vagina and manages to give a fair imitation of virginity. A 17th-century English play called *Sodom*, 'By E of R Written for the Royall Company of Whoremasters', described its other virtues with splendid clarity:

The already Cuckold gets a Maidenhead,
Which (is) a toyle, made of restrigent aide.
Cunt wash't with Allom makes a Whore a Maid.

(Faking maidenheads was a common pastime: Celestina, a fictional bawd from the 15th century, sometimes used needle and thread, 'and when the French Embassadour came thither, shee made sale of one of her wenches three severall times for a virgin.')

As for the French bidet (associated in everyone's minds with douching, but used just as often for washing feet), it arrived on the scene a little later, according to Lawrence Wright, 'being first mentioned in 1710 when the Marquis d'Argenson was charmed to be granted audience by Mme de Prie whilst she sat'. But though the bidet never made it across the Channel, let alone the Atlantic, the prostitute's syringe certainly did. It gets its first reference in *A Scots Answer to a British Vision* in 1706, with:

Sirenge and Condom
Come both in Request.

How much in request is impossible to ascertain. In America, it must have been very little, if at all, because in 1832, Charles Knowlton aggressively claimed it as his own 'invention'.

Any publication, great or small, mentioning the syringe . . . whatever liquid may be recommended—is a violation of my copyright . . .

A suitable case for treatment

Knowlton started life as a timid hypochondriac, morbidly worried about 'wet dreams' and hardly daring to step outside his front door. An 'ingenious mechanic' friend offered to cure his depression with electric shocks, but what really effected the cure was the mechanic's pretty daughter. Knowlton lost no time in marrying her—and never looked back from then. Despite poverty and an unprepossessing appearance, he became a successful doctor, and had settled down into a comfortable Massachusetts practice by the age of 31. But he never lost his social conscience. He worried about his poorer patients, and realising that most of their problems came from having too many mouths to feed, he freely gave them contraceptive advice when requested. In 1832, he anonymously published his information as *The Fruits of Philosophy*, and started generations of American and English women off on the syringe.

Knowlton's syringe sounds monstrous—it had a soft metal barrel and a piston head tightened with a wrapping of tow. It was to be used immediately after ejaculation, although Knowlton mistakenly thought that 'five minutes' delay would not prove mischievous'. To facilitate insertion, the woman should assume a suitable position, 'and this common-sense cannot fail to dictate.' The following solutions were recommended, including Madame de Sévigné's alum and 6th-century Aetios of Amida's vinegar.

1. Of Alum, to a pint of water, a lump as large as a large chestnut.
2. Of Sulphate of Zinc, to a pint of water, a large thimble full.
3. Of Sal Eratus, to a pint of water, two common-sized *even* teaspoons full.

4. Of good Vinegar, to a pint of water, four or five greatspoons full.
5. Liquid Chloride of Soda, to a pint of water, four or five greatspoons full.

In winter, he added that a dash of spirits would stop the liquid from freezing, concluding thoughtfully that the woman should take care the room wasn't too cold. Where special ingredients were lacking, Knowlton felt 'quite confident that a liberal use of pretty cold water would be a never-failing preventative.'

A shrug of undoubted meaning

Grossly inconvenient as the method was, by 1856, Dr. William Alcott reported that Knowlton's syringe 'is in vogue, even now, in many parts of our country, and is highly prized.' By 1867, though doubtless with the help of other methods, an English visitor wrote of American women:

. . . the fact that many of these delicate and sparkling women do not care to have their rooms full of rosy darlings is not a matter of inference. Allusions to the nursery, such as in England and Germany would be taken by a young wife as compliments, are here received with a smile, accompanied by a shrug of undoubted meaning . . .

Knowlton's book was widely read, but his syringe got unexpected publicity from Anthony Comstock. This sanctimonious bigot (see Introduction) had made it illegal to send contraceptives or contraceptive information through the post. His favourite method of trapping people was to send decoy letters, and his first victim in the 1870's, a rubber goods dealer named Kendall, went to prison for sending a vaginal syringe. From then onwards, it became known as

the 'Comstock syringe', and sales boomed throughout the country. So did prosecutions. Comstock liked the personal approach, and boasted of taking 'my man by the nape of the neck' and bundling him into a carriage. 'Thus, reader, the devil's trapper was trapped', he wrote, and it made no difference whether he was dealing with shopkeepers or qualified doctors. They were all 'abortionists' to him.

A charge of obscenity

When *Fruits of Philosophy* had first come out in America, it had been branded a 'Complete Recipe how the trade of Strumpet may be carried on without its inconveniences or dangers'—and Knowlton had been sentenced to three months' hard labour as a result. In England, an 1834 edition had been ignored by the law, and it wasn't until an 1876 version, with so-called 'obscene' illustrations, that a legal battle began. It started half-heartedly enough. Bookseller Peter Cook, when threatened with two years' hard labour, pleaded guilty to get let off with a suspended sentence. This enraged birth control militants Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant. They felt that:

The Knowlton pamphlet is either decent or indecent. If decent, it ought to be defended; if indecent, it should never have been published.

Militant is almost a pale word to describe this amazing pair. They were entirely at odds with Victorian society, probably because they'd had their noses rubbed in its hypocrisy so many times. Mrs. Besant had suffered at closest quarters. She'd married a pillar of society—the Reverend Frank Besant—who'd made such a hash of his wedding night that all she'd felt had been shame and outrage; who'd caused a premature birth by hitting her during a quarrel;

and who'd finally driven her to a nervous breakdown. Bradlaugh had only met it professionally, and he was destined to meet it still more. When he was elected M.P. for Northampton in 1880, for instance, he was continually thrown out of the House of Commons for refusing to swear the oath of allegiance on the bible. And when he was finally allowed in, 'a genial Conservative Q.C.' reproached with him, 'Good God, Bradlaugh, what does it matter whether there is a God or not?'

Mr. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant determined to defend Knowlton's pamphlet. To make sure of being prosecuted, they set up the 'Freethought Publishing Company' and re-published it. A first copy was delivered to the chief clerk at the Guildhall, and first customers included several thinly disguised police officers.

The trial opened in 1877, with the Solicitor-General maintaining:

I say that this is a dirty, filthy book, and the test of it is that no human being would allow that book to lie on his table; no decently educated English husband would allow even his wife to have it . . .

Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant conducted their own defences—so ably—that the Lord Chief Justice summed up in their favour:

A more ill-advised and more injudicious proceeding in the way of a prosecution was probably never brought into a court of justice . . .

The confused jury brought in a middle-of-the-road verdict. Mrs. Besant said it amounted to, 'Not guilty, but don't do it again', so she and Bradlaugh appealed—and finally emerged triumphant.

The Song of the Squirt

During the three months of the trial, *Fruits* had sold about 125,000 copies—and Victorian gutter writers had a field day. Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant were good for a page or two whenever news was slack, and they continued so for the next decade. Of course, accusing others of obscenity is always a good excuse for genuine obscenity, and the scurrilous William MacCall wasn't one to miss his chance. His 1884 pamphlet called *Malthusian Quackery*, had Bradlaugh and Mrs. Besant doing can-cans on heaps of dung-hills, standing in cesspools and blaspheming, and replacing the cult of the phallus with the cult of the syringe. All followers of their new religion had to 'squirt him [Brassy Cheek alias Bradlaugh] for an hour with the nastiest, most unmentionable liquids. Next, Breezy Bouncer [alias Mrs. Besant] was to put on him a crown of syringes, necklace of syringes, a girdle of syringes . . .' ending up with 'a syringe as big as a walking-stick, like a sceptre, in his hand'. As a final refinement, Breezy Bouncer sang the 'Song of the Squirt', which predictably spent most of its time rhyming with dirt.

A little more sophisticated was the anonymous :

Said good Mrs. Besant,
To make all things pleasant,
If of children you wish to be rid,
Just after coition
Prevent all fruition,
And corpse the incipient kid.

* * * *

To do this completely,
Securely and neatly,
That your conscience may suffer no twinge,

MALTHUSIAN APPLIANCES.



The Improved Vertical and Reverse Current Syringe.

The Improved Appliance is a powerful Enema of Higginson's pattern, fitted with a new receiving and filtering valve for preventing undissolved particles from entering and irritating the person; this is an improvement of great importance, and not obtainable in any other Enema Syringe; also a new Vertical and Reverse Current Vaginal Tube, producing a continual current treble the power of the ordinary tubes used for this purpose, thoroughly cleansing the parts it is applied to. It is to be used with injection of sufficient power to destroy the life properties of the spermatic fluid without injury to the person, and if the instructions are followed it can be used with success and safety.

*Complete in Box, with particulars for Injection, and directions for use,
Post free 3s. 6d. and 4s. 6d. each.*

IMPROVED CHECK PESSARY.



Is a simply devised instrument of pure soft medicated rubber, to be worn by the female (during coition) as a protection against conception. It is constructed on a common-sense principle, and strictly in accordance with the female organisation; can be worn any length of time with ease and comfort; is easily adjusted and removed, adapts itself perfectly, and no apprehension of it going too far or doing the slightest harm need be felt, and with care will last for years.

*Post free with directions for use,
2s. 3d. each.*

**E. LAMBERT & SON, MANUFACTURERS,
138-44 MAYFIELD ROAD, KINGSLAND, LONDON, N.**

24 Park Square, Leeds, June 7, 1880.

Dear Sirs,—Your Syringe should be used by every woman for prevention to conception. I should certainly advise you to have the vertical reverse actions in all your future makes.—Yours truly,

To Messrs. E. Lambert and Son.

H. A. ALLESTREE, M.R.C.P.

Before having connexion,
Procure an injection,
Likewise an elastic syringe.

* * * *

Then after the 'coup',
All the ladies need do,
Is to jump out of bed on the spot.
Fill the squirt to the brim,
Pump it well up her quim;
And the kid trickles into the pot.

Taking it lying down

Not all ladies needed to 'jump out of bed on the spot'. Allbutt's *The Wife's Handbook*, having extolled the 'reverse-thrust' syringe, went on to say:

The use, however, of the above method necessitates the woman rising from bed, and thus perhaps taking a chill. If however, she uses an Irrigator (sold by most surgical instrument makers for 10s. 6d.) she can remain in bed. The Irrigator is a kind of can, holding about two pints, which is hung against the wall by the woman's side of the bed, at the height of some four feet or more above the level of her head. This can has a long india-rubber tube attached to a hole near its bottom, and at the mouth-piece end of the tube there is a little turn-tap. Before getting into bed the woman fills the can with a solution of alum and water, as recommended above, places a bed-pan and towel on a chair at the side of the bed; and after

A page from Dr. H. A. Allbutt's *The Wife's Handbook* (1866), which created a furore. The Royal College of Physicians of Edinburgh slung him out "for having published and exposed for sale an indecent publication . . . and having published as attached thereto advertisements of an unprofessional character". Later, his name was erased from the Medical Register.

RUBBER APPLIANCES.

**GOODS,
SURGICAL,
AND
DOMESTIC,
ALL KINDS.**

**WRITE FOR
82-PAGE
CATALOGUE,
ILLUSTRATED.
POST FREE
OR CALL.**

LEICESTER RUBBER CO.,
Dept. M., 10, GREEN ST., LEICESTER
SQ., LONDON, W.C. Business Hours,
10 a.m. to 12 p.m.
Ent. Stationers' Hall.

Myra's Journal, a respectable dressmaking publication, carried this advertisement in its November 1905 issue—along with another one for 'surgical rubber goods', five for 'books for wives', seven for 'female pills' and one for a 'Valuable and Reliable Corrective by Skilled Parisienne Specialist.' Meantime, the *Lancet* raged against 'filthy advertisements', that gave any innocent girl a 'second-hand knowledge which could place her on an equal footing with an experienced prostitute'.

connection she has but to turn on her back and slip the bed-pan under her; then she inserts the mouth-piece of the india-rubber tube into the vagina as far as possible, turns the tap, and the alum solution flows in and out again without causing wetting or trouble.

Was it worth it? People seem to have thought so. One William T. Stead, in his diary for the year 1899, recorded: 'I have from the birth of Willie (in 1874) practised simple syringing with water.'

The glossy approach

The method remained popular well into the 20th century, and it was prominently advertised. *Old Moore's Almanack* for 1908 features a 'whirling spray syringe', though rubber squeeze-type versions (rather like the horns on vintage cars) began to replace such fearsome items. Most women had them hidden away with their clean knickers, along with uninspiring sex books called *Marital Hygiene* or something similar. By the 1930's, even glossy magazines were dealing with the indelicate subject—but ever so delicately. Here's an example from one of the glossiest, American *McCalls*, for July 1933.

The most frequent eternal triangle
A HUSBAND A WIFE
and her
FEARS

Without [marriage hygiene] some major physical irregularity [overdue periods] plants in a woman's mind the fear of a major crisis. Let so devastating a fear recur again and again, and the most charming and gracious wife turns into a nerve-ridden, irritable travesty of herself. Bewildering, to say the least, to even the kindest husbands. Fatal, inevitably, to the beauty of the marriage relation.

It all sounds very dreadful, doesn't it? But it needn't happen. The proper technique of marriage hygiene, faithfully followed, replaces fear with peace of mind. Makes what seems a grave problem no problem at all.

What is the proper technique? To my practice [she's supposed to be a famous Parisian gynaecologist] I recommend the 'Lysol' method. I know that 'Lysol' destroys germs in the presence of organic matter, not just on a glass slide. I know that it has high penetrating

power, reaching into every fold and crevice. And I further know that with all its power, it is very gentle . . .

She doesn't say whether it's kind to the hands, but thousands of women must have used it nevertheless. Possibly your parents—which could explain why you're here to read this book.

4 The Coming of the Condom

According to a 1709 *Tatler*, the condom was invented by:

A Gentleman of this House [i.e., Wills Coffee-House] . . . observ'd by the Surgeons with much Envy; for he has invented an Engine for the Prevention of Harms by Love-Adventures, and has, by great Care and Application, made it an Immodesty to name his Name.

Such an 'Act of Self-denial' had gained 'this worthy Member of the Commonwealth' a 'great Reputation'. Nevertheless, the *Tatler* continued, he 'shuns Glory . . . and has, by giving his Engine his own Name, made it obscene to speak of him more'.

He was Doctor, Sir, or plain Mr. Condom, according to which story you believed. A popular one had him acting as Charles II's physician and trying to keep down the number of illegitimate children. Despite apparent lack of success (Charles acknowledged fourteen bastards and probably ignored more), another version even has him getting knighted for services rendered.

Too good to be true

The idea of a 'real' inventor is attractive—far too attractive for most of the experts—who've stood on their heads to explain away the name with duller alternatives. German writer Hans Ferdy, for instance, thought it came from the French village of Condom in Gascony. (And before readers jump to similar conclusions, our nickname 'French letter' doesn't mean a thing; The French have a similar disclaimer—*la capote anglaise*.) Ferdy later decided the word derived from the latin verb *condere*—to conceal, protect, preserve. (In this context, it's worth remembering that the early sheaths were used as protection against venereal disease, and often called preservatives.) Fellow-German Richter



Ancient Egyptians sometimes wore sheaths—and nothing else—but as decorations rather than contraceptives. This sketch depicts part of a XIX Dynasty (1350 to 1200 B.C.) original

went one better. He reckoned condom came from the Persian *kendu* or *kondu*, a long vessel made from animal intestines and used for storing grain. All of which proves just how determined an etymologist can get once the hunt is up.

In any case, Mr. Condom, *if* he existed, didn't invent the sheath. Ancient Egyptians used to wear them—and nothing else—but as the briefest of briefs rather than a form of contraception. Similarly, primitive natives have worn them, sometimes as symbols of rank, but often as a guard against disrespectful insects.

Poor Minos had a problem

First written mention comes in the *Metamorphoses* of Antonius Liberalis (around A.D. 150), where he recounts the legend of Minos, King of Crete. Poor Minos had a problem. His semen contained serpents and scorpions, a circumstance that doomed his sex-life, until Prokris came to stay and had the following brainwave:

She slipped the bladder of a goat into the vagina of a woman. Into this bladder Minos cast off his serpent-bearing semen. Then he went to find Pasiphae, and cohabited with her.

Pasiphae was his wife, and their reunion proved so successful that they not only had Ariadne and Phaedra, but four sons and two lesser-known daughters as well. Disappointingly though, the Liberalis reference turns out to be isolated, and there's no further evidence of the sheath in either Greece or Rome. In fact, this type of female sheath is rare at any time. Dr. Morton Kahn described one in 1931, worn by the Djuka Bush women in Dutch Guiana. It consisted of a seed pod, about five inches long, and snipped at one end to allow the male penis entry. If it sounds uncomfortable, it doesn't seem to have put them off, because the tribe were reported as highly promiscuous—and perhaps discomfort played a part in their pleasure. Certainly the males were in the habit of inserting 'fragments of a reed known as the mucca-mucca in the urethra' to cause irritation and 'bring about erections of long duration'.

Gabriello Fallopius was just as interested in successful erections. He advised parents 'to take every pain in infancy to enlarge the privy member of boys [by massage and the application of stimulants], since a well-grown specimen never comes amiss'. This famous Italian anatomist (1523–1562) turned his attention to all parts of the human body, discovering in the process the Fallopian tubes that bear his name. And as far as Europeans were concerned, he also discovered the male sheath, by devising a crude and cumbersome linen version. This was aimed at stopping the spread of syphilis. It was to be worn over the tip of the penis, with the foreskin pulled down to hold it on—or as a more

painful alternative—it could be inserted into the urethra itself. His account reads:

As often as a man has intercourse, he should (if possible) wash the genitals, or wipe them with a cloth; afterwards he should use a small linen cloth made to fit the *glans*, and draw forward the prepuce over the *glans*; if he can do so, it is well to moisten it with saliva or with a lotion; however, it does not matter. If you fear lest carries [syphilis] be produced in the canal, take the sheath of this linen cloth and place it in the canal; I tried the experiment on eleven hundred men, and I call immortal God to witness that not one of them was infected.

Towards the end of the 16th century, Hercules Saxonia was describing a similar sheath, only he soaked his several times in a solution and left it to dry in the shade. Suzanne in *L'Escole des Filles* knew all about it too, because she told Franchon about 'putting a little piece of linen' on the tip of the penis so that it could 'receive the lacquer of love'. And in 1708, a quack named John Marten was soaking sheaths like Saxonia, but he piously left out the ingredients, lest they 'give too much encouragement to the Lewd'.

The very first 'condom'

The actual word 'condom' didn't appear in print till 1706. It turns up in the poem we've already met—'A Scots Answer to a British Vision'—which states:

Sirenge and Condom
Come both in Request.

1708 sees the next reference, in the anonymous poem 'Almonds for Parrots'. This reinforces the theory of an actual Mr. Condom by praising 'matchless Condon', whose

fame will 'last as long as Condon is a Name'. His 'happy Invention' had:

. . . quench'd the heat of Venus's Fire,
And yet preserv'd the Flame of Love's Desire.

According to this poem, people were already selling condoms in St. James's Park, Spring Garden, the Play-House and the Mall. But they were still selling them as a protection against venereal disease, without realising that they acted as contraceptives, too. Hence in 1717, English physician Daniel Turner, writing on syphilis, describes the 'Condum' as:

the best, if not the only Preservative our Libertines have found out at present; and yet, by reason of its blunting the sensation, I have heard some of them acknowledge, that they had often chose to risque a Clap, rather than engage *cum Hastis sic clypeatis* (with spears thus sheathed).

A defence against Big Belly

It wasn't until the 1720's that White Kennett, son of the Bishop of Peterborough, and later a rector himself, praised the condom for liberating women from 'big Belly, and the squawling Brat.' Even so, his poem placed greater emphasis on guarding against infection:

With C—— arm'd he wages am'rous Fight
Fearless, secure; nor Thought of future Pains
Resembling Pricks of Pin and Needle's Point,
E'er checks his Raptures, or disturbs his Joys.

This reappears in various versions, in one instance accompanied by the following verses, attributed to a former Poet Laureate:

The Man, Dear Friend, who wears a C——m,
May scour the Hundreds round at random;
Whether it please him to disport,
In Wild-Street, or in Coulson's Court;
He fears no Danger from the Doxies,
Laughs at their F*****, and scorns their Poxes.

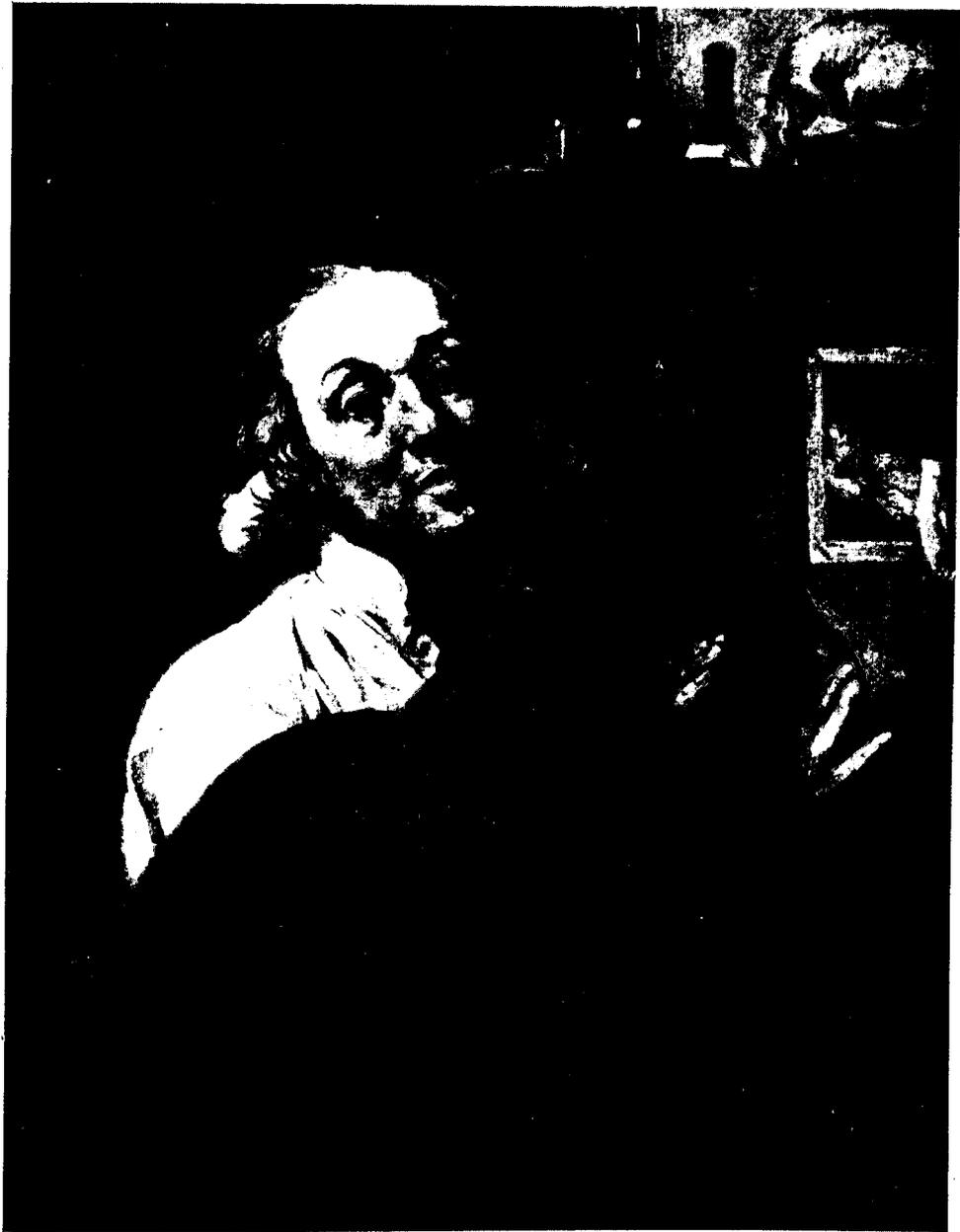
Kennett's creation finally got rewritten in heroic couplets and published in 1744 as *The Machine*. The Frontispiece showed a 'CUNDUM Warehouse, in St. Martin's Lane', with a sample being blown up to test it, and the new metre gave a jaunty style to advice such as:

Do as sage Ch-s-l-n is wont to do,
For greater Safety put on two:

'Industrious Jenny', a 'Gentlewoman of the Calling' also got a mention, as supplementing her earnings by washing used condoms and re-selling them to unsuspecting clients.

Finer than Gossamer

From contemporary accounts, these condoms had obviously progressed from passion-killing linen to being made of much finer animal membrane. (Doubtless this improvement accounts for Mr. Condom's claim to fame.) In fact, they were more sensitive than today's rubber version—even 'gossamer' quality—and they were certainly prettier. Casimir Freschot in his *Histoire Amoureuse* (1714), describes them as a very fine covering tied with a ribbon. More effective than if made of iron, they were to be put over 'the instrument of pleasure' at the moment the 'gallant' was ready to thrust forward, and would protect him like an 'enchanted armour'. 'Roger Pheuquell, Esq.' (see next chapter), described them in his 1740 *A New Description of Merryland*. Merryland meant



German artist Zoffany, patronised by George III, painted this dissipated self-portrait in 1779. Symbols of moral rot include a bottle of wine, the pack of playing cards on the shelf, a small portrait of Venus—and the two condoms hanging from a nail in the wall.

vagina, and visitors to the territory were advised to wear 'proper Cloathing' as a precaution against the 'dangerous heat of the Climate'. The Cloathing was 'made of an extraordinary fine thin Substance, and contrived so as to be all of one Piece, and without a Seam, only about the Bottom it is generally bound round with a Scarlet Ribbon for Ornament.'

Making condoms was a painstakingly slow business, as the following entry in Gray's 1828 *Pharmacopoeia* shows:

Condoms, Armour, Baudruches, Redingotes Anglaises:

The *intestina caeca* of sheep soaked for some hours in water, turned inside out, macerated again in weak alkaline ley changed every twelve hours, scraped carefully to abstract the mucous membrane, leaving the peritoneal and muscular coats; then exposed to the vapour of burning brimstone, and afterwards washed with soap and water; they are then blown up, dried, cut to the length of seven or eight inches, and bordered at the open end with a riband.

'Baudruches fines' went through a similar process, but were 'drawn smooth upon oiled moulds of a proper size'. 'B. superfines' took even longer to prepare, and ended up by being 'scented with essences' and 'rubbed with a glass to polish them'. And as a final refinement, 'B. Superfines-doubles' consisted of two skins, the one drawn over the other while still moist, so that the 'two insides adhere together'.

William Pattison's 1728 poem maintained that the sheath 'shall all sizes fit. Provided that it first be wet', but most manufacturers catered for the inequality of man. When Dr. Dingwall was called in a few years ago, to examine some late 18th-century examples of sheaths, he found three differ-



Late 18th-century English condom, made from animal membrane, and tied round the top with a pink silk ribbon. These condoms worked best if they were wetted first, as Boswell found out when he dipped his 'machine' in the lake at St James's Park and 'performed most manfully'.

ent sizes available. His description of one of them went:

The specimen submitted is apparently made from some animal membrane, and as far as could be discovered is seamless, the edge of the open end being turned over and roughly stitched with cotton to form a hem through which is threaded a strip of silk. Its approximate dimensions are: length 190 mm, diameter 60 mm, thickness

0.038 mm (as compared with the thickness of a modern thin rubber sheath of 0.075 mm).

In inches, this means the sheath measured about $7\frac{1}{2}$ inches long by $2\frac{1}{4}$ inches wide, but as the measurements are only two-dimensional, and the ribboned end would have taken up any slack, the alarming size can be discounted.

Trying on for size

Casanova (1725–1798) provides more information on the sizes and qualities for sale in his *Histoire de ma Vie*. When visiting a brothel, he asked for a sheath, but refused the one proffered because it was too coarse. He was then offered a finer one, but as it wasn't sold singly, had to pay for a dozen. 'The girl came back with the packet. I put myself in the right position, and ordered her to choose me one that fitted well. Sulkily, she began examining and measuring. "This one doesn't fit well", I told her. "Try another". Another and another; and suddenly I splashed her well and truly.' Elsewhere he describes condoms as 'a little coat of very fine transparent skin, eight inches long and closed at one end, with a narrow pink ribbon slotted through the open end.' Never a one for inhibitions, he sometimes blew them up to amuse the ladies, probably testing them at the same time, too. He calls them 'English overcoats' (even quaint in the original, *redingotes d'Angleterre*), and 'the little preventive bags invented by the English to save the fair sex from anxiety'. This last quote makes it clear that Casanova used the sheath to prevent pregnancy just as much as venereal disease. In fact, despite the brothel above, he usually went

Casanova was one of the first men to use condoms as contraceptives rather than to prevent V.D. He called them 'the little preventive bags invented by the English to save the fair sex from anxiety', and never seems to have caused a pregnancy throughout his hard-working career.



in for affairs—albeit rapid ones—and always took good care of his partners. Not that all of them appreciated his solicitude. One girl found condoms ‘nasty, disgusting, and scandalous’. Another, although granting that they were very fine, complained that she didn’t like *ce petit personnage* so much when it was covered. Even Casanova admitted that he didn’t really like to shut himself up ‘in a piece of dead skin’.

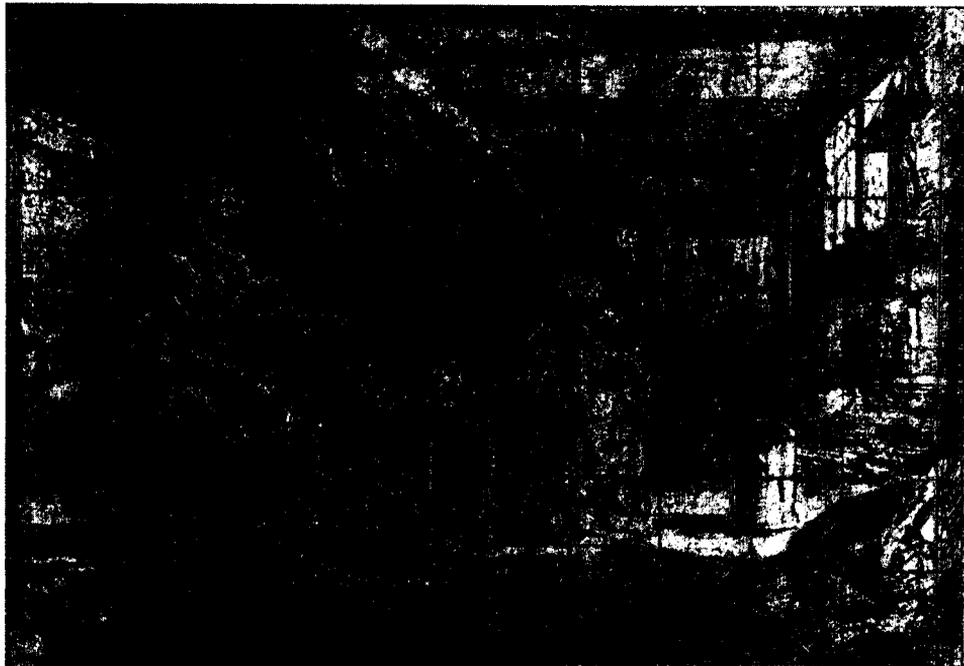
Boswell and his lusty embraces

Boswell had similar reservations. He was always feeling ‘carnal inclinations’ raging through his frame. In his *London Journal*, an entry for Friday, 25th March, 1763, tells how in St. James’s Park:

For the first time did I engage in armour, which I found but dull satisfaction. She who submitted to my lusty embraces was a young Shropshire girl, only seventeen, very well-looking, her name Elizabeth Parker.

Afterwards, he ‘supped at Lord Eglinton’s. Sir James was there . . .’

Despite the dull satisfaction, Boswell continued to use condoms. Thursday, 31st of March found him back in the park ‘safely sheathed’, but the girl was too ugly to bother with her name. He had better luck on Saturday, 9th April. This time, he ‘came to the Park, and in armorial guise performed concubinage with a strong, plump, good-humoured girl called Nanny Baker.’ By Saturday, 4th June, he was wetting the sheath first to increase sensitivity. Having found a ‘low brimstone’, he ‘agreed with her for sixpence’ and ‘went to the bottom of the Park arm in arm’, where he dipped his ‘machine in the Canal and performed most manfully’. He had no complaints about a previous experi-



Hogarth's Harlot, coming to the end of her Progress, as she loses her looks. She's lost her health, too, and the beribboned condoms on the table probably protect her clients from V.D., rather than herself. Note the syringe, which American Dr. Knowlton was to claim as his 'invention' in the next century.

ence, either, which took place on Tuesday, 10th May.

At the bottom of the Haymarket I picked up a strong, jolly young damsel, and taking her under the arm I conducted her to Westminster Bridge, and there in armour complete did I engage her upon this noble edifice.

The whim of 'doing it there' with the Thames rolling below amused him 'much'.

Tuesday, 17th May was an equally memorable occasion, but for less pleasant reasons, because when he picked up a 'fresh, agreeable young girl called Alice Gibbs', he was persuaded to go into battle unprotected. 'I took out my armour, but she begged that I might not put it on, as the sport was much pleasanter without it . . .' He was 'so rash

as to trust her', and spent the following days examining himself closely and fearing the worst.

After this long recital, it's fascinating to hear Boswell's reactions to contraception. In 1775, his *Journal* reports that Sir John Miller, Bt., of Batheaston near Bath, 'talked foolishly about the methods practised in France by men to prevent their wives from having children. "You, Sir", said he to Mr. Johnson, "have been a married man and will understand it"; and he spoke gross bawdy . . . I wondered that Mr. Johnson let him alone'.

There's a century's gap until the next unabashed assessment of the condom in action. The anonymous author of *My Secret Life* wrote in the 1880's that 'I was timid, used French letters, and took to carrying them in my purse again, but always hated them.' He describes them as 'wet, flabby sheep's gut'—and his girl friends didn't think much of them either. 'I gave Madeleine the experience of a prick covered with sheep's gut, but neither of us liked it.' And later, 'not liking the sensation—which cheats the sexual pleasure of both—I took my prick out, well greased the cundum outside, put it on and up her again. We compared sensations, but both agreeing that pleasure was largely lessened by the intervening skin . . . I took it off'.

London leads the world

Long before vulcanised rubber and mass-production arrived on the scene, London was an international condom centre, with British brands travelling the world. A Mrs. Philips (there seem to have been several—the name was as synonymous with sheaths as Hoover with vacuum-cleaners), sent out a handbill in 1776, proclaiming:

She defies anyone in England to equal her goods, and hath lately had several orders from France, Spain, Portugal

This advertisement is to inform our customers and others, that the woman who pretended the name of Philips, in Orange-court, is now dead, and that the business is carried on at

Mrs. PHILIPS'S WAREHOUSE,

That has been for forty years, at the Green Canister, in Bedford (late Half-Moon) Street, seven doors from the Strand, on the left hand side,

STILL continues in its original state of reputation; where all gentlemen of intrigue may be supplied with those Bladder Policies, or implements of safety, which infallibly secure the health of our customers, superior in quality as has been demonstrated in comparing samples of others that pretend the name of *Philips*; we defy any one to equal our goods in England, and have lately had several large orders from France, Spain, Portugal, Italy, and other foreign places.

N. B. Ambassadors, foreigners, gentlemen and captains of ships, &c. going abroad, may be supplied with any quantity of the best goods in England, on the shortest notice and lowest price. A most infamous and obscene hand-bill, or advertisement, in the name of *Philips* is false: the public are hereby assured that their name is not *Philips*, but this is her shop, and the same person is behind the counter as has been for many years.—The following lines are very applicable to our goods :

*To guard yourself from shame or fear,
Votaries to Venus, hasten here;
None in our wares e'er found a flaw,
Self-preservation's nature's law.*

Letters (post paid) duly answered.

There were at least two Mrs. Philipses—Gillray's Mrs. Philips at Orange Court, Leicester Fields, and this one at the Green Canister, Bedford Street. Both claimed to be the 'original' purveyors of condoms, and rivalry reached such a pitch in the 1770's that they even used the same sales-jingle.



Gillray's *A Sale of English-Beauties in the East-Indies*, 1786, shows a bale of condoms as the Auctioneer's 'desk'. It's inscribed 'Mrs. Phillips (the original inventor), Leicester Fields London', and marked 'For the use of the Supreme Council'.

Italy, and other foreign places. Captains of ships, and gentlemen going abroad, may be supplied with any quantity of the best goods on the shortest notice.

Gillray's *A Sale of English Beauties in the East-Indies*' (see above), shows a large parcel of condoms, stamped with Mrs. Philip's Golden Fan and Rising Sun trademark, and reserved 'For the use of the Supreme Council'. This particular Mrs. Philips adopted the Golden Fan and Rising Sun when she came back into business 'out of patriotick zeal', after a temporary retirement. Her handbill gives the reasons:

Mrs. Philips, who about ten years left off business, having been prevailed on by her friends to resume the same

again upon representations that, since her declining, they cannot procure any goods comparable to those she used to vend;—begs leave to acquaint her friends and customers, that she has taken a house, No. 5, Orange Court, near Leicester-fields . . . where she continues to carry on her business as usual.

The war of the handbills

The snag seems to be that she had sold her original premises to a certain Mrs. Mary Perkins, who then produced her own handbill claiming to be 'successor to Mrs. Philips, at the Green Canister in Half-moon-street, opposite the New Exchange in the Strand, London.' Feeling between the two was obviously bad. Mrs. Philips complained:

And whereas some person or persons pretending to know and carry on the said business, discovering the preference given to her goods since coming into business again, have industriously and maliciously reported that the Original Mrs. Philips is dead, and that such person or persons is or are her successors (which is entirely false and without the least foundation) . . . the public are hereby assured, that such person or persons is or are a mere impostor or imposters, and that the real original Mrs. Philips lives and carries on her business in Orange-court aforesaid, and not elsewhere (as can be testified by many who daily see her behind her counter) . . .

Meanwhile Mrs. Perkins complained:

Whereas some evil-minded person has given out handbills, that the machine warehouse, the Green Canister, in Half-moon-street in the Strand, is removed, it is without foundation, and only to prejudice me . . .

No-one knows who won the 'war of the handbills' (which certainly adds a new dimension to the term 'knocking' copy), but foreign visitor Andréa de Nerciat found those of 'la Philipps' *les plus renommés* in 1788. Another tourist, Archenholz, was shocked to find the wares of 'Mistress Philipps' on public sale. In Paris, he said such things were sold discreetly, and even in 'voluptuous Italy', very few people knew anything about them.

The novelty condom

Paris eventually made up for lost time. It scooped the early 20th-century market for novelty condoms, designed to afford women a greater degree of stimulation and bearing colourful names like 'le Porc-epic', 'le Conquérant', 'L'Inusable', 'le Cocorico', 'la Sainte-nitouche' and 'le Bibi Chatouilleur'. Not that these were so novel. Devices of a similar kind were recommended for men unable to satisfy an 'Elephant woman' in the 4th-century *Kama Sutra of Vatsyayana*. Called *Apadravyas*, they're listed as:

'The armlet', which 'should be of the same size as the lingam (penis), and should have its outer surface made rough with globules'.

'The couple', consisting of two armlets, and

'The bracelet', made by joining three together 'until they come up to the required length of the lingam.'

Materials employed sound somewhat daunting, because:

In the opinion of Babhravya, these *Apadravyas* should be made of gold, silver, copper, iron, ivory, buffalo's horn, various kinds of wood, tin or lead.

Japanese women must have been just as tough, because before the arrival of the rubber condom, their menfolk used



to wear *kabutogata* or hard helmets. These were sheaths made of tortoiseshell or horn, and when the men were away, women used to attach them to sticks and use them as dildos. Gentler condoms were available, and in 1827, a Japanese sex book described:

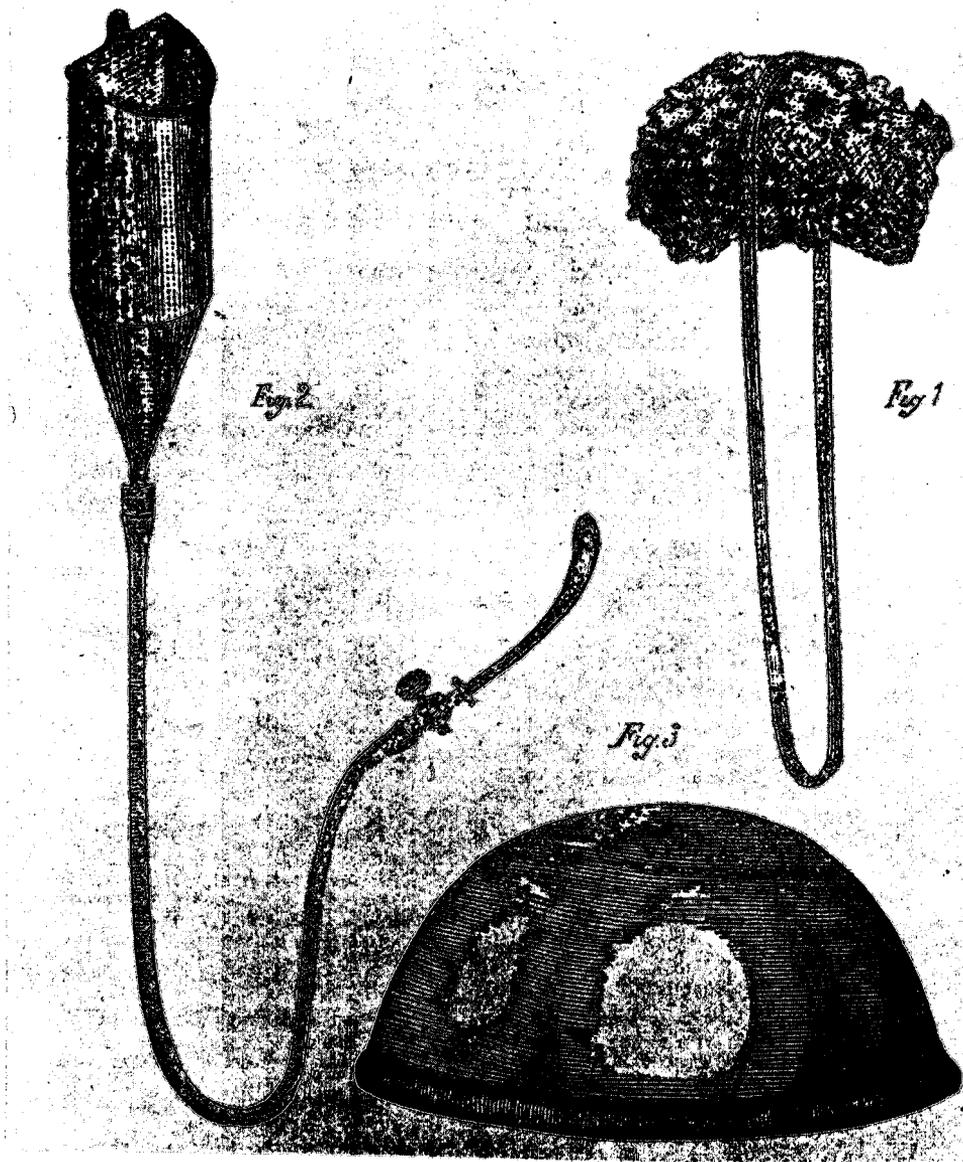
Kawagata; it is also called *Kyotai*. Such a *Kyotai* is made of thin leather, and foreigners called it *Ryurusakku*.

The foreigners could have been Germans with *Rude-Sack* or the Dutch with *Roede-zak*. Today, Japan's approach to contraception is far more lyrical. Rubber condoms come in pretty pastel colours and packaging lays the emphasis on cherry-blossom and romance. Instructions are always worth a read, too. One for an *apadravya*-type device to boost a man's potential goes:

MORE BIG, OR RUBBER BAND. This may be used by men who have small tools in order to increase sexual pleasure which give unexplainable feeling to women.

But the last word in decoration must go to London. In 1883, Frenchman Hector France described a visit to Petticoat Lane. Along with canaries that turned grey in the rain, he was delighted to find 'French letters' for sale, bearing the portrait of none other than Queen Victoria. She would *not* have been amused.

Japanese 'Happy Box' with traditional *kabutogata*—a hard condom made of tortoiseshell—that women could use as a dildo when the men were away. Other variations on the theme include little brass balls with bells inside—and women wore these in their vaginas to provide a musical accompaniment.



19th-century devices—but not inventions. One French prostitute was using a syringe in the year 1600; Jewish women were wearing the sponge in the time of Christ; and even the Dutch cap was invented by a German. But Holland can claim one legitimate 'first'. Dr. Aletta Jacobs opened the world's first birth control clinic at Amsterdam in 1882.

5 Caps and Gadgets

Chaucer complained about women who 'putteth certeine material thynges in hire secree places', and there have certainly been plenty of 'thynges' to choose from. Natives usually used the first that came to hand, from crushed roots in West Africa to chopped-up grass or torn rags in Central Africa. On the Easter Islands, surrounded by sea and beset by lecherous sailors, women inserted pieces of seaweed, but in Sumatra, the Karo-Bataks preferred a small ball of opium. Even civilised societies have used primitive methods, and come to think of it, today's diaphragm or Dutch cap isn't so sophisticated when you're squatting down and putting it in. It may be made of rubber, but it does the job of blocking the entrance to the cervix in just the same crude way.

Casanova's golden balls

Casanova liked to vary his methods of contraception as well as his women, and though he often wore a condom, many of his partners inserted little gold balls instead. He was very particular about them. They weighed 60 grams, measured 18 mm in diameter—and cost an exorbitant six quadrupels from a goldsmith in Geneva. But they were worth it, doing sterling service for fifteen years—and never letting the sperm through by becoming displaced. His own account reads:

It is sufficient for the ball to be placed at the base of the temple of love when the loving couple carry out the sacrifice . . . But, says the friend, movement may displace the ball before the end of the libation . . . This is an accident which need not be feared, provided one exercises foresight.

This is really a digression, but small metal balls have been

used in the Middle and Far East from way back, and for a variety of reasons. During the Chinese Ming Dynasty, one novel describes a 'Burmese Bell', made of copper and containing the semen of a 'lascivious' Burmese bird, which was supposed to act as a sexual aid. And that most un-Victorian Victorian, explorer and orientalist Richard Burton, added the following note to his *Arabian Nights* translation:

When Peking was plundered the Harims contained a number of balls a little larger than the old musket-bullet, made of thin silver with a loose pellet of brass inside somewhat like a grelot; these articles were placed by the women between the labia, and an up-and-down movement on the bed gave a pleasant titillation when nothing better was to be procured.

These same little balls turn up again in Japan today, but this time made of brass—and with a bell inside to give a pretty tinkle. Here's one firm's catalogue description:

MUSIC BALL: If women put these balls into her vagina and love him (Lady up and men down) a wonderful music will ring inside of her organ and will feel very good.

Or as one witty English friend suggested: 'Listen darling, they're playing our tune.'

A new way with lemons

Returning to contraception, Casanova also hit upon a direct forerunner of the modern Dutch Cap. He mentions cutting a lemon in half, extracting most of the juice, and using the disc as a cervical cap—an ingenious and effective method that would have had a spermicidal effect as well. German-Hungarian peasants seem to have had a similar inspiration

in the 19th century, because they made caps from melted beeswax, moulding them over the cervix to ensure a good fit. And making use of local materials, Japanese and Chinese prostitutes are supposed to have used *Misugami*—discs of oiled paper made from bamboo tissue. One Japanese erotic book says:

Make a ball of *Misugami* and put it into the vagina in order to prevent the penis from touching the uterus; that is called *Agezoko*.

But the obstacle with the longest pedigree of the lot is the sponge. Ancient Hebrews used it, because although men had been told to increase and multiply, and weren't allowed to practise contraception, nothing had been said about women. This meant that provided *they* did the dirty work, men couldn't be blamed when their worthy efforts failed to get them pregnant. Not that the sponge was wholeheartedly approved of. Inevitably it was part of a prostitute's stock-in-trade, but the *Talmud* only gave it the OK for respectable wives in the following circumstances:

There are three women that must cohabit with the sponge: a minor, a pregnant woman, and one that nurses her child—a minor [that's a girl in her 11th year], because she might become pregnant and die; a pregnant woman, because the *foetus* might become a *foetus compressus* [they thought women could get pregnant twice, with the second foetus squashing the first one flat]; one that nurses her child, because she might kill her child [presumably through losing her milk so she couldn't feed it properly].

France absorbs the sponge

The sad thing is that they didn't pass this information on, because it really would have been quite effective. None of

the Islamic physicians mention it, and it doesn't crop up again till it's found in the same French prostitute's room that we met in Chapter 3. She was using the sponge in the year 1600, and though it couldn't have been infallible (her probe probably dealt with the failures), it was soon to become the most popular means of preventing conception in France. By 1778, the author of *Recherches et considerations sur la population de la France* was lamenting its spread throughout all spheres of society.

Rich women, for whom pleasure is the chief interest and sole occupation, are not the only ones who regard the propagation of the species as a deception of bygone times; already these pernicious secrets, unknown to all animals save man, have found their way into the countryside; they are cheating nature even in the villages. If these licentious practises, these homicidal tastes, continue to spread, they will be no less deadly to the State than the plagues which used to ravage it; it is time to halt this secret and terrible cause of the depopulation which is imperceptibly undermining the nation, and which it will soon, perhaps, be too late to attend to.

Far from halting it, *Le Rideau Levé* ('The Drawn Curtain') threw more light on the subject in 1786. Women should provide themselves with sponges, which could be removed by means of a silk cord after intercourse had taken place.

You wet this sponge in water mixed with a few drops of brandy [probably quite an effective spermicide]; you insert it exactly over the mouth of the womb, so as to block it; and even if the pervasive semen goes through the pores of the sponge, the extraneous liquid, mingling with it, destroys its power and essence.

Other methods of birth control were in vogue. The Marquis de Sade mentions three in his *La Philosophie dans le Boudoir* in 1795: the sponge, the condom, and anal coitus—which he personally found *la plus délicieuse sans doute*.

Apart from the odd moralist bewailing the decline in standards, the ordinary 18th and 19th century French people seem to have accepted contraception without much fuss. This is ironical in view of Roman Catholic attitudes, especially as Protestant England put up a far more puritanical resistance. While the French birthrate dropped steadily (from 38.6 per thousand in 1771–1775, to 31.3 per thousand in 1816–1820, to 25.4 per thousand in 1871–1880), this country was still producing at the rate of over 35 per thousand even during the last period quoted—and not for lack of information.

Welcome to Merryland

As early as 1690, the sponge had crept across the Channel in the company of ‘our Monarch’s whore from France’. A collection called *The Duchess of Portsmouth’s Garland* accused this shameless lady of using ‘new fashion’d sponges to clear her twat from slimy sperm . . .’, though English women don’t seem to have followed suit. The sponge doesn’t get another mention till the 1740’s, and then only in very seedy society. Thomas Streetser, writing under the name of ‘Roger Phequewell, Esq.’ (could Phequewell have been pronounced Fuckwell?), gives an account in his *A New Description of Merryland*. For Merryland read vagina; for Juice, semen; for bad Effects, pregnancy!

Another submarine Plant is said to be found in MERRYLAND, of the Sponge-kind, the name of which I have forgot. They use it not only as a Cleanser, but also as an

Antidote against the bad Effects of the Juice above mention'd.

Presumably the information stayed with the pimps and prostitutes, because when Methodist minister the Reverend Joseph Townsend brought it back from his travels a few decades later, he was under the impression it was something new. Townsend was an unusual clergyman, and he had unusual friends, among them Jeremy Bentham. This famous political theorist (whose mummified corpse acts as mascot to University College, London—and still gets an airing on special occasions), was quick to grasp the economic implications. In fact, he was soon suggesting contraception as a means of reducing the poor rates, but in his 1797 *Situation and Relief of the Poor*, the proposal was only there for those sharp enough to read between the lines.

Rates are encroaching things . . . You . . . are, I think, for *limiting* them . . . But how?—Not by a prohibitory act. [abstinence] . . . not by a *dead letter* [condom], but by a *living body* [sponge]: a body which, *to stay the plague* [to prevent pregnancy], would . . . throw itself into the *gap* [gap was an 18th-century slang term for vagina]; yet not . . . be swallowed up in it.

Later on he talks of his 'reverend friend' telling him 'about a *spunge*', but his vocabulary has become so guarded that most of the passage is incomprehensible.

A capitalist plot

None of this clever talk would have reached the ears of the poor themselves—or meant anything to them if it had. The Industrial Revolution had left them degraded and apathetic, seeking refuge in cheap gin and spawning offspring

under the effects of it. In fact, the rumours of population control that came their way only created antagonism and resentment—an attitude curiously echoed in this century, when a 1930 edition of the *Socialist Standard* said: 'We find our work for Socialism impeded by the muddle-headed enthusiasts who preach salvation through . . . birth control . . . Their remedies consist of ingenious methods of indirectly helping the employing classes'.

Before contraceptive knowledge could spread to the masses who needed it most, a working-class man was needed who could clear up the misunderstanding, speak to them on equal terms, and convince them that he was working for them, as opposed to against them.

Sponges for the masses

As we've seen, Francis Place the tailor was just the man. An old friend of Jeremy Bentham's, he'd learnt all about the sponge from him, and determined to get the information across to the people who'd really benefit. Instead of talking above their heads, he addressed himself directly to 'the great mass of the community, whose daily bread is alone procured by daily labour'. And what's more, he made sure the great mass actually got his message. In the London area, he had his first 'diabolical handbill' handed out in market places and dropped into basements while maids were scrubbing the steps. In the North, where people read wrapping papers as eagerly as the newsprint round fish and chips today, anyone opening a parcel of cheap candles or a penny box of snuff was in for a big surprise.

Place had too poor an opinion of the British male to put much faith in withdrawal, so he concentrated most of his energies on explaining Bentham's method. This was cheap and easily available, and in addition, had the advantage of

being 'the most likely to succeed in this country, as it depends upon the female'. It consisted of 'a piece of sponge, about an inch square, being placed in the vagina previous to coition, and afterwards withdrawn by means of a double twisted thread, or bobbin attached to it.' It caused no harm, '... neither (did) it diminish the enjoyment of either party. The sponge should', he added, 'as a matter of preference, be used rather damp, and when convenient a little warm.' A second handbill, *To the Married of Both Sexes in Genteel Life*, reassured the genteel reader that it was 'an easy, simple, cleanly and not indelicate method,' while a third one, addressed *To the Married of Both Sexes of the Working People*, emphasised the economic benefits that would accrue:

When the number of working people in any trade or manufacture has for some years been too great, wages are reduced very low, and the working people become little better than slaves.

Less people would mean better conditions, and this time, the sponge was to be 'as large as a green walnut, or a small apple', and tied by a penny ribbon. 'You cannot fail to see' he concluded, 'that this address is intended solely for your good.'

There was a welcome in the hillsides

I.C.H., the anonymous gentleman who wrote to Place complaining about withdrawal, didn't approve of the sponge either. It was a dangerous method, 'for the orgasm is often so violent, that any substance will be carried into the womb, as greedily as a fish swallows the bait'. On the other hand, Carlile was sufficiently impressed with the whole idea to feature the sponge prominently in his 1826 *Every Woman's Book*. This claimed sales of 5,000 within

months, and amazed Carlile by creating a demand 'even in Wales'. The Jones's must have been equally amazed to learn that the sponge was popular:

. . . with the females of the more refined parts of the continent of Europe, and with those of the Aristocracy of England. An English Duchess was lately instanced to the writer, who never goes out to a dinner without being prepared with the sponge. French and Italian women wear them fastened to their waists, and always have them at hand.

Moreover, 'The writer has been informed by those who have made experiments upon the matter, that the sponge is not felt by either party during the act of coition, and that no portion of the pleasure is abated. . . . One gentleman has made an experiment of using the sponge unknown to the female, of which she was ignorant until it was shown to her . . .

Not all ladies and gentlemen have shared this opinion. Our old friend the author of *On the Use of Night-Caps* (determined not to miss an opportunity for some more 'knocking copy'), objected that any gentleman with a respectable length of 'machine' would knock the sponge out of place—and worse still—his delicate member might receive injury. Even the anonymous author of the 1880's *My Secret Life* (he seems to have had a very unsatisfactory life where contraceptives were concerned), said that after inserting 'a nice little round sponge', he and his partner 'agreed that pleasure was much destroyed'.

The opposition

Reaction to Place and Carlile was violent. Tories and Radicals joined forces to heap abuse on them, with Tory-turned-

Radical 'Rural Rides' Cobbett leading the pack. Cobbett called Place a monster, and Carlile 'nearly a madman', who was 'openly and avowedly teaching young women to be prostitutes'. Years later, Cobbett was still doing battle. His 1831 comedy *Surplus Population* gave Place (who incidentally, fathered fifteen children, five of whom died in infancy), the following opening speech:

Oh God! Only look at that swarm of children! Why, the village of NESTBED is properly enough named; for it really resembles an ant's nest.

The very trade unionists Place had worked so hard for opposed him. *The Trades' Newspaper and Mechanics' Weekly Journal* declared that 'certain practices for regulating the population of the country, which, though represented as the fruits of *the soundest political economy*, are in fact . . . detestably wicked.' At least this was sober if misguided comment. Reaching rock-bottom, the '*Bull Dog*' ranted about 'Eunuch Place' or 'Spongeon Place', cruelly branding him as 'a reptile; mean in all his crawling endeavours: a bully in private: a coward in the field . . .' As for 'Beast Carlile', his aim had been to put 'money into his pocket, which has been his only object all through his career'—an ill-advised charge when Carlile spent nearly a third of his 'career' in jail for his beliefs.

The immediate clamour died down, but for the rest of his life, and regardless of what cause he was working for, Place's name aroused hostility: many people refused to be introduced to him; many committees refused his able services. He took it quietly and confidently. 'I have offended many and alarmed more, but the offence has worn off, and the alarm has subsided, and I have received multitudes of thanks from persons who have been saved from poverty and

misery . . .’ As for Carlile (whose wife turned out to be as vociferous an opponent as any), he stood by his work with a firm: ‘I will endeavour to be otherwise useful; but I have no desire to be known to posterity in a higher-character than that of being the sole and unassisted author of *Every Woman’s Book*.’

The support

Some of the ‘multitudes of thanks’ Place received must have come from the North of England. A Yorkshire textile worker told a parliamentary committee in 1832 that fewer illegitimate babies were being born. ‘Do you mean,’ asked one horrified M.P., ‘that certain books, the disgrace of the age, have been put forth and circulated among the females in factories, to the effect you state?’ ‘Yes’. ‘And you attribute the circumstance of there being fewer illegitimate children to that disgusting fact?’ ‘Yes.’

As it happens, there was no immediate drop in the birth-rate, though Place and Carlile had set the wheels in motion here and elsewhere. In America, Robert Dale Owen was getting dubbed leader of the ‘sponge party’ for his 1831 *Moral Physiology*, despite the fact that his only mention of the sponge was to say that it failed as far as three married men of his acquaintance were concerned. Back in England, the many brave birth controllers who risked friends and reputations for their beliefs, included the sponge among their recommendations—Dr. George Drysdale for surprisingly selfish reasons in 1854. ‘Any preventive means, to be satisfactory, must be used by the *woman*, as it spoils the passion and impulsiveness of the venereal act, if the man have to think of them’.

The sponge had a very long run for its money (as late as 1918, a remarkable young *virgin* named Marie Stopes was

recommending it in her book *Married Love*), especially long in view of the fact that a rubber cap had been invented back in the 1830's by a German Dr. Wilde. This was a small cervical cap, which fitted snugly onto the cervix, where it could stay until the woman's periods were due. It never really became popular, and by the 1880's, it was being ousted by the larger cap or diaphragm as we know it today. This was invented by Mensinga, another German. But because it was popularised in Holland by Aletta Jacobs (she opened the world's first birth control clinic in 1882), it's been nicknamed the Dutch cap ever since.

The cap and its forerunners blocked the entrance to the womb. But the I.U.D. (intra-uterine-device) and its antecedents created an obstruction within the womb itself—though 'obstruction' is a misleading word. Any foreign body introduced into the womb prevents conception, but not by blocking it. It works in a far more complicated way—so complicated in fact that experts have only recently come up with the answer.

The wrong end of the stem

Ironically enough, the first mention of inserting something into the womb was intended to *promote* fertility. The Hippocratic book *On the Diseases of Women* describes a hollow lead tube, to be filled with mutton fat and fed through the cervix to keep the mouth of the womb open. Perhaps they thought it would widen the space for the sperms to go through when the tube was removed. The self-same idea turns up again in 13th-century Europe, when Lanfranchi of Milan recommends it, 'if the cervical orifice is closed and does not permit the passage of sperm'. And by the 17th century, Scultetus, in his *Armamentarium Chirurgicum*, is recommending and illustrating a 'stem pessary' very like the ones used during

the 19th century. These contraptions consisted of a stem, to be inserted through the cervix into the womb, and a circular base, to cover the entrance to the cervix. In other words, they were a cross between a cap and an I.U.D.—and even in Scultetus's time they sparked off a controversy. Some doctors protested that they *prevented* conception instead of promoting it, though the *Ladies' Companion* of 1671 pooh-poohed such an idea. Having explained that pessaries (i.e., the solid type—not to be confused with the soluble pessaries of Chapter 3), 'are never taken out (except they please)', the writer continues:

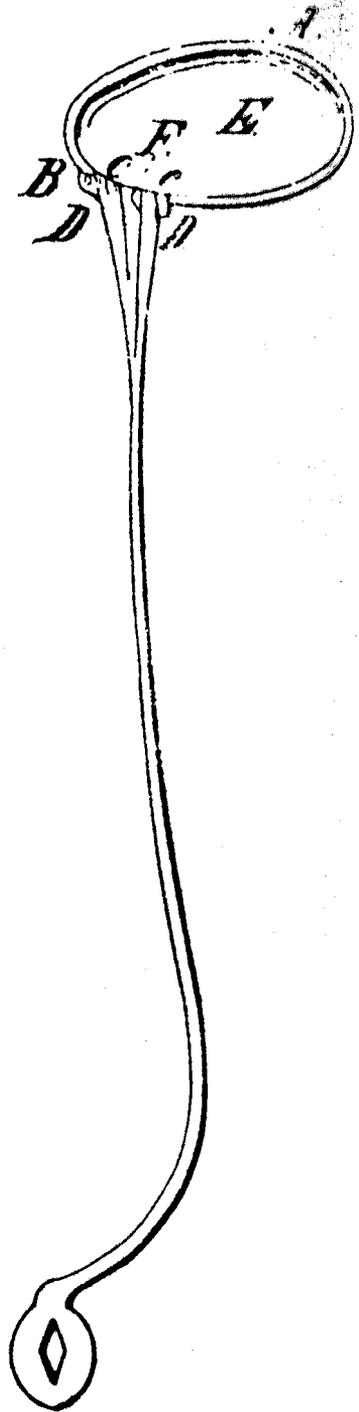
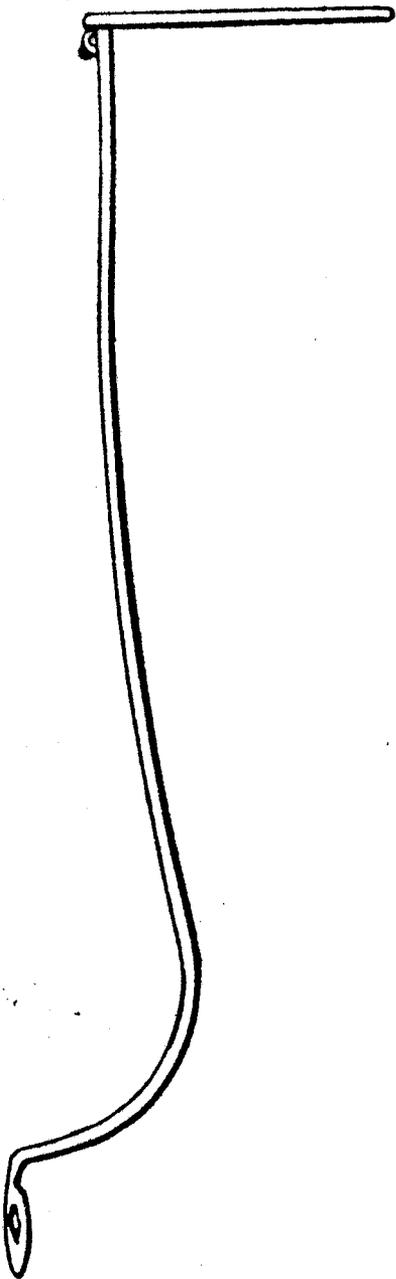
So the women notwithstanding, do all their necessary employments and may as well be enjoyed by men in carnal conjunctions; do also conceive and carry their great bellies, and bring forth, which is affirmed by many authors, and not unknown of late to myself.

The garrulous Culpeper, 17th-century author of *Aristotles Compleat Masterpiece*, confirmed that many doctors:

put pessaries into the bottom of the womb . . . I know some physicians object against this, and say they hinder conception: but others, in my opinion, much more justly affirm, that they neither hinder conception, nor bring any inconvenience; nay, so far from that, that they help conception . . .

This curious confusion persisted right into the 19th century, by which time inserting objects into women's wombs had reached epidemic proportions. It was seen as a cure-all, despite the fact that one American had made it quite clear what it *would* cure—unwanted pregnancy. A drawing of a stem pessary bears his description:

What I claim as my invention is the particular combina-



tion of a curved hoop attached to a handle by a spring joint, as described and for the purpose above specified.

And the above specification couldn't have been plainer. It read: 'J. B. Beers. Preventing Conception. No. 4729, patented Aug. 28, 1846.'

A still small voice of sanity

Nevertheless, doctors went on 'curing sterility' and almost all ills under the sun by shoving things into as many *uteri* as they could lay their hands on. The only operation to rival it in popularity was that being performed on anuses—another useless but supposedly universal panacea. It's amusing to reflect that the Victorians, so intent on suppressing sex, produced a medical profession that spent more time operating between its patients' legs than anywhere else on their bodies put together. One American, W. D. Buck, did raise a still, small voice of sanity in 1866:

A distinguished surgeon in New York City, 25 years ago said, when Dupuytren's operation for relaxation of the *sphincter ani* was in vogue, every young man who came from Paris found that every other individual's anus was too large, and proceeded to pucker it up. The result was that New York anuses looked like gimlet holes in a piece of pork. It seems to me that just such a raid is being made upon the uterus at this time. It is a harmless, unoffensive little organ, stowed away in a quiet place. Simply a muscular organ, having no function to perform, save at

American J. B. Beers claimed the stem-pessary (left) as his invention, patented it in 1846, and expressly stated that it was meant to prevent conception. Nevertheless, doctors used similarly hideous implements to *promote* conception. 'Spitting and skewering and pessarying' became all the rage in the 19th century, though one American doctor did protest against turning the vagina into a 'Chinese toy-shop'.

certain periods of life, but furnishing a capital field for surgical operations, and is nowadays subject to all sorts of barbarity from surgeons anxious for notoriety. Had Dame Nature foreseen this, she would have made it iron clad. What with burning and cauterizing, cutting and slashing and gouging, and spitting and skewering, and pessarying, the old-fashioned womb will cease to exist, except in history. The *Transactions of the National Medical Association for 1864* has figured 123 different kinds of pessary, embracing every variety, from a simple plug to a patent threshing machine, which can only work with the largest hoops. They look like the drawings of turbine water wheels, or a leaf from a work on entomology.

Pessaries, I suppose, are sometimes useful, but there are more than there is any necessity for. I do think that this filling of the vagina with such traps, making a Chinese toy-shop of it, is outrageous . . . By some practitioners, all diseases which occur in the female are attributed to the uterus.

Who put them there?

In the same year that Buck was writing, British 'devices' were displayed at a meeting held by the Obstetrical Society of London, and though there weren't as many as 123, there were enough to show that the British uterus was being well catered for. Not all doctors could have been stupid. Some of them must have realised they were dealing with contraceptive devices—and used them as such—in a discreet way.

By 1879, the light was dawning. When Dr. Routh condemned the 'baneful' contraceptive practises 'making their way into this country', he added an extra, and hitherto unrecognised one.

It has been reserved for some of our own people to dis-

cover a fifth method. In a debate before the Medical Society of London, last session, on the use of intra-uterine stems, devised originally for uterine disorders, we were credibly informed that they were also used by some ladies of high position and continually worn by them with a view to *prevent* conception.

Worse still,

. . . to find them placed in proper position and with this intent implies the assistance of a person of some skill, and shows to what a degree of degradation some men have fallen. The question naturally then presents itself, "Who put them there?"

In 1909, a German Dr. Richter invented a true I.U.D., a thread pessary meant to fit inside the uterus entirely—and moreover openly meant to prevent conception. Then in the 1920's, another German, Graefenburg, invented his famous intra-uterine ring. For some reason both fell into disrepute, and the I.U.D. was shelved—only to be hailed as a new discovery in the 1950's.

6 From Potions to the Pill

Oral contraception has been around for centuries, and if just half of it had worked, the human race would have been extinct long ago. The Chinese, for instance, spent nearly as much time cooking contraceptives as meals, and most of them sound ludicrously like something on a restaurant menu. But appetising names like 'The Four Ingredients Broth' were misleading—you had to marinate the ingredients in a child's urine or fry them up with a handful of earth. There *were* less gruesome recipes in the 7th-century *Thousand of Gold Prescriptions*. You could:

Take some oil and quicksilver and fry a whole day without stopping. Take one pill as large as a jujube seed on an empty stomach and it will forever prevent one from becoming pregnant.

Alternatively, you could boil a little something up. A 1728 recipe instructs:

Take 1 *sheng* (Chinese pint) of a leaven called *mien ch'u* and 5 *shengs* of liquor without dregs. Knead this into a paste and boil until there are but $2\frac{1}{2}$ *shengs* left. Use a silken cloth to strain and throw away the dregs. Divide the liquid into doses. Wait until menstruation is about to come and in the evening take one dose; on the following morning take another dose. The menstruation will then flow and for the rest of her life she will be without children.

'*Mien ch'u*', for anyone who wants a try, consists of wheat flour, kidney beans, the juice of *shin liao* and apricot kernels, all to be mixed during the dog days—and so strong that its quite likely to bring about 'awful retribution'. The author concludes, not very helpfully, that his recipes 'may only be

used in one out of ten thousand cases; therefore those who use them should do so with caution.'

The eternal triangle

Ancient Hebrew women didn't use their potions with caution, because before the Flood, a substantial minority of them were on the 'cup of roots'. According to the *Midrash* (reams of Rabbinical writings which explain biblical texts), before Noah paired the animals off two by two, human animals had been living in threesomes. Men had two wives, and while one wife spent her time worthily breeding and getting thick around the waist, the other one had to dress like a mistress, and make sure of keeping her figure by rendering herself sterile. This was the trouble with the cup of roots, of course. Once you'd drunk it there was no turning back, which is why Rabbi Hiyya was so despondent around the year A.D. 200. His wife Judith had got sufficiently fed up with childbearing to drink the stuff, and all he could say was a helpless 'I wish you had given me at least one birth more.'

Rabbi Hiyya seemed just as convinced as his wife that it would work, though the ingredients themselves don't sound very effective. Rabbi Yohanan, who died in A.D. 279, gave them as:

Alexandrian gum, liquid alum, and garden crocus, each in the weight of a denar, are mixed together. Three cups of wine with this medicine are good for gonorrhoea, and do not sterilise. Two cups of beer with this medicine cure jaundice and sterilise.

'Those with gazelle eyes'

Indian women relied mainly on seeds, leaves and roots (interesting ingredients, as we'll see later in the chapter),

and there were literally hundreds to choose from. The 8th-century *Bṛīhadhyogatarāṅgīnī* suggested, amongst others:

One *tola* (two-fifths of an ounce) of powdered palm leaf and red chalk taken with cold water on the fourth day makes a woman sterile with certainty.

The roots of the *Tanduliyaka* tree, ground with rice-water, and taken for three days at the end of the menstrual period, make women sterile.

Mustard seeds ground in sesame oil, and taken for three days during menses, prevents all chance of pregnancy.

The 11th to 13th century *Pancasāyaka* covered the subject even more comprehensively:

The woman who drinks on a lucky day *palasa* and . . . fruits as well as flowers of the *salmali* tree, together with melted butter, will certainly become unfruitful. If she drinks regularly of the decoction of the root of the *pavaka* tree and sour rice water, and keeps it up for three days after the end of the menstrual period, she will remain unfruitful until death . . . If a woman eats or drinks continuously for half a month a large *pala* of three-year-old molasses, the greatest of the poets [actually, the author *Kavisekhara* himself] says that she will surely be unfruitful to the end of her life. Two large *karsa* of the seeds of the *rakasa* tree, drunk with white rice water for seven days after the end of the menstrual period, causes certain unfruitfulness for those with gazelle eyes.

Sometimes 'those with gazelle eyes' had to catch their ingredients first. 'The fruit of the *kadamba* and the feet of flies . . .' began one improbable suggestion.

Curiouser and curiouser

The Greeks and Romans had equally improbable sugges-

tions to make. Hippocrates (or one of his followers) caused a lot of trouble in the 4th and 5th centuries B.C. by writing:

If a woman does not wish to become pregnant, dissolve in water *misy* as large as a bean and give it to her to drink and for a year she will not become pregnant.

He forgot to say what 'misy' was, but in the 1st century A.D., Dioscorides gave the following definition in his Herbal:

Misy Copperas.

Misy, but ye Cyprian is to be chosen, looking like gold, hard and in the breaking of a golden colour, and glistening like a starr. If hath ye same faculty as burning Chalcitis hath, without ye making of Psoricum from it, differing both in ye excesse and ye defect. But that of Egypt in respect of others, is ye best, being ye most effectual.

This colourful description must have caught people's imaginations, because before long, a contraceptive-metal tradition was under way. A century later, Soranus was noting that many people believed 'the water from the fire-bucket of the smith, when drunk continuously after every menstrual period, causes sterility.' By the 6th century, this was being quoted as undisputed fact instead of popular superstition, with Aetios of Amida saying: 'Copper water in which one extinguishes iron, drunk continually, and above all immediately after the end of menstruation, is anti-conceptual.'

Europeans, with their knack of sifting the chaff from the wheat, inevitably picked it up. 13th-century Arnold of Villanova reported: 'If a woman drinks in the morning for three days two *minas* of water in which smiths quench their forceps, she will be sterile permanently', and as he prac-



Classical superstitions easily took root in Europe—and made the blacksmith the most popular man in the village. Greek and Roman women ‘prevented’ pregnancy by drinking water that hot metal had been quenched in, and by the 2nd century, only a smith’s water would do the trick. The belief persisted into this century, though the horseshoe couldn’t have brought many people luck.

tised at Paris, Barcelona and Rome, he had ample opportunity for spreading the story around. Perhaps that’s why it proved so persistent. In 1886, Fossel noticed that East Austrian women were still drinking blacksmith’s water after every period to prevent pregnancy. And as late as 1914 in England, a witness at the National Birth Rate Commission told disapprovingly of ‘labouring women’ in Selly Oak near Birmingham, who were ‘drinking the water in which copper coins had been boiled.’

The original old wife

Pliny may have started European women off on drinking

willow tea. He insisted that a potion of crushed willow leaves would 'check libidinous tendencies'—and this was typical of his approach to 'contraception'. He had equally useful recommendations for men.

A most powerful medicament is obtained by reducing to ashes the nails of the lynx, together with the hide; . . . these ashes, taken in drink, have the effect of checking abominable desires in men.

Where abominable desires persisted, women were to drink potions of parsley and mint, which would 'curdle' the man's semen into sterility when it arrived.

Although parsley and mint passed straight from Pliny into European culture, it was probably Dioscorides who made willow popular. Apart from the fact that his books were more widely read, he suggested drinking its finely-ground leaves in water to prevent *conception* rather than sex, which was bound to have more appeal. But why willow as opposed to anything else? Because the willow doesn't bear fruit. It was supposed to work by sympathetic magic, like another of Dioscorides' suggestions, the kidney of a mule. Because the mule is sterile, various parts of its anatomy were eaten for centuries in the hopes of rendering the eater sterile, too.

Soranus steered clear of semi-magical potions. He thought they caused 'very considerable harm', though he did mention that some people believed eating the uterus of a she-mule would cause sterility. Aetios on the other hand was doubly enthusiastic, and decided to combine both types of sympathetic magic. He wrote: 'The burned testicles of castrated mules drunk with a decoction of willow constitute contraceptives'—for men. Women had to drink a 'decoction of willow bark with honey to temper its bitterness'.

By and large, Islamic physicians gave oral contraceptives a miss. They paid their respects to the foregoing experts by quoting some of their ingredients, but used them in a far more effective way. Avicenna, for instance, in his 11th-century *Canon*, suggested:

Inserting intravaginally the leaves of the weeping willow . . . in a flock of wool, especially if dipped in the juice of the weeping willow.

But once the standard of Islamic medicine started slipping, 13th-century Ibn al-Baitar started trotting out all the old chestnuts.

It is said that white poplar [another of Dioscorides' 'barren' trees], taken with the kidney or testicle of a he-mule will prevent conception. It is said that the leaves of this tree act in the same way, if a woman takes them after her period.

Polly put the kettle on

It was all being said in Europe as well. German women downed pot after pot of willow tea to prevent conception, or drank it boiling hot to eliminate sexual desire. Carolus Musitanus gave it a big write-up in his 1709 *Women's Diseases*, but he thought it could act as an aphrodisiac or an anaphrodisiac, according to how it was used.

Many are the drugs which dispose of or impede semen, or cause the abortion of the foetus. Amongst those which destroy semen and prevent conception is willow, which does not weaken the appetite of small women so much as poisons do, for which reason it mitigates excessive salacity, if first, truly tender willow shoots are cut off, for thus there flows a liquor; when it is shaped into a little

lump and drunk by a woman it is efficacious, so that never is loved deemed stronger, but if a potion of willow be drunk by a woman on an empty stomach several times, it induces sterility.

The kettle must have been on the hob continually, because as well as willow, women made tea from Pliny's parsley or mint, *and* brewed up lavender and marjoram. They also made infusions from fern roots and a special plant—both Dioscorides' suggestions—and both popular enough to get ferns nicknamed 'prostitute root' in some parts of Europe, and to give barrenwort its name.

European women didn't follow classical advice slavishly. They jibbed at eating pieces of mule, for instance, and like some 2nd-century women (Soranus found it necessary to dismiss amulets made from 'the womb of a mule or the ear-dirt of the same') preferred to *wear* whatever part, private or otherwise, was being recommended. Sometimes it was the heart, though by the early 18th century, all they had to do for protection was hang a mule-hide over the bed. One 13th-century imitator of Arnold of Villanova had suggested eating the dust from a mule's hoof, but the idea just didn't catch on. It stuck in Morocco, however, right up till the 1920's. There, anthropologist Westermarck reported that in Agui, where hell hath no fury like a man who's been spurned, the rejected suitor would 'take revenge' by charring 'the hoof-parings of a mule', grinding them together with 'barley or wheat', and making a loaf of bread, which he gave the woman to eat, fully expecting her to become 'as sterile as is a mule.'

As the Bishop said . . .

Apart from rejecting mule's testicles, Europeans made a few



Albert the Great made some original contributions to oral contraception in 13th-century Europe. His *Admirable Secrets* (probably not his, but he got the blame for them), suggested drinking a man's urine. After that, an alternative suggestion to eat bees didn't sound so bad.

original suggestions, too. Bishop Albert the Great was supposed to have recommended drinking a 'man's urine or eating bees, though the latter may not have been so original. Reporting on Morocco again, Westermarck wrote that women ate 'bread into which has been put a piece of honeycomb containing a few dead bees'. As for the former, at least it's been rivalled in revoltingness. One (admittedly dubious) report reckons that Tibetan women used to eat the Dalai Llama's excrement. Albert was also accredited with anaphrodisiacs, and they were every bit as good as anything that Pliny had dreamt up.

If one wishes that a women be not sexually desirous of men, it is necessary to take the penis of a wolf, to take the hairs of his eyelids, and those under his beard, to have them burned, and then to make the woman drink the results without her knowing anything about it.

If this proved difficult, ingredients could always be disguised as a tasty stew.

Reduce to powder the sexual organ of a red bull, and give a crown's weight of this powder in a broth composed of veal, or purslane and lettuce.

Universal 'tricks and crimes'

In the main, primitive peoples in the world have been a little more rational in their beliefs. One tribe in Sumatra seems to have thought up its own contraceptive-metal myth by drinking the dust resulting from sharpening a knife, but generally they've stuck to plants and roots, and avoided anything too gruesome.

In North America, one man bemoaned in 1891 that, 'We find the same tricks and crimes accompanying concep-

tion and gestation among Indians that are common every where'. He avoided the sordid details, but another observer reported:

Among the White Mountain Apache a woman desiring to have no children, or to stop bearing, swallows now and then a little of the red burned earth from beneath the fire . . . Some of the Huichol women drink a decoction of a certain plant to prevent childbearing.

Cora women, for the same purpose, take internally the scrapings of the male deer horn.

In South America, Canelos women of Ecuador were 'in the habit of taking a medicine prepared from the small 'piripiri' plant. The root knots of the plant were 'crushed and soaked in water,' and the woman had to drink a fair amount of it. But unfortunately, it wasn't quite that simple. Afterwards she had to 'eat only roasted plantain without salt and small birds of the forest.' And if she infringed these rules of diet, she was believed to be 'particularly exposed to the very danger against which the piripiri drink was to protect her'.

Malayan women preferred fruits to plants, according to a Dutch Professor de Zwaan. Women chewed the 'toemanang fruit' with a 'sirih "plug",' which had to be kept after the juice was swallowed. The plug was then 'deposited on a board above the fire of the fireplace' and gave her protection as long as it stayed there. Alternative methods included eating asafoetida in banana, or fermenting a ripe pineapple with yeast. When it had hung for a day or two 'the woman who eats it will find it a sure preventive of pregnancy.'

Where too many babies made you a laughing stock

Most people take it for granted that primitive tribes prize

fertility, and it's true that barrenness is usually the worst curse that can befall a native woman. But Blyth, an 1880's member of the British Government Medical Staff in Fiji, said that 'Fijian women have a decided aversion to large families, and have a feeling of shame if they become pregnant too often, believing that those women who bear a large number of children are laughing-stocks to the community.' Accordingly, they took 'amusing expedients' to escape pregnancy. 'The medicine employed for this purpose is obtained from the leaves and root of the Roqa tree, and from the leaves and root of the Samalo in conjunction. The roots are first denuded of bark and scraped. The scrapings and the leaves bruised are made into an infusion with cold water, and this, when strained, is ready for use.'

Blyth's sceptical attitude was typical until recently. Pitt-Rivers wrote about Australasia in 1927:

European observers, such as missionaries and government officials, have often supposed that some mysterious contraceptive drug was used by the unmarried girls. Native herbs and roots, mixed together with all manner of magical substances, such as spider's eggs, skins of snakes, etc., are as a matter of fact made into concoctions and drunk by girls with this idea. I have myself collected such recipes from Melanesian and Papuan sorcerers and old women, but there is no reason to suppose that they have any physical effect . . . No medical analyst to whom I have submitted several of these prescriptions has, however, found any reason to credit these concoctions with any of their supposed physical properties.

Second thoughts

Nowadays, scientists aren't so sure. Quite a few things have happened to make them re-think the situation, starting

with the mysterious 'clover disease' in Australia. When lamb percentages fell from 80% to as low as 10% during the 1940's, farmers were surprised to find flock production return to normal when they moved to fresh fields and pastures new. It was some time before they realised they'd had their sheep on a grass-roots version of the Pill, because the original clover had been rich in oestrogen. Meantime, much the same thing had been happening to women in Europe. When food ran short during the Second World War, some of them took to eating stewed tulip bulbs, and wondered why their reproductive systems had gone haywire.

However, it wasn't until Professor Russell Marker started looking for supplies of progesterone—like oestrogen, a vital ingredient of the Pill—that scepticism got its real knock. In the early 1940's, it was one of the rarest and most expensive drugs in the world, and much in demand for preventing miscarriages. It took literally tons of animal brains and spinal cords to produce a meagre amount, so Marker decided to try the plant kingdom instead. Every summer vacation, he plodded through the backwoods of the south-western states and Mexico, taking samples of any likely-looking plants and roots, and bringing back as much as 100,000 pounds of obscure vegetation. And every term time, he and his assistants systematically worked their way through them. Some contained no progesterone at all; others too little to be worth the cost of extraction; but finally, they came to the roots of a Mexican vine. Called *cabeza de negro* (head of black), it contained enough of the drug to be a practical proposition—except that nobody wanted to know. Not a single commercial firm (and they must all be kicking themselves now) was prepared to give Professor Marker financial backing—so he abandoned his students in mid-term, and set off to go it alone.

First thing he did was rent a cottage in a New Mexico backstreet and turn it into a 'laboratory'. Then he headed for the mountains, with nothing but a knife, a spade, some sacks, a supply of cigars, and a mule to carry them. An intrepid traveller if ever there was one (he spoke no Indian and next to no Spanish), he managed to organise a string of Indians to keep him supplied with *cabeza de negro* roots—but that was the only help he had. Back in his 'lab', he had to extract the drug single-handed, and despite the Herculean task, by the end of the summer was able to stroll into a Mexico City drug firm with a couple of jam-jars wrapped in newspaper. They looked unpromising enough, but at the then prevailing prices, they were filled with more than £40,000 (160,000 dollars) worth of progesterone.

The birth of the Pill

Though Professor Marker made the Pill possible, he didn't invent it. Back in 1937, someone called Makepeace discovered that progesterone inhibited ovulation in rabbits—but he didn't try the idea out on humans. And probably no-one would have done so for decades but for a chance meeting. Biologist Dr. Gregory Pincus was invited out to dinner, and one of his fellow-guests was Margaret Sanger, the pioneer of American birth control. She told him how depressed she was at the failure rates of existing contraceptives, and he listened so sympathetically that by the end of the evening, he'd committed himself to researching on her behalf. He couldn't have guessed how easy it was going to be. Driving home from work the very next day, it suddenly occurred to him to ask, if a pregnant woman naturally produces progesterone, which stops the release of further eggs, why shouldn't the hormone prevent ovulation in a non-pregnant woman, too?

And so the Pill was born out of the boredom of a car-ride, and though its ingredients are now manufactured synthetically, it was a plant that made the whole thing possible. This sparked off an interest in plant analysis that's still in full swing. In countries like India, where people can manage their own traditional (but apparently useless) methods, but find the sophistications of the Pill beyond them (one man complained it made his rice taste bitter), just proving that one traditional method is effective could be of enormous importance. Both the Lucknow Central Research Institute and the Haffkins Institute in Bombay are working their way through as many as they can manage, but so far, as in most other countries, results have proved disappointing. There have been isolated exceptions. The American journal *Scientist* recently reported tests on a Paraguayan weed called *Stevia rebaudiana Bertoni*. For centuries Matto Grosso Indian women have been drying the leaves and stems of this plant, and drinking it daily with water to prevent pregnancy when their families were large enough. The same decoction was tried on female rats for 18 days, and their fertility was reduced by 57%—79%. What's more, they stayed nearly as infertile for another seven or eight weeks, and seemed perfectly healthy at the end of the experiment.

Of course rats aren't people, but the research sounds well worth pursuing—and not just for the benefit of simple people. Plenty of so-called sophisticated people, who fight shy of the Pill because it's 'unnatural', would probably have no qualms about chewing on a root that had exactly the same effect.

7 When Safe was a Four-Letter Word

With most forms of contraception, intelligent guesswork went a long way. It was commonsense to block the entrance to the womb, slow down the sperm, or stop them entering the vagina altogether. But to calculate the elusive safe period, an accurate knowledge was needed, not just of the male sperm, but of the female egg and the whole menstrual cycle. Such knowledge was woefully lacking—and let's face it—most women have the shakiest grasp of what's going on inside them even today.

The simple theory of the safe period (see Chapter 10 for a fuller explanation) is that the female ovaries release one egg *about* a fortnight before menstruation. This egg can only live for about a day. Male spermatozoa live longer—about two days is the commonest estimate—so there are only three *dangerous* days around the middle of each month when the two can meet up and cause conception. (But don't get too hopeful—the three days shift from month to month, turning simple theory into complicated practice.) If conception takes place, the sperm-fertilised egg makes itself at home in the lining of the womb. If not, the lining of the womb breaks down and menstruation takes place. In other words, a woman is *least* fertile before and just after her period.

Immaculate Conceptions

Of course, plenty of people knew that male semen played a vital part in causing pregnancy, which is why the art of withdrawal was so ancient and widespread. But there were always plenty more who preferred an immaculate conception—some of the early Church Fathers blamed everything onto the wind. In any case, even when people had the sense to hold semen responsible, the mystery of how it worked was often beyond them. In mid-17th-century England, for instance, pregnancy was practically something you could

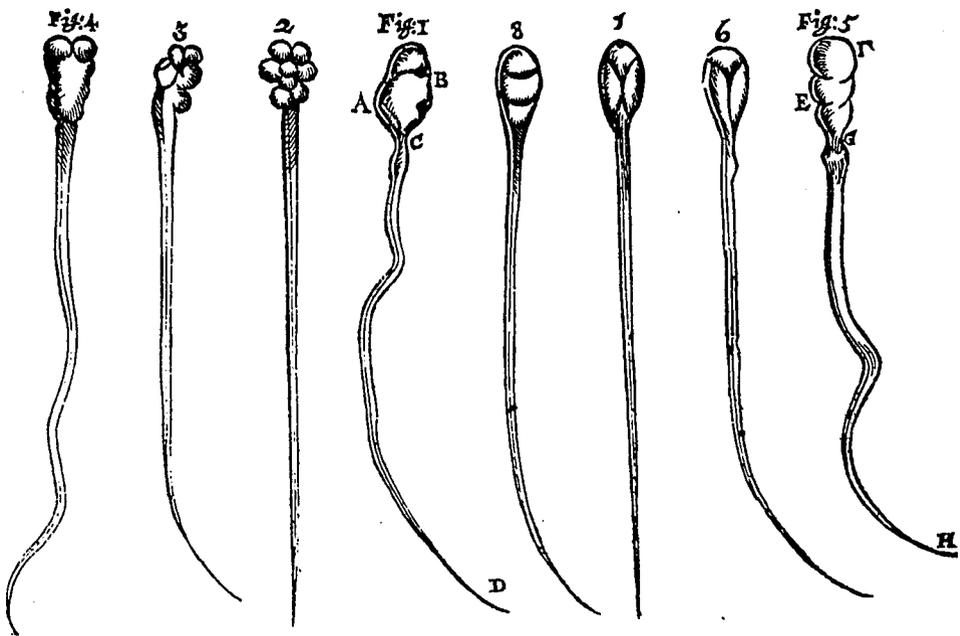
“There will be no more.”
Hoorah!



When replying to a questionnaire sent out by the National Life Assurance Society in 1871, the above gentleman, after giving details of his numerous offspring, drew a little picture to express his relief that his wife had reached the menopause. Contraceptives were available—but respectable people didn't use them. Queen Victoria had written that she didn't want to be the *'Mamma d'une nombreuse famille'* but dear Albert made her one all the same.

pick up off a lavatory seat. Women blamed their condition onto men who had nocturnal emissions several yards away, or in one case, onto contact with a woman who had just had intercourse with her husband. These seemed likely stories to Sir Thomas Browne, especially the one about a woman who 'conceived in a bath, by attracting the sperm or seminal effluxion of a man admitted to bath in some vicinity unto her.' 'I have scarce faith to believe', he comments wonderingly. '“Tis a new and unseconded way in history to fornicate at a distance . . .”'

Things should have got clearer in 1677, when a Dutchman called Leeuwenhoek discovered 'little animals' (*animal-*



A Dutchman called Leeuwenhoek discovered 'little animals' swimming in *semine masculine* under his microscope in 1677. His drawings caused quite a stir at the Royal Society of London, though no-one was sure how the little animals caused pregnancy. One woman claimed she conceived 'by attracting the sperm or seminal effluxion' of a man who shared the use of her bath, an immaculate conception if ever there was one.

cula) while studying '*semine masculine*' under the microscope. He described them as 'moving forward with a snakelike motion of the tail, as eels do when swimming in water.' But instead of feeling elated, he submitted details to the Secretary of the Royal Society of London with a shame-faced:

And if your Lordship should consider such matters either disgusting, or likely to seem offensive to the learned, I earnestly beg they be regarded as private, and either published or suppressed, as your Lordship's judgement dictates.

Fortunately his Lordship saw fit to publish. But as often happens with scientific progress, it was a case of one step forward and two steps back, and Leeuwenhoek himself was partly to blame. He'd written, 'I have sometimes fancied that I could even discern different parts in the bodies of

these *animalcula*, but since I have not always been able to do so, I will say no more'. Later 'scientists' were not so cautious. Before long they were claiming they'd seen minutely formed men under their microscopes, with legs, arms and heads all intact. One even swore he'd seen a microscopic horse riding through the semen of a stallion.

Shut the Door, they're coming in the window

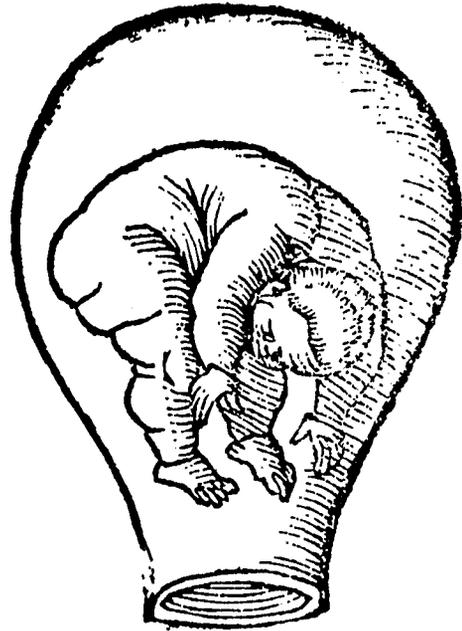
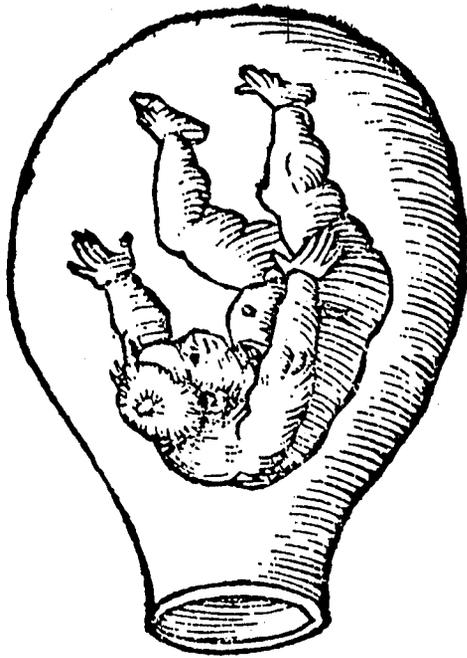
By the 18th century, a clergyman was claiming spermatozoa floated in the air. This unnerving notion must have saved many reputations—and kept a lot of doors and windows tightly shut. His book enjoyed enormous success, and though it's difficult to know how many took it seriously, it certainly prompted Sir John Hill to parody the Royal Society, with descriptions of a wonderful machine, 'electrified according to the nicest laws of electricity'. It was erected facing west, 'in a convenient attitude to intercept the floating *Animalcula*', and when several miniaturised men and women had been trapped, they were fed to a chambermaid who promptly became pregnant.

A horny problem

If the workings of spermatozoa were misunderstood, even after they'd been minutely examined under a microscope, it's not surprising that the release of the monthly female egg was entirely overlooked. Physicians were having enough trouble getting to grips with the visible facts of female

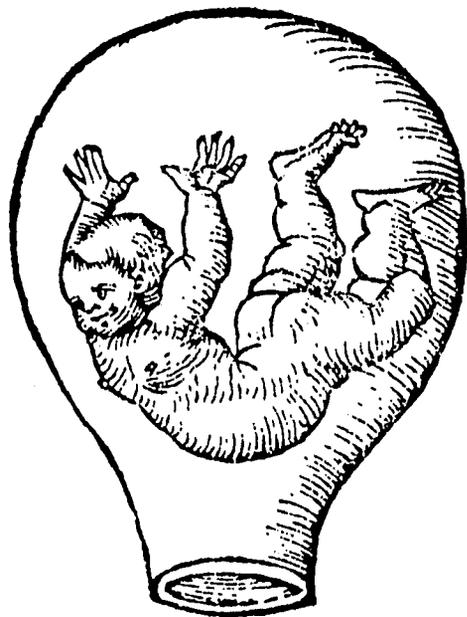
This illustration shows the medieval idea of an embryo. It was supposed to be perfectly formed from the word go, and spent its nine months merely shifting around and getting bigger. Leeuwenhoek's discovery did nothing to shake this traditional belief. In fact, post-Leeuwenhoek observers 'confirmed' the old teaching by finding minutely made men and women under their microscopes.

dem angesicht / wie das mit
dem rucken / soll die hebam wie
obstah / thun.



Vnd so das kind mit ein
oder beiden füßen beim kopff
kem / soll die hebam das haupt

begreifen / die füß vber sich
richten / vnd dem kind außhelf
fen.

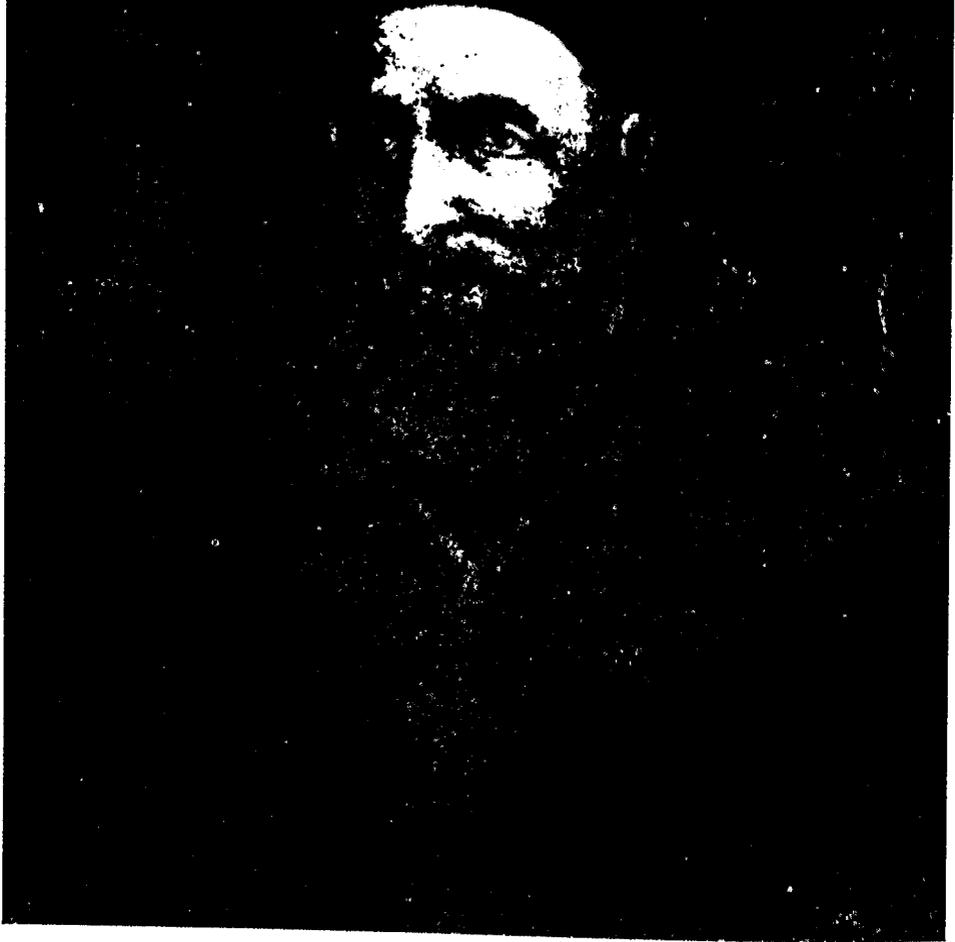


Ob das kindt getheilt leg /
oder auff sein angesicht / so sol
die hebam zii der frawen greif
fen / vnd gar subtil das kind in
der seitten vmbkeren. Oder dz
kind richten / also / Welche teil
dem außgang aller nechst / die
sol sie halten vnd außföhren /
am meisten doch das haupt sü
chen vnd außföhren.

FALLOPIUS NAPTINENSIS. AM.

17. 1577

1562



Gabriello Fallopius, who gave his name to the Fallopian tubes. In the brief flowering of the Renaissance, when it was safe to contradict the ancients, he gave an account of the human embryo and its gradual development in the womb.

anatomy, without bothering about the invisible. All they knew was that a woman had a womb. It had seven horns (Galen had said so in the 2nd century), three on the right for boys, three on the left for girls, and one in the middle for hermaphrodites. You might think that even an idiot could have proved otherwise—but what could you use for proof? Not the evidence of your own eyes. Anyone could have blown the theory of tiny human embryos complete right down to toe-nails, by cracking open a few eggs and examining the development of fledglings. But no. A scientific attitude was the last thing that was called for, especially if it contradicted traditional medical thinking. When a 15th-century anatomist ‘discovered’ a hornless womb, he hastily wrote his corpse off as a freak—and he wasn’t so stupid. A century later, Vesalius caused such an uproar by saying the womb consisted of a single cavity that he burned his papers in disgust, and gave up anatomy till the dust had died down.

With the Renaissance, men felt confident enough to ‘improve on’ the ancients, and their works were no longer treated as sacrosanct. Around 1600, Fallopius discovered and christened the Fallopian tubes, and described the development of the human embryo from ‘inhuman’ blob onwards. By 1662, the ovaries had not only been discovered by van Horne, but given the name of ovary in preference to ‘female testicle’.

Unfortunately though, nobody discovered the female egg. And without it, there was nothing to jolt the traditional notion that women played a passive part in conception. All they were supposed to do was act as warm and cosy incubators. Their wombs provided somewhere for the male seed to grow until it could be hatched out as a human being, and there was no question of women making an *equal* contribution to the creation of life. In fact, the only active

contribution women were believed to make had nuisance value. According to Plato and plenty of other classical authorities:

That part of the woman which is called the womb, being an animal desirous of generation, if it become unfruitful for a long time turns indignant, and wandering all over the body stops the passages of the spirits and the respiration and occasions the most extreme anxiety and all sorts of diseases.

Virgins were the worst sufferers, naturally, and as their wombs were lightest they travelled furthest. Where they stubbornly refused to return to base, the remedy was to frighten them from the top end by sniffing foul smells, and coax them towards the bottom end by fumigating the vagina with sweet smells. This 'wandering womb' therapy survived into 17th century England. Treatment for prolapse of the womb (working the other way round of course, to encourage the womb to rise) goes: 'Yea, apply stinking things to her matrix, as assafoetida, galbanum, castor and stinking pisse; but to the nose, hold sweet things, as musk, civet, and amber.'

In the heat of the moment

It wasn't until the 1840's that Bischoff in Germany and Pouchet in France realised that the female ovaries regularly and spontaneously released a monthly egg. The news was hailed as a great advance (Pouchet received a French Academy of Science prize on the strength of it), but once again, the advance turned out to be a setback. Both scientists assumed the female egg came down at the time of menstruation, making women most fertile then—and least fertile in the middle of the month. Disastrous as their con-

clusion may have been, it was the natural one to arrive at, especially as it confirmed what learned men had believed in all civilisations and centuries. From Aristotle onwards, everyone had compared the female human to the female animal, and decided that women came 'in heat' when they had their period.

If there was an exception, it may have been Moses. He wasn't interested in a safe period, of course, but with his 'increase and multiply' zeal he *was* interested in a fertile period. By making a woman 'unclean' for seven days from the start of her period, and then demanding a purification rite, he ensured that the husband applied himself with renewed vigour just as conception was becoming most likely. Coincidence or not, it was too good to last. By the time the *Talmud* got around to commentating on contraception, the pendulum had swung the other way. Both Rabbi Ammi and Rabbi Issac insisted:

A woman does not conceive unless it is near her menstrual period, for it is said. 'Behold I was brought forth in iniquity'.

They're both referring to the text in Psalm 51—a text that's caused endless trouble to Jews and Christians alike—for different reasons. As far as the Jews were concerned, it meant the psalmist's mother became pregnant while she was 'unclean', 'proving' that fertility must coincide with menstruation. As far as the Christians were concerned, it meant that sex was tainted, and gave rise to the doctrine of original sin.

Do as I say, not as I do

St. Augustine was the first Catholic to denounce 'poisons of sterility' and 'evil deeds' designed to avoid pregnancy. As

far as he was concerned, the only reason for getting married was to have children—which doesn't explain how he managed to have a child and not get married. Ironically, Augustine poured a great deal of his wrath on the safe period, the one form of contraception that the present Catholic church approves. This was because he'd been a Manichaeian. He'd got nine adult years of non-Christianity to live down, and the more he could discredit his old religion, the more secure he could feel in his new one.

The Manichaeians were followers of Mani, a Christ-like celibate born near Bagdad, who founded his religion around A.D. 250. He never claimed to be the Son of God, but he still ended up with his head stuck on one city gate and his skin hanging from another—and a stream of devout adherents stretching from Spain to China. Over the centuries, persecution was so appalling (two English martyrs were burned at York), that hardly any of his original writings remain. In fact, it's difficult to know what he advocated sexually, and a hundred years later, there's almost only St. Augustine's very biased word for it. According to St. Augustine in the 4th century, the Manichaeians believed that God was 'fettered' in the seeds of 'trees, herbs, men and animals', and needed to be loosed and liberated'. The male seed could be loosed in the usual time-honoured way—provided it didn't cause pregnancy and create another human being for God to be fettered in. Addressing the Manichaeians directly he continues:

For though you do not forbid sexual intercourse, you . . . forbid marriage in the proper sense, although this is the only good excuse for such intercourse . . . Is it not you who hold that begetting children, by which souls are confined in flesh, is a greater sin than cohabitation? Is it

not you who used to counsel us to observe as much as possible the time when a woman, after her purification, is most likely to conceive, and to abstain from cohabitation at that time, lest the soul should be entangled in the flesh?

All of which, he concludes, 'makes the woman not a wife, but a mistress, who for some gifts presented to her is joined to the man to gratify his passion'—an argument that gets wearisomely familiar through the centuries. (Though at least he was better-qualified to make it than most. Even when he decided to turn over a new leaf and get married, which involved ditching his mistress of about ten years' standing, his fiancée was too young for immediate marriage, so he took another mistress to tide him over.)

The road to pregnancy was paved with good intentions

If St. Augustine means that the time when a woman is most likely to conceive is 'after her purification', then the Manichaeans may have been depleted by birth control as much as persecution. But even presuming they'd hit on an accurate safe period, their knowledge died with them. Non-Manichaeans were probably consulting the works of the eminent Soranus, who with the best will in the world was sending women to almost certain pregnancy, from the time of his 2nd century writing onwards. He stated quite confidently:

In cases where it is more advantageous to prevent conception, people should abstain from coitus at the times when we have indicated as especially dangerous, that is, the time directly before and after menstruation.

True, the writings of Soranus were lost for centuries, but he had an enormous influence on the writers that came after him. Aetios of Amida, for instance, quoted him almost parrot-fashion in the 6th century, and doomed another generation of women to disappointment with:

In order to avoid conception it is necessary to abstain from coitus during the days favourable to conception, for example, at the beginning or end of menstruation.

It's just possible Avicenna carried on the bad work in the 11th century, with the phrase 'Avoid the form of coition which favours conception, and which we have already mentioned'—but he could as easily have been meaning the dreary old missionary position.

Yin, Yang and when to ejaculate

Meantime in China, men were as anxious as Moses to discover a fertile period, not because they wanted to colonise neighbouring territories, but because they wanted to do their duty to their ancestors by providing sons to carry on the line. To this end they had several wives, and some kings boasted a queen, three consorts, nine wives of the second rank, twenty-seven wives of the third rank, and eighty-one concubines. Because of the belief that a man should save his *yang* essence (semen), while gaining strength from the female *yin* essence (vaginal secretions), the general rule was that he slept with the lower orders first and oftenest, but avoided ejaculation at each encounter. Then, when he'd mustered all the *yin* strength he could possibly manage, he was let loose on number one wife or queen. But nurturing top-potency sperm wasn't enough. To be sure of getting her pregnant, he had to observe the fertile period as laid down by Tung-Hsuan in his *Records of the Bedchamber*.

Every man who desires a child should wait until after the woman has had her menstruation. If he copulates with her on the first or third day thereafter, he will obtain a son. If on the fourth or fifth days, a girl will be conceived. All emissions of semen during copulation after the fifth day are merely spilling one's semen without serving a purpose.

Tung-Hsuan, and the sex experts who followed him up till the 17th century A.D., could hardly have thought up a less likely period if they'd tried. Today, day 10 of a woman's cycle is reckoned to start her most fertile phase—the very day that Chinese men were being told to abandon their efforts. But as the sex hand-books only reached the literate upper classes, the remainder of the population must have ejaculated with abandon—which would account for China's present population problems.

The 'modern theory' of generation'

In Christian Europe, as we've seen, church disapproval of contraception replaced written research by word-of-mouth old wives' tales. Information was driven further underground by St. Thomas Aquinas in the 13th century. He branded contraception 'a vice against nature'; his views became official doctrine—and the subject was even less fit for respectable study. Probably an oral tradition existed, but the safe period didn't re-surface seriously until the 19th century, when it started popping up all over the place.

In England in the 1840's, it was the 'modern theory of generation' which 'limits the period of conception to a day or two before, and about eight days after the flux'. The physical impossibility of pregnancy at this time was 'not blinked at by the supporters of this theory'. Well, every time

Dr. Henry Oldham, obstetric physician at Guys Hospital, delivered a baby that should never have been conceived—he blinked. But though he insisted there was something radically wrong somewhere, no-one listened to him. Sir James Young Simpson (the first man to use chloroform as an anaesthetic) found out the hard way. He'd heard of the safe period from Polish menstruation expert Raciborski, and rashly recommended it to the father of a large family. The man was back in a few months, foaming at the mouth and shouting, 'He's a damned rascal that Raciborski . . .'

There were a lot more furious fathers—and mothers—to come. Across the Atlantic in 1852, Dr. Russell Thacher Trall was telling American wives that conception was 'entirely within the control of the will, reason and judgement'. All they had to realise was that 'impregnation can only occur, as a general rule, between the commencement of the menstrual excitement and twelve days after its cessation.' Trall obviously had misgivings, because in 1866, he recommended the coughing, jumping and sneezing tactics that earn him a place in Chapter 2. But Mrs. Eliza Duffey still thought it worth mentioning in her *What Women Should Know* seven years later. Her safe period lasted from ten or twelve days after the end of a period to four or six days before the next one, and where it didn't work, women must 'accept the inevitable'.

Back in England, isolated writers were getting nearer the truth. In 1854, Dr. George Drysdale suggested a safe period from two to three days before menstruation to eight days after it, and in 1886, Dr. H. Allbutt lengthened this to five days before and eight days after. But neither felt very confident, and stressed the method was unreliable. It must have been, because, generally speaking, people were still seeing menstruation as a preparation for conception rather

than a proof that it hadn't taken place. Usually doubts were expressed quietly. In 1894, Leopold and Miranoff, who'd been unsuccessfully hunting for a female egg, mildly observed that 'no-one has yet described a case where a freshly discharged follicle was found at menstruation'.

Doctors' Dilemma

Throughout this trial-followed-by-error, members of the medical profession, instead of doing research on the subject, were keeping their hands clean and making it quite clear that contraception was nothing to do with them. The *British Medical Journal* assured readers in the 1860's that 'Our profession will repudiate with indignation and disgust such functions . . .' Of the two courageous doctors above, Drysdale published his works anonymously, and Allbutt was struck off the medical register. This attitude prevailed well into the 20th century. By 1923 however, *The Practitioner* made a real concession and devoted an issue to birth control. But the trouble was, doctors had kept their hands so clean none of them knew what they were talking about. They were still muttering about 'barbarous weapons', hinting that contraception caused sterility and madness, and as for the grudgingly approved safe period, it was cut down to a miserable eight days in each month.

It was left to Dr. Ogino in Japan and Dr. Knaus in Austria to realise, quite independently, that the female egg descended mid-monthly. That was in the 1930's—and to see how little science has advanced since—turn to Chapter 10.

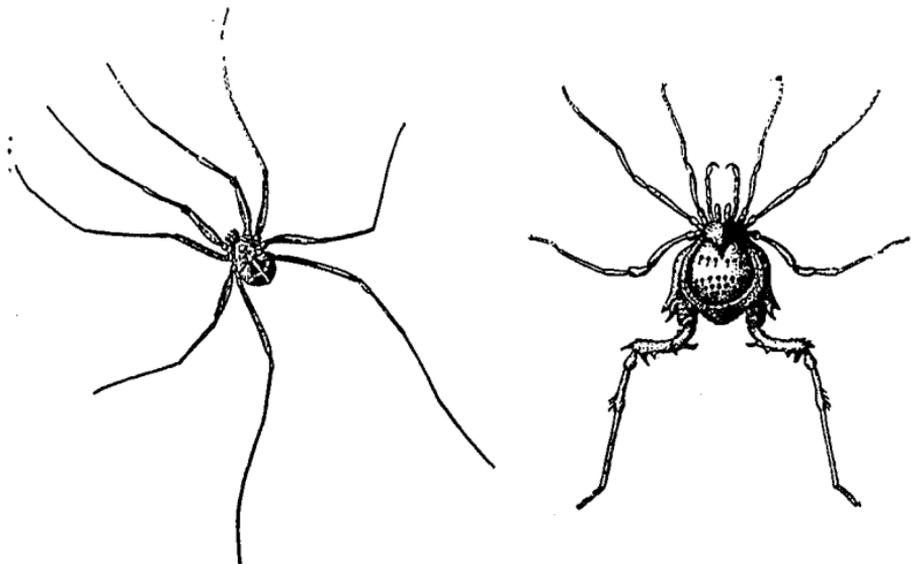
8 Popular Misconceptions

People are incredibly credulous. They'll believe just about anything—and at one time or another just about everything's been suggested. Dioscorides told Romans that, 'The menstrual blood of a woman appears to prevent conception when they spread themselves with it'. A few centuries later, Indian women were being told to rub the soles of their feet with salves of plants. And Middle-Age European women were supposed to spit three times into the mouth of a frog presuming they could find a frog stupid enough to stand still.

Often, the more repulsive the idea, the better it caught on. There were plenty of things to do with urine, for instance, besides drinking it. Pliny, taking his usual negative approach, said that, 'If a man makes water upon a dog's urine, he will become disinclined to copulation'. By the time Ibn al-Baitar was writing in the 13th century, this had become 'If a woman urinates in the urine of a wolf, she will never be with child'. Alternatively, if a man had steady hands, he could use his urine to *promote* conception. Supposing his wife had done something to make herself sterile, 17th-century Culpeper considered the cure 'easy', as it could be effected by the man 'only making water through his wife's wedding ring.'

A few dead certs

Appealing to the dead was an even less attractive proposition. In European folk belief, women simply went to the graves of their sisters and called out three times, 'I don't want any more children'. But in Morocco, Westermarck reported that 'water which has been used for the washing of a dead person is secretly given to a woman to drink in order to make her infertile.' A less repugnant way of being sterilised was for the girl 'to remain behind after a burial when the other people had left the grave, in order to avert



Roman historian Pliny sprinkled his 1st-century *Historia Naturalis* with contraceptive old wives' tales. He thought a spider called 'phalangium' (two fat specimens pictured above) an extremely reliable method. All a woman had to do was extract two small worms from it, attach them to her body in a piece of deer's skin before sunrise, and she wouldn't get pregnant.

the event she fears by stepping three times over the grave; but all the steps must be made in the same direction, since otherwise the return step would counteract the effect of the earlier step.' Of course, three, like seven, is an international lucky number.

The idea that something would only work if it was unpleasant enough, was easy to translate into terms of amulets. Almost inevitably, Pliny was in the forefront with a long list of animals' testicles to be worn on the body. But his favourite was 'phalangium', wrapped in a piece of deer's skin, and attached to the woman before sunrise. And phalangium consisted of two small worms extracted from a large hairy spider. 'It is the only one of all the anti-conceptives' he stated modestly 'that I feel myself at liberty to mention, in favour of some women whose fecundity, quite teeming with children, stands in need of some respite.' Things had got even more complicated by Aetios of Amida's day in the 6th century. He suggested:

Anti-conceptual: Wear cat liver in a tube on the left

foot, or wear the testicles of a cat in a tube around the umbilicus.

Or else: Wear part of the womb of a lioness in a tube of ivory. This is very effective.

Or else: The woman should carry as an amulet around the anus the tooth of a child or a glass from a marble quarry.

Another experiment: Wrap in stag skin the seed of henbane diluted in the milk of a mare nourishing a mule. Carry that as an amulet on the left arm, and take care that it does not fall to the ground.

Roots, fruits and cabbage blossoms

Indian women seem to have been spared such indignities, though in the 8th century the well-dressed prostitute was wearing around the waist 'the root of the *Datura* plant gathered in the month of Powsha'. As for Arabian women, most of the time they were wearing their roots, fruits and cabbage blossoms in the right place—i.e., the vagina. It wasn't until the 13th and 14th centuries, when the *Treatise on Simples* tried to improve on Rhazes and Avicenna, that they were expected to wear amulets, and even then, by classical standards the ingredients were far too innocuous to be effective. The recipe said:

If one takes, before it falls, the tooth of a child who is losing his teeth, and puts it in a silver leaf, and a woman carries it, it will prevent her from conceiving.

Alternatively:

The seed of patience or sorrel enclosed in a linen cloth and carried on the left arm of a woman will prevent her from conceiving as long as she carries it.

By the 16th century, all she had to wear was a piece of paper covered with special letters, numbers and symbols. 'In order to prevent conception one writes and suspends on the woman . . .' starts the contraceptive advice in the *Kitab at-Tadhkira*, before reeling off pages of magic formulae.

Contemporary Europeans preferred stronger stuff, and though the thought of a woman tottering around with the 'heart of a salamander' attached to her knees is pitiful, sometimes the plight of the animals was much worse. *The Admirable Secrets of Albert the Great*, for instance, included:

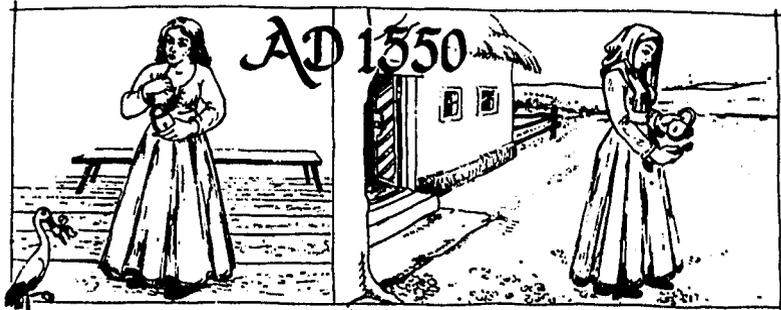
The ancients say that if a woman hangs about her neck the finger and the anus of a dead foetus, she will not conceive while they are there.

It is also said that if one cuts off the foot of the female weasel, leaving her still alive, and if one puts this foot about the neck of a woman, she will not conceive while she wears it; and that if she takes it off she will become pregnant. If one takes the two testicles of a weasel and wraps them up, binding them to the thigh of a woman who wears also a weasel bone on her person, she will no longer conceive.

Some amulets had to be worn in even more unlikely places. 'If one soaks up in a piece of cloth the oil of the barberry tree', Albert also wrote 'and if one applies it to the left temple of a woman, she will not conceive while it is there.'

Burning with Desire

Oriental women burned the nearest they came to amulets before intercourse, and positioning was a critical part of the procedure. The Chinese usually placed their *moxa* balls (made from the downy covering of mugwort plus a pinch



• JUGOSLAVIJA — POLENSAK

BEFORE GOING TO THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY THE BRIDE PUT AN UNLOCKED PADLOCK INTO THE BODICE OF HER DRESS. SHE DECIDED UPON THE NUMBER OF HER CHILDLESS YEARS BY MAKING THE SAME NUMBER OF STEPS OUTSIDE HER HOUSE WITH THE PADLOCK UNLOCKED, THEN SHE LOCKED IT.



• JUGOSLAVIJA — PAVLOVCI AT ORMOŽ

WHEN THE BRIDE-GROOM CAME TO TAKE THE BRIDE TO THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY, SHE CLIMBED UP A LADDER AS MANY RUNGS AS SHE WANTED TO HAVE CHILDREN IN HER WEDLOCK.



• JUGOSLAVIJA — ČRNI VRH ABOVE IDRİJA

WOMEN REMAINED CHILDLESS THE SAME NUMBER OF YEARS AS WAS THAT OF THE BARLEY GRAINS THROWN INTO THEIR WEDDING SHOES.

of incense) on the naval to prevent pregnancy, but one late-Ming erotic novel, *Chin-p'ing-mei*, distributed them around more widely. The man had to light one between the breasts, one on the stomach, and one on the *mons veneris*—though Japanese men tastefully confined their corresponding *mogusa* to the *mons veneris*.

Symbolic acts of magic were usually less offensive than wearing amulets, and rarely took as much trouble. When Frater Rudolphus instructed priests in the funny ways of human flocks, he described the following examples amongst 14th-century German women:

Those who desire to prevent birth and conception do a great many fantastic things. When they sit or lie down they sometimes put a number of fingers under them, thinking they will be free from conception as many years as they put fingers under them. A substance which they call their 'flower' they place in an elder tree saying: 'You will bear for me and I will bloom for you'.

'And yet', continues Frater Rudolphus wearily, 'the tree blooms, and the woman bears children with pain.' Women should have been the first to lose faith, but instead, they continued to do fantastic things all over Europe and well into the 19th century. In Serbia, they sat on as many fingers as they wanted pregnancy-free years on the way to their weddings, and when that failed, dipped as many fingers into their child's first bath-water. Whenever Bosnian women rode a horse, they slipped a certain number of

Symbolic magic was a favourite with Europeans. One 14th-century monk described the Middle-Age situation in Germany: 'Those who desire to prevent birth do a great many fantastic things. When they lie or sit down they sometimes put a number of fingers under them, thinking they will be free from conception as many years as they put fingers under them'. Simple country people were still doing the same things all over 19th-century Europe.

fingers under the saddle—and put both hands under if they wanted total sterility. Elsewhere, women threw everything from stones, nails, grain or apples into their nearest well or river, believing they'd escape pregnancy according to the number of objects they threw in. As a final desperate measure, they also tied knots in things. Items ranged from threads or shoe-laces during the wedding-ceremony, to lint soaked in menstrual blood. Among women in Southern Russia, this latter prize was tied into ten knots and worn for 'nine days and nights' as follows:

During the night it is carried under the right arm, and during the day under the left knee. Thereafter it is buried in the earth in the main corner of the room while these words are recited three times: 'I do not bury you for one year, but for eternity!'

Tying a knot in it

Europeans seem to be the only 'civilised' people to have gone in for these methods, although the minds of primitive peoples were working along the same lines. Native women in Fez were eating one castor bean for every year they wanted to avoid having a child. The men went in for knot-tying, and Westermarck's *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* reported:

At Fez a man prevents intercourse with a woman from resulting in pregnancy by eating the oviduct of a hen which he has boiled after first making a knot in it; and it is said that the woman will remain sterile for ever.

In parts of Africa, it was left to the witch doctor or *fundi*. He went out into the jungle, and came back with two kinds of tree bark which he twisted into a cord. Then he

rubbed in the yolk of an egg and tied the cord into three knots, saying as he did so: 'Tree you are called so and so; and you so and so. Out of you' (here he addresses the egg) 'arises life. But from now on I want no more life'. And after that Canute-like pronouncement, the woman who wore the cord was supposed to be sterile—and she could only get pregnant again by untying the knots.

Sex is bad for you

Some European contraceptive beliefs started out as superstitions, but were later 'confirmed' by the findings of modern medicine. One that should have proved popular was that the more often you had sex, the less likely you were to get pregnant. 'Grass seldom grows on a path that is commonly trodden', Culpeper asserted solemnly in his 17th-century *Aristotles Compleat Masterpiece*—something that would have had Aristotle turning in his grave. But before this could turn into a frenzy of sexual activity, people were also asserting that frequent sex was harmful. It was part of the brainwashing campaign that culminated in Victorian times, though it had less success at turning men frigid than the 'passivity' theory had with women. Daniel Defoe (and how he ever managed to create a character like Moll Flanders is a minor miracle), was one of the first to cry woe in 1727:

Whence come Palsies and Epilepsies: Falling sickness, trembling of the Joints, pale dejected Aspects, Leanness, and at last Rottenness, and other filthy and loathsome Distempers, but from the criminal Excesses of their younger times? 'Tis not enough to say that it was lawful, and they made use of none but their own Wives.

Inevitably, the dreaded William Acton seized the 'crim-

inal excess' angle in 1857, and faithfully enough to repeat the actual words.

Married people often appear to think that connection may be repeated just as regularly and almost as often as their meals. Till they are told of the danger, the idea never enters their heads that they may have been guilty of great and almost criminal excess.

In fact one of his married patients had been 'indulging in connection . . . three times a week', without realising it was causing mental enfeeblement, and a pain in the back so bad that he was 'scarcely able to move alone.'

Respectable people, bent on reproduction, were only allowed to 'enjoy' sex little and half-heartedly. Conversely, disreputable people could risk flinging themselves into it often and vigorously—and be pretty sure of staying barren. Reverting to Culpeper again, this time in his *Aristotles Book of Problems*, whores seldom get pregnant because:

diverse seeds corrupt and spoil the instruments of conception for it makes them so slippery that they cannot retain seed, or else 'tis because one man's seed destroys another.

With sterility in mind, Ukrainian women were still trying to get slippery with as many men as possible in the 1930's, and even anthropologists gave the theory serious consideration, particularly when faced with promiscuous but non-productive natives. 'Can there be any physiological law', wondered Dr. Malinowski about the Trobriand islanders in 1929, 'which makes conception less likely when women begin their sexual life young, lead it indefatigably, and mix their lovers freely?'

Pitt-Rivers, similarly astounded by primitive goings-on,

wondered whether one man's sperm had an immunising effect on the next one's—a hopeful notion that our permissive society hasn't substantiated yet.

A lot of hot air

At least one popular misconception had a *slight* basis of rationality—the idea of smoking pregnancy out of existence—and it's shown a remarkable continuity. Since an Egyptian papyrus of 1300 B.C. suggested:

Fumigate her in her vulva with mimi: then she will not receive her seed,

women have crouched over kettles and practically scalded themselves to death. The slight rationality arises from the fact that immediately after intercourse, sitting legs astride of anything should cause most of the semen to run out. And even if a woman thought she was pregnant, perhaps it was worth a try, like desperately having hot baths to 'bring on a period' today. However, some people preferred a beforehand approach. The 8th-century *Bridhadhyogatarangini* instructed:

The woman who has intercourse after menstruation, after treating the vaginal passage with the smoke of the Neem wood, does not conceive.

A footnote explained that the woman was to put live coals into a vessel with a spout, put some powdered Neem wood on it, cover the opening of the vessel and insert the spout into the vagina.

Arabian women seem to have known enough about the practice not to need detailed explanations. All Rhazes says is 'She may smell foul odours or fumigate her underparts', and Avicenna has the same brief recommendation to

make. Incredibly, 18th-century English ladies were being told to fumigate themselves, too. The 1729 *Compleat Housewife: or Accomplish'd Gentlewoman's Companion*, headed the suggestion 'To bring down a woman's courses in an instant', and many gentlewomen probably tried it in the hopes of bringing about an abortion. That's certainly how women were using the method in Norman Himes' time. In his 1936 *Medical History of Contraception*, he says he's 'very reliably informed' that Jewish women on the lower East Side of New York City try and steam away unwanted pregnancies. In their case though, they ignored Neem wood and sat over a homely pot of stewed onions instead.

Love is a vacuum

It's understandable that simple people should come up with crackpot ideas—but the medical profession can claim the most crackpot of the lot. Thomas Ewell M.D., a U.S. Navy surgeon writing in 1806, decided that the remedy for a 'fruitful nature', 'might be found by embracing only in vessels filled with carbonic acid or azotic gas'. Conception needed 'pure air', and a man's member had been specifically designed, 'so that some oxygen gas may be protruded before the penis into the uterus.' One way of keeping oxygen out of the act was to make love in the mornings only, because 'the air of beds before morning is well known to become so foul as to extinguish burning tapers.' As for proof, one only had to look at the fertility rate of negroes, notorious for copulating by day 'exposed to the sun, on the sides of hills, where the air is uncommonly pure.'

9 Drastic Measures

When contraception failed, there was always abortion or infanticide to fall back on. Alternatively, some people took a Pliny-type approach and tried to rule out pregnancy by ruling out sex. This involved some very unpleasant operations, but other peoples seem to have taken them literally in their stride.

Male genitals have always provided the most tempting material, and people seem to have lopped pieces off for the most frivolous and non-contraceptive reasons. Reporting in the 1880's, Otto Finsch tells of one Central African tribe where the men have 'only *one* testicle, because in boys at the age of seven or eight years the left testicle is removed by a piece of sharpened bamboo. This is said to make the men more desirable to women.'

A broadening experience

It was a mere scratch compared to the mutilations that were taking place in Australia, where 19th-century anthropologists observed the gory rite of subcision in horrified amazement. This involved slitting the penis open from top to bottom and opening it out—'like a hot dog', as one American writer puts it—and victims submitted quite willingly. Gason's first hand account says the operation starts with the young man 'first laying his penis on a piece of bark, when one of the party, provided with a sharp flint, makes an incision underneath into its passage, from the foreskin to its base. This done, a piece of bark is then placed over the wound and tied so as to prevent its closing up.' A French army doctor gave a similar account of Pacific islanders in 1898, answering the thoughts that must be in most people's minds. 'This curious operation compels those who have been thus mutilated to stoop down to make water. In a state of erection, the member becomes large and flat,

and when emitting, the sperm dribbles out over the bag'. The only trouble is, no-one's sure why the operation was carried out. It may have been meant as a form of contraception, but the victims themselves don't seem to have known what it was all in aid of.

If you're thinking 'how barbaric', England and America were performing operations nearly as hideous less than a hundred years back, and for reasons far sillier than anything a primitive tribe could think up. The most popular one was to prevent masturbation, commonly believed to cause 'seminal weakness, impotence, dysury, vertigo, epilepsy, hypochondriasis, loss of memory, manalgia, fatuity'—and, wait for it, 'death'. In addition, as Sylvanus Stall reminded the male youth of America on phonograph cylinders, it wronged 'that pure, sweet girl, whom, in the providence of God, we may rightly trust is being prepared to crown and bless your manhood . . .' For mild cases, circumcision was sufficient remedy, and foreskins fell like scalps on both sides of the Atlantic. But for those who were hardened in the habits of vice, infibulation provided a far more effective answer.

The seal of disapproval

Infibulation was a degrading process whereby the foreskin was pulled well down over the tip of the penis, pierced with two holes, and held there permanently by a silver ring or fibula. In Imperial Rome, it was mostly found amongst comic actors and musicians, who believed that by discouraging erections (which would have proved excruciating in the circumstances) they could keep their voices youthful. The 1st-century epigrammist Martial says that they were especially attractive to women, and Juvenal adds 'The fibula of a comic actor is loosened by the woman only at a

great price'. By the 4th century, Greek physician Oribasius implies that infibulation is widespread, but from then onwards it only crops up in isolated instances—once as a kind of male medieval chastity belt. This was when a Frenchman woke up to find his penis padlocked, and his Portuguese mistress in charge of the key. No-one seriously thought of it as a means of keeping down population until a professor of surgery and medicine at the University of Halle, Karl August Weinhold, in the early 19th century. This learned gentleman proposed to round up all impoverished bachelors between the ages of 14 and 30 and infibulate them, adding a seal that was to be checked intermittently. Any who tampered with it were to receive punishments ranging from the birch or treadmill to a passion-dampening diet of bread and water, and they could only be released for marriage when they made the grade financially.

Fortunately no-one took *him* seriously. Most 19th-century champions of birth control were humane and well-balanced people, and as we've seen, they always had the interests of the working-class at heart. This was more than could be said for the 19th-century medical profession. They seized upon infibulation for their own sick ends, and in 1876, a D. Yellowlees records triumphantly in the *Journal of Mental Science*:

The sensation among the patients was extraordinary. I was struck by the conscience-stricken way in which they submitted to the operation on their penises. I mean to try it on a large scale, and go on wiring all masturbators.

Of course some degenerates tried to pull out the wires—and America had the answer to that one. In the 1890's, the *Texas Medical Practitioner* calmly gives a report of a man who 'had' to be castrated.

A eunuch's testimonials

Full-scale castration has a long history, though except in the very broadest sense, the aim doesn't seem to have been contraceptive. It's been used for public punishment or private revenge (remember Abelard?), but most men had themselves castrated as a job-qualification. In Ancient China and the Middle East, eunuchs looked after the women's quarters, and had to be sexless to withstand the temptations thrust upon them. And to make sure nothing else was thrust upon them (Juvenal, for instance, tells of Roman matrons having intercourse with eunuchs to get their pleasure without fear of pregnancy), they were made sexless with a vengeance—losing testicles and penis in one fell swoop. According to Gulik in his *Sexual Life in Ancient China* Chinese eunuchs were 'as a rule haughty and extremely suspicious by nature, quick to take offence and much given to moods.' They were usually taken to be castrated by their parents, probably in exactly the same way as at the turn of the century. Gulik continues: 'The operation performed on eunuchs was a crude one, both penis and scrotum being removed in one cut with a sharp knife. Dr. Matignon gives a detailed description of the operation as it was regularly done in Peking circa 1890, by an expert living near the Palace Gate. His profession was hereditary, and he asked a high fee, which could be paid in installments later when the person operated upon had obtained a position in the Palace.'

Apart from looking after harems, eunuchs had a good future as choir 'boys' or opera singers—though prudent parents waited to see if they were musical before doing the irrevocable. Male castrates made superb sopranos for the Roman Catholic church in the 18th century, despite an official attitude of condemnation. But the Italian opera held

out greater lures, with chances of glamorous travel and big money for the ones that got to the top. They were supposed to be 'puffed up with a Vanity which is ever peculiar to Eunuchs', and even presumed to think the ladies fancied them. As a result of this, a 'Person of Honour' felt obliged to write a book called *Eunuchism Display'd* in 1718. He says it was 'occasion'd by a young lady's falling in love with Nicolini, who sung in the Opera at the Hay-Market, and to whom she had like to have been Married.'

In all the welter of de-sexings, only one writer seems to have hit upon the idea of making a man sterile without making him impotent. It's a rather novel version of vasectomy (see Chapter 10 for the present-day version), and appears in *De Morbis Foemineis: The Woman's Counsellour etc.*, published in 1686:

But amongst other causes of barrenness in men, this also is one that maketh them barren . . . the incision, or cutting of their veins behind their ears . . .

This, saith Hippocrates, causes barrenness in them, whole veins behind their ears are cut, to which Galen agrees; for he saith that especially more than from any other part of the body the seed flows from the brain by those veins behind the ears, which also Aristotle confirms. From whence it probably appears, that the transmission of the seed is impeded . . . so that it cannot at all descend to the lower parts of the body, or else very crude and raw.

Life with the ancient Lydians

Although men made the obvious targets for grisly operations, women came in for their fair share, and to begin with, the aim was definitely to prevent conception. In the 2nd century, Athanaeus of Naucrates gives a lurid account of life

with the ancient Lydians, and says their king was 'the first man who ever castrated women' to avoid the consequences of his orgies. Strabo says much the same, maintaining that both the ancient Lydians and Egyptians used the art of removing the female ovaries, to keep their women slim and sylph-like instead of making them stout with child-bearing. These reports have been viewed sceptically, on the grounds that ovariectomies are extremely delicate operations to perform—regarded as major surgery even today, with modern skills and equipment. But even less sophisticated peoples have performed them, as 19th-century anthropologists in Australia, still reeling from reporting male sub-cisions, were quick to tell. Their stories make sad reading, and N. von Miklucho-Maclay, using a report by Roth in 1881, gives the following pitiful account. Roth noticed:

an odd-appearing girl who avoided the company of women, and kept company only with the young men of the tribe, with whom she shared their duties and hardships. He reports that the girl showed a very poor development of the breasts and especially of buttocks; the thin buttocks, and hair growing on the chin, giving her the appearance of a boy. She not only avoided the women, but showed no special inclination to the young men to whose sexual satisfaction she was appointed. One of the natives, interpreting the two long scars on the abdomen, and who, as a result of residence on various stock farms could speak some English, observed that the girl was like a 'spayed cow'. The native also stated that the girl 'was not the only case of her kind; and that the operation was undertaken from time to time on girls in order to produce for the young men a special kind of prostitute, who could never become a mother.'

European cranks

With the exception of religious fanatics, Europeans proved less ruthless. One 18th-century Bavarian crank called Eva Butler took to operating on the Fallopian tubes of her female followers, but she soon ran short of adherents. The Russian Skoptzies, on the other hand, flourished in the 18th and 19th centuries, even though they took the Book of Matthew's 'and there be Eunuchs which have made themselves for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake' quite literally. Men did away with their 'keys of hell' and women with their 'keys of the abyss', and to make life even bleaker, they fasted and abstained from vodka. But the majority of men and women accepted their bodies as god had made them. The Crusaders may have put female sex organs under lock and key with the medieval chastity belt, but they expected them to be in good working order when they got back from their travels. True, one Leicester man went further in 1737, but it was too far in the eyes of the law, earning him a one pound fine and two years in jail. The rather garbled charge reads:

The said George Baggerley a certain Needle and Thread into and through the Skin and Flesh of the Private Parts of the said Dorothy in divers Places then and there wickedly, barbarously and inhumanly did force, and the said Private Parts of her the said Dorothy Baggerley, with Needle and Thread aforesaid, did then and there sew up.

Fortunately the said Dorothy had plenty of sympathisers, and the said George got badly scratched before he reached the safety of his cell.

The rape of the clitoris

Although Europeans avoided radical surgery, the Victorians

found plenty of wicked, barbarous and inhuman things to do to women in a relatively superficial way. Masturbation was the excuse again. To rob it of any pleasure, doctors removed the clitoris, and in so doing, ruined their victims' chances of ever enjoying sex again. Not, of course, that they were supposed to have any chances. We've already met William Acton, who was writing in 1857 that 'Decent women have no sexual feelings'. In 1858, a Dr. Isaac Brown (later President of the Medical Society of London), dedicated his London Surgical Home to making sure of it, and he even removed the offending piece of flesh from women of over 70. Much the same lunacy had sprung up in America. An 1867 *New Orleans Medical Society Journal* discoursed on 'The Influence of the Sewing Machine on Female Health', and suggested bromide to make sure seamstresses didn't get excited with the rhythmical pressure of foot on treadle. At least bromide only had a temporary effect. Elsewhere, clitoridectomies were all the rage, and they took a long time to fall into disrepute. As late as 1912, a Dr. Dawson was writing in America:

I do feel an irresistible impulse to cry out against the shameful neglect of the clitoris and its hood, because of the vast amount of sickness and suffering which could be saved the gentler sex, if this important subject received proper attention and appreciation at the hands of the profession. Circumcision for the girl or woman of any age is as necessary as for the boy or man.

Desperate efforts

After such senseless and appalling butcheries, abortion seems a relatively unimportant matter. And historically, that's how most peoples have regarded it. All over the

world and in all times, women have swallowed potions or used probes—and not just sophisticated women either. 20th-century anthropologists tell how primitive Marquesans in the Pacific used herbal remedies ‘and also mechanical abortion by means of a sliver of bamboo inserted into the uterus.’ Elsewhere, methods ranged from the subtle to the crude. Samoans ‘practised abortions by pressure, either by rather skilful manipulations by the old masseurs, or roughly by the boy placing the sole of his foot against the girl’s side’. And in the South Sea Islands, when all else failed, women could always try jumping ‘from a great height’, as a last desperate measure.

The earliest ‘civilised’ recipes for abortion appear in ancient Chinese literature. The Emperor Shen Nung, who supposedly reigned from 2737–2696 B.C., devoted his spare time to medical writing, and later writers sometimes refer back to him. This was the pattern of Chinese writing—all very confusing—because one expert would quote another expert quoting a previous expert and add his own commentary. For instance, the following text written by Hsieh Chi in the 16th century, quotes Ch’en Tzu-ming’s *Complete Collection of Valuable Prescriptions for Women* published in 1237, which in turn quotes the much earlier *Book of Changes*. It goes:

The *I Ching* or *Book of Changes*, one of the Chinese canonical works, states: ‘The great virtue of heaven and earth is called *sheng* [produce]. But married women have difficulties at the time of childbirth. Some bear offspring unceasingly but desire to stop this; therefore prescriptions are written so that they may be prepared for use. If one takes a dose of substance such as *shui yin* [quicksilver], *meng ch’ung* [gadfly] and *shui chih* [medical leeches], not

only will pregnancy not again occur, but disaster will ensue as quickly as the turning of the hand.

When the cure was worse than the illness

Hsieh Chi (16th-century commentator, remember?) adds a word of grave warning:

As a rule, in contraceptive prescriptions, many use dangerous and violent ones, so that we constantly have cases wherein they do not recover. Really then the injury from childbirth is not as great as the injury from preventing childbirth. I have heard that the wives of Chang ho-feng the Grand Secretary and Li Heng-chai the Director of the Court of Sacrificial Worship both took contraceptive prescriptions. They personally explained that they were weak in physique and vitality and that excessive exertion was certain to bring on illness.

Hsieh Chi, like all the Chinese sex writers, didn't see any distinction between contraception to prevent pregnancy, abortion to end a particular pregnancy, and sterilisation to make a woman barren for ever more. Bar medical as opposed to moral reservations, they're all equally approved of, and there's no question of their being criminal or irreligious activities. The Emperor Shen Nung himself had suggested '*Shui yin* [mercury]' which 'tastes bitter, is of a cold nature, and contains poison' to 'cause abortion'. And a 7th-century book had cheerfully named one recipe: 'The Thousand of Gold Prescription for Abortion', though its ingredients sound perfectly innocuous. It read:

Take five pints of *ta ch'u* [barley leaven], one *tou* [Chinese measure] of clear liquor, bring to a boil twice and strain off to remove the sediment. Divide the liquid into five

doses. Do not take any food during the night, and in the morning repeatedly take.

And it even described the result most graphically:

The foetus will become like rice gruel and the mother will be without any suffering.

A fine distinction

Indian prescriptions were just as confused about contraception, sterilisation and abortion, and it's often hard to tell which they mean. One recipe in the 8th-century *Bridhadyogatarangini* seems aimed at setting up a state of spontaneous abortion:

If a woman drinks, at the time of delivery, flowers of the china rose tree in gruel, even if she conceives again, the foetus will disappear, and she will never carry to deliver.

But the majority were aimed at making a woman barren, most of them on the level of: 'The woman will never conceive again who drinks during the menses the flowers of the Jambala tree ground in the urine of a cow.'

Greek and Roman women swallowed potions, too, and lots of them probably worked by being poisonous enough to kill the embryo without killing the mother at the same time. But they also went in for mechanical means; no self-respecting midwife would have set up in business without being a skilled abortionist, too. The practice was taken for granted (both Plato and Aristotle approved), and Professor Leeky says in his *European Morals*:

A long chain of writers both pagan and Christian represent [abortion] as avowed and almost universal. They describe it as resulting not simply from licentiousness or from poverty, but even from so slight a motive as vanity,

which made mothers shrink from the disfigurement of child-birth.

If the grumblings of Ovid, Juvenal and Seneca are anything to go by, abortion was commoner in Rome than Greece—but unfortunately nobody bothered to go into details. Greek physician Dioscorides at least supplied *some* written information in the 1st and 2nd centuries. He says that the roots of the brake or fern, when drunk in an infusion with water, will cause a miscarriage, and so will swallowing the rennet of a hare. Alternatively, the young shoots of ivy leaves spread with honey, and introduced into the womb, should evacuate the embryo and bring on menstruation.

Hippocrates and what he thought

Of course Hippocrates, the most famous Greek physician of them all, was strongly opposed to abortion in the 4th and 5th centuries B.C. But his views fell on stony ground until 2nd century A.D. Soranus took them up, with qualifications. As far as Soranus was concerned, abortion for frivolous reasons was out, but where a woman's life was endangered, it was justifiable. Since he's one of the first people to make a clear distinction between contraception and abortion, it's worth quoting at length from his *Gynaecology*:

Contraception differs from abortion in this, that the first designates a remedy which prevents conception, while the second, on the contrary, designates a remedy which kills the foetus. Some think of expulsion as a synonym for abortion; others however say that in contrast to abortion, expulsion does not designate a medicine but on the contrary a violent convulsion of the body [i.e., the Physical Jerks of Chapter 2], as for example in jumping. Thus Hippocrates in his book *On the Nature of a Child*

[in fact, it's pseudo-Hippocratic] has rejected abortifacients, and has advised a method to procure an abortion by jumping so that the buttocks are touched with the feet. Opinion, however, on the use of abortifacients differs. Many men reject them, referring to the words of Hippocrates, 'I shall never prescribe an abortifacient' and further declaring it to be the task of medical art to preserve and save the works of nature. Others permit the use of abortifacients in exceptional cases, but never in cases where the killing of the foetus is desired as a consequence of adultery or as the consequence of the desire to maintain beauty; but, on the contrary, always when birth threatens to become dangerous . . . In agreement with these, we think it surer, to prevent conception than to kill the foetus.

Accordingly, he concentrates on methods of contraception, and supplies a mere handful of brews that 'not only prevent conception, but also destroy its product'. One of them reads: 'one *obol* of hedge-mustard seeds and one-half *obol* of sphondylium mixed with sour honey'. But Soranus is still very dubious about the whole thing. 'In our opinion the damage caused by them is, however, very considerable, for they cause indigestion, and vomiting; also they cause a heavy head.'

The will of Allah

Aetios of Amida repeated his views to a Byzantine audience four centuries later, but another four centuries on, Islam was the centre of the medical world, and a fresh set of attitudes prevailed. Mahomet had forbidden infanticide, but as with contraception, he'd forgotten to say anything about abortion. This meant people could use their own discretion—

and they didn't need to lose much sleep over it. The will of Allah was going to prevail anyway, and there was nothing wrong with a woman trying to destroy a potential life when He could always step in and save it. Nafawzi unconsciously sums up the attitude in his 15th-century *The Perfumed Garden*. He says that cinnamon on a tampon of linen in the vagina will bring about the fall of the foetus—'with the permission of God most high'.

All this explains why 9th-century Rhazes has no hesitation in giving a clinically detailed account of how to bring about an abortion. In his *Quintessence of Experience*, he concludes a long list of contraceptive measures with:

If these methods do not succeed and the semen has become lodged, there is no help for it but that she insert into her womb a probe or a stick cut into the shape of a probe, especially good being the root of the mallow. One end of the probe should be made fast to the thigh with a thread that it may go in no further. Leave it there all night, often all day as well, Use no force: do not hurry: and do not repeat the operation or you will cause pain. Wait thus for one or two weeks until gradually the menses appear and the whole thing will slowly become open and clean. Some people screw paper up tight in the shape of a probe and after binding it securely with silk, smear over it ginger dissolved in water. They leave this to dry and then insert it into the uterus. If one is unsuccessful, they take it out and insert another, until the menses do appear and the woman is cleansed. This procedure causes no harm. But if the paper is passed too high up, the woman is not cleansed because it rapidly grows soft and comes out again. There is no better operation than this.

If women couldn't face the thought of an abortion by

mechanical means, Rhazes had other alternatives, and by the sound of them, the will of Allah would have done a lot of prevailing.

The use of drugs both internally and externally is often successful. While the uterus is being watched, the patient should guard herself against cold and should not eat any dishes containing things which are astringent and bitter, nor cold things, cold water, melons, peaches, wind-causing foods. She should go to the hot bath every other day. She should massage the abdomen and uterus with soft infusions and oils and eat soft dishes which are aperient and solvent, such as soups containing eggs and broth of onions, leeks, mallows, and saffron, and animals' tails with fat of fowls, oil of almonds, and so forth, and the flesh of young fowls and their feet.

A case of murder

Christ didn't mention abortion any more than Mahomet, but in Europe, Christians attributed to him a very different point of view. In the year 384, St. Jerome complained in a letter about young girls who took potions to make themselves sterile, and when they failed, went on 'even to practise abortion. Many, when they become aware of the results of their immorality, meditate on how they may deliver themselves by means of poisonous expedients, and, often dying themselves for that reason, go to hell as threefold murderesses: as suicides, as adulteresses to their heavenly bridegroom Christ, and as murderesses of their still unborn child.' At least he found abortion a degree worse than contraception. By the Middle Ages, people weren't bothering to make a distinction, and as we've seen, that typical man-of-his-times Chaucer felt the same way. Here's his Parson's

complete tirade, with the abortions italicized for clarity.

Eek whan man destourbeth concepcioun of a child, and maketh a womman outhere bareyne by drynkyng venenouse herbes thurgh which she may nat conceyve, *or sleeth a child by drynkes wilfully, or elles putteth certeine material thynges in hire secree places to slee the child*, or elles dooth unkyndely synne, by which man or womman shedeth hire nature in manere or in place ther as a child may nat be conceived, *or elles if a woman have conceyved, and hurt herself and sleeth the child*, yet is it homycide.

Despite such a damning verdict, nuns who took to 'gliding down the fascinating slopes of human impulses', as medieval historian Fort puts it, attempted abortion to evade 'the legitimate results of these frailties.' Precisely how is uncertain, and Boccaccio doesn't help much with his vague allusions in *The Decameron*, where apprehensive maidens asking would-be seducers, 'But if we should conceive, what would become of us then?' get the answer:

You think of the worst before it happens. It will be time enough to talk of that when it takes place; there are a thousand ways of managing in such a case, that nobody will ever know, unless we ourselves divulge it.

Few people were prepared to divulge how they managed when it made them criminals, so written information is meagre. In the 16th century, Brantôme says that French apothecaries sometimes helped girls who got themselves into trouble, and it's obvious from the probe which Mathurin Regnier found in 1600 that French prostitutes were capable of helping themselves. So were the aristocracy, and if 17th-century Madame de Montbazon is anything to go by, they helped themselves with characteristic

flippancy. This extrovert lady rode through the streets of Paris shouting to all her friends, 'I've just got rid of the baby!'

How to miscarry 'without Noise'

In England, the attitude was one of stern disapproval, but quacks managed to make a living out of abortion all the same. Daniel Defoe describes their methods in his 1727 *Conjugal Lewdness: or, Matrimonial Whoredom*.

I have heard of a certain Quack in this Town, and knew him too', who 'gave the Directions to his Patients, as follows:

No. 1. If the Party or Woman be young with Child, not above three Months gone, and would miscarry without Noise, and without Danger, take the Bolus herewith sent in the Evening an Hour before she goes to Bed, and thirty drops of the Tincture in the Bottle, just when she goes to Bed, repeating the Drops in *Rhenish* Wine, right Moselle.

No. 2. If she is quick with Child, and desires to miscarry, take two papers of the Powder here enclosed, Night and Morning, infused in the Draught contained in the Bottle; taking it twice, shall bring away the Conception.

It was quite beyond him how 'an honest Woman! openly and lawfully married!' could do such a thing, but as he raged against contraception even more strongly than against abortion, he made sure that the quacks would stay in business.

Female Pills

By the 19th century, they were doing a roaring trade in 'female pills'. Dumas' Paris Pills, for instance, were supposed to cure 'female ailments', but everyone knew that the ailment was pregnancy. They were advertised in respectable

dressmaking publications like *Myra's Journal*—but respectable women put themselves in a vulnerable position by sending off for them. In 1899, three brothers were tried at the Old Bailey for blackmailing women on their mail-order pill list, and over 8,000 women lived in fear of exposure. Respectable men were more afraid of the police, and a popular Victorian jingle went:

Now abortion, t'is clear, would imperil your dear,
And bring *you* within grasp of the law.

Meantime, contraception was still being stamped out as a vice only equalled—but not surpassed—by abortion. Dr. Charles Drysdale had tried to make the distinction back at the Bradlaugh-Besant trial in 1877. 'To procure abortion, I consider, is almost as bad as murder. But I do not see any crime in preventing conception, otherwise those who remain unmarried should all be prosecuted.' There was loud laughter in court—but as we've seen, the Solicitor-General still thought that 'no decently educated English husband' should let his wife have contraceptive information. She had to breed by the year—or keep the ugly and unnecessary art of abortion flourishing.

The last resort

There was always the most drastic measure of them all—infanticide. It's quite extraordinary how matter-of-fact people have managed to be about it, though in many cases, there was very little alternative. Australian aborigine women, for instance, simply didn't have enough arms to carry more than one baby when they went on walkabouts, which meant they had to kill every child born before the preceding child could walk. Other primitive tribes (Carr-Saunders reels off scores in his *The Population Problem*) per-

formed infanticide in a similarly perfunctory way. One hair-raising account from earlier this century says:

Infanticide was extremely common in Madagascar. All children born on certain unlucky days were put to death to prevent them from bringing bad luck to their families . . . In at least one tribe all children born on three days in each week were killed. The child was killed immediately after birth, being dropped into a jar of boiling water head down or buried in an ant hill.

Even without 'unlucky' days, tribal parents usually thought they had the right to dispose of their offspring's lives as they saw fit, because children didn't become fully-fledged human beings until they underwent their initiation rite of puberty. From then onwards, of course, any killing would be murder in the usual way.

Poverty was the chief cause of Chinese infanticide, though one pre-Communist 20th century report said it was 'very common amongst the poor, and even people in pretty easy circumstances. There is hardly a family in which at least one child has not been destroyed, and in some families four or five are disposed of.' Sometimes babies were drowned, but the traditional method of disposal was exposure, and in the 18th century, one Jesuit missionary rejoiced in his 'abundant harvest' of last-minute converts, culled from the gutters just before they breathed their last. 'There is seldom a year in which the churches at Peking do not reckon five or six thousand of these children purified by the waters of baptism', he congratulated himself.

A local custom

There's plenty of evidence that Chinese women grieved bitterly at losing their children. Hindu women, on the con-

trary, seemed relieved to see them go. Of course, they only got rid of daughters. Girls were regarded as burdens—and getting them married off was always an expensive business. In fact in one part of India, females weren't allowed to survive at all, and the men got their brides from neighbouring territories. Such goings-on could hardly be countenanced by the British Raj. A Major Walker wrote to the local Prince insisting on a change of heart, and received the following cool reply, dated 1807:

Your letter, Sir, I have received; in which it is written to rear up and protect our daughters—but the circumstances of the case are, that from time immemorial the Jarejahs have never reared their daughters, nor can it now be the case.

After plenty of brow-beating it became the case, with the result that daughters were often neglected until they died lingering deaths from 'natural' causes. Nevertheless, one Edward Moor saw fit to celebrate the 'victory' with a book on the subject. After the usual protestations of horror and disgust, he wrote: 'Curiosity will naturally be excited to learn the forms, and methods, observed in committing these Infanticides', and goes on to relate how mothers smeared their nipples with opium before breast-feeding. He discounts more flamboyant methods—but describes drownings in vats of milk all the same.

Why Romulus nearly didn't found Rome

The Greeks and Romans were equally blasé about infant murder, and it never occurred to them that they were doing anything wrong. True, Romulus, legendary founder of Rome, restricted parental infanticide rights by insisting that fathers brought up all their sons and at least one

daughter. But he was probably feeling sensitive on the subject, as he'd been thrown into the river Tiber with his twin-brother Remus, and only survived by a quirk of the current—and the good nature of the passing wolf that suckled them. In Ancient Greece, fathers usually waited a few days before publicly announcing whether they'd keep their child or not—and the law was on their side. In the 6th century B.C. Solon had passed a law permitting child exposure, and Plato and Aristotle still approved of it in their day.

Of the Romans, Pliny and Seneca accepted infanticide as a necessity. It was so much a part of everyday life that dramatists like Plautus and Terence were always hinging their plots on the reappearance of children supposedly destroyed. And in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, when a husband goes on a long journey, he tells his wife to destroy the coming baby if it's a girl, about as casually as if he's reminding her to lock the back door. As for fact, it was even stranger than fiction at times. Suetonius records that on the death of Germanicus in the 1st century, there was such an orgy of public grief that many women decided to commemorate the event by exposing their children.

Conversion to Christianity brought about gradual changes. In the late 8th century, Charlemagne still found it necessary to legislate against infanticide in France. And the Teutonic tribes (their sagas are full of child exposures) must have carried on with it much longer. One account has it that the Norsemen of Iceland only agreed to become Christians in A.D. 1100 on condition that they could keep their child-slaying rights. But generally speaking, the practice was dying out, and it took appalling economic conditions (such as existed during the Industrial Revolution—John Stuart Mill was converted to the cause of contracep-

tion after seeing a murdered baby in a London Park), for it to rear its ugly head again. In 1801, William Godwin (Shelley's father-in-law) ventured that 'if the alternative were complete, I had rather . . . a child should perish in the first hour of its existence, than that a man should spend seventy years of life in a state of misery and vice'.

Every cloud has a silver lining

Godwin was far from advocating infanticide—but 'Marcus', a writer whose identity is still unknown, did so in all seriousness. His *On the Possibility of Limiting Populations*, published in 1838, (at a time when Place and Carlile were still being ostracised for suggesting contraception) proposed that of every third child born, three-quarters were to be gassed at birth, and from the fourth child onwards, the lot were to be painlessly put under. Corpses were to be buried in beautiful colonnades garlanded with flowers, and the burial ground was to be thrown open to the public as a place of recreation. 'Marcus' may as well end this unpleasant chapter on a rosy note.

Let this be the infants' paradise; every parturient [i.e., about-to-give-birth] female may be considered as enlarging or embellishing it. This field of fancy will amuse her confinement, and will please by the reflection that her labour will not have been in vain, and that even posterity are to be the better for it.

10 And So to Bed

What has the 20th century to offer in the way of contraceptives? (You're going to need something, because if you make love six times during the next month, three out of ten of you are going to conceive or cause conception.) Pitifully little in the way of improvement over our ancestors. We're still using the same old methods with the same old disadvantages—and tolerating failure rates that should put modern science to shame. The only exception is the Pill, which approaches contraception in a completely new way. Instead of preventing sperm and egg from meeting up, it prevents the release of the egg in the first place, and manages to exploit a 'weak link' in the reproductive chain. Future 'weak links' may prevent sperms from being produced. In case you haven't noticed, testicles always feel cool to the touch, because they need a low temperature for sperm-production. While scientists try and find a way of warming them up, here's a run-down of what's available today. It's a general and non-medical guide, and anyone wanting to read a more serious study should get Clive Wood's *Birth Control—Now and Tomorrow*.

Hors de Combat ♂

The ancient art of withdrawal is as popular as ever. It takes rigid self-discipline, and unless the man can delay ejaculation until the woman has achieved her orgasm, she's going to get left high and dry. Apart from problems of frustration, the failure rate is fairly high, with about 18 women out of every 100 ending up pregnant each year—but even so, it's much better than nothing.

For men prepared to take mind-over-matter to greater lengths, *coitus reservatus* probably provides a similar failure rate, and has the added distinction of being approved by the Pope, along with the safe period.

The Sperm Killers ♀

You can buy the venerable pessary in any chemist shop today, and it needs pushing into the vagina with the finger a good ten minutes before intercourse. This gives it long enough to melt—but don't kill time walking about, or you'll leak the contents and have to start all over again. Spermicidal creams are equally easy to get hold of, and they come supplied with applicators rather like hypodermic syringes. You fill the applicator with cream, insert it as far into the vagina as possible, withdraw it about half an inch until it's level with the front of the cervix, and depress the plunger. Again, don't prance about. If you can't keep still, buy a foaming tablet or aerosol cream that will stay put.

If you haven't been put off already, you probably will be by the following snags. First, you have to make love within one hour of inserting the spermicide, so you may have to re-visit the bathroom if your lover proves tardy. Second, it's very difficult to distribute the cream evenly or be sure that the pessary's melted comprehensively—it's not something you can leave to the penis, which tends to push them out of the way instead of finishing the job off. (N.B. C-Film, about to appear on the British market, is a soluble 'postage stamp' of spermicide that may prove an exception. All a man has to do is stick it on the end of his penis—and it disappears thoroughly in the course of the action.) Finally, the failure rate is frighteningly high. Used on their own, pessaries and creams allow at least 20 pregnancies per 100 women per year—and some surveys put the figure at an astronomical 40.

If you want to use a douche after intercourse, leave a
There's no law against advertising contraceptives in England, but most publications, to say nothing of television, fight shy of the ideas. Sweden has no such inhibitions, as the magazine ad. for Durex shows.

”Much better much better!”



...och så mycket bättre!
...och så mycket bättre!

...och så mycket bättre!
...och så mycket bättre!

Durex Fri Form ger en bekväm
känsla som du också på tomma
Frank själv!

DUREX
FRI FORM

GRATISPROV
Nu får en Fri Form gratis när du
köper den här kopian i en
butik med Fri Form-aktiven

...och så mycket bättre!
...och så mycket bättre!

time-lag of six hours for the spermicide to complete its work. Douching remains as primitive as it was in Allbutt's day, and really the best thing you can do is forget about it, because the inside of the vagina is ridged like corrugated paper, making it practically impossible to wash out all the sperms. This accounts for the fact that douching, used on its own, results in at least 40 pregnancies out of every 100 women in one year—a fertility rate you'd find it hard to beat using nothing at all.

Casanova's Overcoat

Again, condoms can be bought from any chemist's shop, though it's about time they had more self-service machines to spare the blushes of the young and inexperienced. Connoisseurs of condoms can still buy expensive animal-membrane versions, but most men settle for conventional rubber versions, which are thicker but much more reliable.

The trouble with wearing a rubber condom is that it reduces sensitivity (one disgruntled user in an L.R. Industries survey said it was 'like having a bath with your coat on'). Just how much is a moot point, but it must interfere with the pleasure of both partners to some degree. It must also impose a measure of restraint, because too many gymnastics can wriggle the thing off. This danger is accentuated after ejaculation, and instead of being able to stay lazily inside the woman, the man has to remove his penis immediately—and be careful to hang onto the condom as he does so, in case it peels off and gets left behind.

The condom itself is very reliable. Though the myth of a 'dud in every pack' is still doing the rounds, a trip over a Durex factory should dispel anyone's misgivings. After the initial shock of seeing a room labelled 'BALLOONS' (no, Durex haven't got a sense of humour—they just happen to

make coloured party balloons as well), it's very re-assuring to realise that for every one man involved in manufacturing, there are eight or nine involved in testing. One test comes when the condoms start their journey on their little glass moulds. A random sampler whips a sheath away every 28 seconds, and it gets filled with 300 ccs. of water, visually inspected, and then rolled over blotting paper to check for invisible faults. The remaining condoms continue down the conveyor belt, and at a later stage, get subjected to an electronic test. This involves passing a certain number of volts through each and every condom. If less volts come out than went in—there's a leak, and an automatic hammer smacks the offending article out of production. It takes several more tests to meet the required British Standard (look for the kite mark), but Durex go one better and satisfy Swedish requirements at the same time. The Swedes must fancy their natural attributes, because part of their extra specification involves filling a condom with 40 litres of air before it bursts. Watching this test is an awesome experience. The condom lifts and fills like an erect penis, but goes on and on filling till it boasts a truly remarkable three foot high by one foot wide.

Surprisingly, the failure rate of condoms can be as high as 14 pregnancies among 100 women a year (most surveys put the figure at 12), but this may be due to careless use. Many people have used the method successfully for a lifetime, and it remains the world's most popular contraceptive, even since the Pill arrived on the scene.

If the Cap Fits ♀

You can buy the rubber diaphragm or cap in a chemist's shop but it's not a very good idea because women vary in size internally—a fact well known to the *Kama Sutra* with its Elephant women, Deer women and Mare women.

Initially it's best to be fitted by your doctor or local family planning clinic. From then onwards you insert it yourself (so it rests on the shelf of the pubic bone and partitions off the entrance to the cervix from the rest of the vagina), and remove it (simply by hooking your finger around its rim and giving a pull).

The big snag is that most women are so squeamish. They don't mind someone else's penis going inside their vagina, but they're revolted at the thought of putting their own finger in. The other snag is that it takes so much effort—especially if you do the job properly—and squeeze a contraceptive jelly on both sides of the cap to foil any sperms that manage to get through. You've *got* to insert the cap every time sex is *likely*, and you've *got* to go for six monthly check-ups to make sure it's still a good fit. All this takes high motivation—probably too high for a bed-sitter girl, with a disorganised life and without a private bathroom.

Having given the disadvantages, here are the advantages. The cap can't possibly harm you, a big plus factor if you're filled with forebodings about 'interfering with hormones', etc. You won't realise you're wearing it during intercourse (nor will your partner), and after intercourse, you can turn over and go to sleep. This is because the cap *has* to stay in for at least six hours after ejaculation, which brings you comfortably round till the morning. In fact, as long as you remember to insert fresh jelly before each act of intercourse, there's no reason why it shouldn't stay in place for days. Finally, the chances of getting pregnant in any one year are about 12 out of a 100—and most of the failures are probably due to skipping the jelly or slap-dash insertion.

With This Ring♀

The Zipper Ring, the Margulies Spiral, the Lippes Loop

and the Birnberg Bow are not exotic love-making positions—they're intra-uterine devices—unexotically called I.U.D's for short. About an inch in diameter, they're usually made of plastic, fishing nylon or metal, and as their name implies, they get placed entirely *within* the uterus. This 'operation' has to be carried out by a doctor, but anaesthetics are rarely needed, and then usually only in the case of childless women.

The theory of this method is that once the device is in, it's in. You don't have to worry about it again, and when you want a child, you simply have it removed. The practice is less alluring. Between 5% and 30% of I.U.D's get spontaneously expelled in the first year—in other words, women could flush them down the loo without realising it. And between 7% and 16% cause such heavy bleeding that they have to be removed. Other little side effects include stomach cramps (supposed to vanish after a month or so) and pricked penises for men (though only when devices with 'tails' have been used).

Despite this, for the vast majority of women, I.U.D's stay their course and give no trouble. They also give excellent protection—out of 100 women making love for a year only three are going to get pregnant. No-one knows why there should be three failures (perfectly healthy failures, by the way), but then no-one could account for the 97 successes either until a few months ago. I.U.D's were discovered by accident (remember Victorians using them to promote fertility?), and two American doctors have only just discovered that they work

- a) by irritating the womb's muscles so it tends to expel any fertilised egg before it can attach itself to the womb's lining, and
- b) by stimulating the womb into producing a substance which kills the fertilised egg.

A Pill a Day Keeps the Babies Away ♀

The Pill is a combination of hormones (progesterone and oestrogen) that trick a woman's body into thinking it's already pregnant. Thus happily believing that an embryo's taking shape, it stops releasing eggs that would only go to waste, and the male sperm has nothing to meet up with. All a woman has to do when she wants to become genuinely pregnant is to stop taking the Pill, and put an end to the deception.

Because the Pill creates a 'false pregnancy', side-effects can often include nausea, tender breasts and a voracious appetite. These usually disappear after the first month or so, but if they don't, you can switch to a Pill with a different hormonal balance. The 'classic' Pill (as opposed to the mini-pill that's little marketed, or the once-a-month and morning-after pills that are still things of the future), has to be swallowed daily for 20 or 21 days, starting from day 5 of your cycle. In fact, the 7 or 8 days' break in pill-taking is quite unnecessary. It's just that the experts, in their wisdom, decided that you'd be unhappy if you didn't have a period, and provided you with a 'false' one—mere withdrawal bleeding as opposed to proper menstruation.

The advantage of the Pill is that it's foolproof. Some surveys have shown an 0.3% failure rate over a year, but this is probably because women forgot to take a Pill and refused to admit it. It's also the most aesthetic form of contraceptive on the market. You can drink it down with your morning cup of coffee, forgetting it's got anything to do with sex, and letting love-making become completely free and spontaneous. As for the disadvantages, they've been blown up out of all proportion, and the biggest may well turn out to be that you have to trek to the doctor's for a prescription before you can buy it. The Pill has been

researched more thoroughly than any other drug, and that includes aspirin, estimated to cause serious stomach haemorrhage in 34 out of 100,000 people. It's true that some years ago, about 3 out of every 100,000 pill-takers between the ages of 20 and 44 in Great Britain died from it, but even this small risk could have been minimised if they'd taken pills with smaller doses of oestrogen. And it's equally true that about 30 out of every 100,000 women are going to die as a result of pregnancy anyway.

The Pill has only been in use since 1956, so no-one can be certain about long-term effects. This puts plenty of women off—often the very women who go on smoking when they *know* the long-term effects are lethal. Certainly there seems to be a psychological barrier in many cases—and it's no earthly use going on the Pill if you're going to turn into a neurotic no-one's going to want to sleep with.

Fascinating Rhythm ♀

The 'safe' period has proved so unreliable it's been rechristened the rhythm method—a far more appropriate name when it's so easy to miss the beat. In theory, 600 million Catholics use it, and they place their faith on the findings of Knaus in Austria and Ogino in Japan. Both doctors turned tradition upside down in the 1930's by asserting that a woman's 'safe' days fell around her period-time and *not* in the middle of the month. In other words, all a woman has to do is pin-point her mid-monthly ovulation, and give it a wide enough berth to make sure that sperms (with a life of about 48 hours) and the egg (with a life of about 24 hours) never get a chance to meet up.

The theory's fine, but the practice is fraught. Women aren't automatons, and though some have regular 28-day cycles, other have cycles varying from 21 to 35 days—all of

which can get completely thrown by emotional upset or illness. This means that if you're going to use the rhythm method, you've got to be *meticulous*. Keep a record of your past 12 periods, and once you've established what your menstrual cycle is, you can find your first 'dangerous' day by subtracting 18 from your shortest cycle, and your last 'dangerous' day by subtracting 11 from your longest cycle. (Cycles, of course, start from the first day of your period.) For example, if your shortest cycle was 24 days and your longest 31 days, your fertile period is going to extend from the 6th day to the 20th day of the month.

The advantage of this method is that you don't have to do anything unpleasant—the disadvantage is that half the time you can't do anything at all. Even if you have a regular 28-day cycle, your fertile period is going to last from day 10 to day 17, ruling out nearly half the month if you add in period time. And of course, the even more damning disadvantage is its unreliability. Of one hundred women using this method for a year, about 25 are going to end up pregnant. This includes dedicated women who take their temperature, too. In theory, it should be possible to pinpoint ovulation by the slight rise in temperature that comes immediately after it. In practice, the rise is so slight—a miserable half a degree Fahrenheit—that a drink or a cigarette can produce misleading results. Well might the present Pope say, 'One may even hope that science will succeed in providing this licit method with a sufficiently secure base.'

A Stitch in Time

If you want to split hairs, sterilisation isn't contraception at all. You throw the baby out with the bath water, because with a few rare exceptions, you can't change your mind and

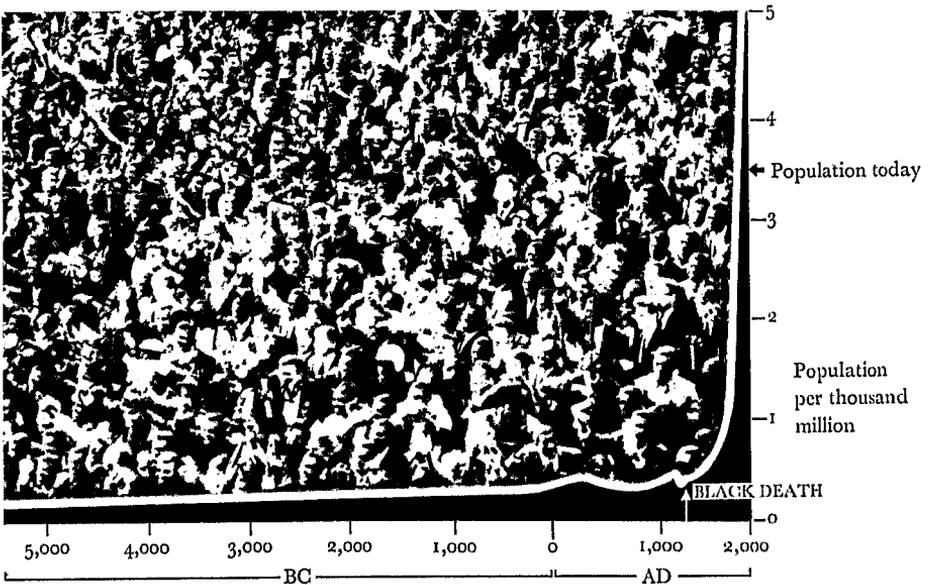
have the operation reversed. This makes doctors very reluctant to operate on childless people, and rightly so. However sure you are that you'll never get lumbered with marriage, a mortgage and a pram in the hall, there's no immunisation against falling in love. It could strike like a bolt from the blue, turn all your beliefs upside down, and have you bitterly regretting your decision to become sterile.

Having said that, vasectomy is the simplest and pleasantest form of 'contraception' for any man who already has enough children. It has absolutely no snags. 'Sterilised men and radiant wives' read the headline of a *Sunday Times* piece on the sterilising activities of the Simon Population Trust, who pioneered the operation in this country.

The operation itself is minor—you can have it carried out with a local anaesthetic in about 15 minutes—and some stalwarts even go straight back to work afterwards. The surgeon makes a small cut in the scrotum (the loose skin housing the testicles), removes a tiny portion from the *vas deferens* (the tube along which the sperms travel), and then does the same thing on the other side. Within 6 to 8 weeks, you'll be totally sterile (or as near as damn it—failure rate is 0.003 pregnancies per 100 women per year), and you won't feel any different at all. You'll still feel desire, have erections and ejaculate semen, the only change being that your semen won't contain any sperms. In England, this operation can be carried out by the Family Planning Association and the Marie Stopes Memorial Clinic for about £15, or privately *via* your own doctor for considerably more. Before long it should be available on the National Health in extreme social cases—though in all cases you must have your wife's signature before any doctor will be prepared to go ahead.

Because male sterilisation is so easy, female sterilisation

is more difficult to obtain, and you have to consult your own doctor. The traditional operation involves tying the Fallopian tubes, and of course to get at them, the surgeon has to gain entry through the stomach. This does mean a general anaesthetic, a week's stay in hospital, and the accompanying soreness of stitches. Being sterilised through a laparoscope (a sort of periscope where the surgeon can peer around inside) is the latest development, however, and it's so much quicker and simpler that it only involves an overnight stay away from home. Until more surgeons are familiar with this technique, it may not be available in your part of the country, but whichever way you have the



operation, you'll soon be able to forget all about it, and you won't be aware of any physical difference. You'll have the same sexual feelings, the same periods, and your body will go on working in exactly the same way, except that the egg won't be able to travel to the womb.

Sterilisation has bad mental associations—thanks to Hitler. His brutal operations on concentration camp inmates have meant that even today, Eastern Europeans who happily countenance abortions shudder at the thought of it. But unless an 'ideal' contraceptive turns up, future civilisations are going to regard sterilisation as a routine basis for human happiness. And unless today's civilisations do so soon, they may never get the chance. This isn't just alarmist chat. To reduce the present population of China by a puny 1% would mean sterilising half of all its married men between the ages of 20 and 44. To sterilise all Indian men who have *already* fathered three or more children would take 1000 surgeons performing 20 vasectomies a day at the rate of 5 days a week, a total of 8 years. And like the Hydra's head, by that time thousands more candidates would have sprung up.

The population graph opposite gives some indication of the problem facing the world. And if it shocks us into a more responsible attitude towards contraception, this curious history may yet have a happy ending.

Glossary for Insomniacs

ABORTION Technically, abortion and miscarriage both mean the 'birth' of a child before the 28th week of pregnancy, when it's too undeveloped to survive, but most people think of abortion as deliberate and miscarriage as accidental. Legal abortions have been commonplace in the USSR and most Eastern European countries for many years, though usually demand drops as contraception becomes more readily available. This is even happening in Japan, where any woman can have an abortion if she feels like it. From an astronomical peak of 1,170,000 legal abortions in 1955, the number's dropped to well below 750,000 as more family planning clinics have sprung up.

Of course, countries that ban contraceptives play right into the hands of back-street quacks, and in France prior to 1967 (see *Legal Situation*) some people estimated there were more illegal abortions than live births. The situation's even worse in predominantly Roman Catholic Latin America, and a country like Uruguay (where contraception is legal but hard to get hold of), recently boasted three illegal abortions for every baby that saw the light of day.

This country legalised abortion in 1967, but making it legal only widened the scope of existing legislation—it didn't make it easy. All the Abortion Act said was that a doctor could (and he doesn't have to if he disapproves) terminate pregnancy, if he and another doctor agree:

- a) that continuing the pregnancy would involve risk to the life of the woman, or injury to her physical or mental health, or injury to existing children in her family, greater than if she has an abortion
- b) that there is a substantial risk that the child when born would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped.

Obviously some doctors interpret the above more generously than others—which can lead to a cruel race against time, with women shopping around for sympathetic doctors, knowing that if they don't find them quickly it will be too late to operate. Anyone in this desperate situation should contact:

The Pregnancy Advisory Service,
40 Margaret Street,
London W1N 7FB

or: The Birmingham Pregnancy Advisory Service,
1st Floor,
Guildhall Buildings,
Navigation Street,
Birmingham B2 4BT

who may be able to help where there are lawful grounds. *P.S.* Many people find abortion repugnant because of the method used (rather in the same way as many people opposed capital punishment because they were disgusted by hanging). Perhaps future trends will prove more acceptable, because the division between contraception and abortion is going to become hair's-breadth.* The once-a-month pessary (containing chemicals called prostaglandins, and not yet available) ensures menstruation regardless of whether or not conception has taken place. The woman has no way of knowing whether she's had an abortion or not—if the word still applies at such a very early stage of pregnancy.

* It already is hair's-breadth with the I.U.D. The I.U.D. prevents formation of an embryo, which makes it a contraceptive, but it kills an already fertilised egg, which makes it an abortifacient?

ANAL INTERCOURSE Ancient Peruvian pottery shows that the Marquis de Sade wasn't the only one to find this 'perversion' delicious. Most men have buggered women for pleasure rather than to prevent conception, but whatever the motive, it's a criminal offence in this country. This means any woman who doesn't know which way to turn (be she wife or otherwise) can complain to the police, and her partner will be liable for *life* imprisonment.

APHRODISIACS Unfortunately, they're nearly all in the mind. People eat everything from oysters and spices to crushed rhinoceros horn, hoping for—and if their faith is strong enough, probably getting—improved sexual performances. At least faith is harmless. Spanish Fly or cantharidin, however, about the only edible substance to have a proven physical effect, is a potential killer that everyone should steer clear of. Made from the bodies of dried and crushed beetles, it stimulates through irritation of the urinary tract—and at the same time quietly makes an attack on the kidneys.

Though faith moved a few penises to begin with, sex-hormone injections have proved disappointing, so, not surprisingly, many people fall back on alcohol. This needs using with caution. A little may help by releasing inhibitions, but a lot deadens the senses, and produces worse performances than usual.

BREAST FEEDING Many primitive and civilised peoples used to put a taboo on love-making while a mother was still breast-feeding her child—a 'natural' method of birth control that must have kept population down considerably. But other peoples (including Europeans) believed the old and still current wives' tale that women couldn't get pregnant

while they were still lactating. Perhaps a very under-nourished woman, drained of strength by her baby, might get sufficiently run-down for her fertility rate to drop, but this method of 'contraception' usually resulted in babies being born too soon after the preceding ones to be healthy.

In Western society, most women call a halt to breast-feeding at six months, but in other parts of the world, it's nothing to see a three-year-old asleep at its mother's breast. This (plus lack of bras) takes its toll of the figure, as anyone will know who's been to Africa. There, women carry their children on their backs, and nonchalantly sling a breast over the shoulder at meal-times.

CERVIX The cervix is part of the womb—the narrow neck (its passage is only about $\frac{1}{8}$ th inch wide) which leads into the vagina. In fact it's so narrow that, apart from sperms, nothing's going to vanish up it—something which should reassure women who live in fear of caps, condoms, Tampax, etc., disappearing for ever. (N.B. If there is a mishap, lost property only gets pushed up the vaginal passage, and even if it's beyond reach of your fingers, doctors are *quite used* to fishing things out, so don't be embarrassed.)

CHASTITY BELT Believe it or not, this contraption's still being manufactured—by the Anne Hugessen Organisation, Trinity House, Trinity Street, Halstead, Essex, if anyone's interested. It all started as a joke. The Hugessens thought a wrought-iron chastity belt, complete with padlock and two keys, would make something novel in the way of plant-holders. But when orders started pouring in from Europe and the USA, complete with vital statistics, they realised their product was being used for real. Anyone wanting a full account of this macabre medieval invention should read E. J. Dingwall's *The Girdle of Chastity*.

CIRCUMCISION Like removing tonsils, routine circumcising of boy babies has fallen out of favour, for which we should all be truly grateful. The operation consists of pulling the foreskin forward and cutting off the part that extends beyond the tip of the penis—with the result that the unprotected tip loses sensitivity. Jews were (and are) circumcised as a religious requirement. Fallopius thought this was to keep their minds 'off sex and on religion', but it was probably a straightforward hygienic measure. Certainly unless a man pulls back his foreskin to wash daily, he's more likely to cause cancer of the cervix in a woman than a circumcised man with an easy-clean penis.

CLITORIS The clitoris is the small female organ (see *Orgasm*) that corresponds to the male organ. It averages about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch in length, but like the penis, fills with blood and erects when it gets excited. Although lady apes and monkeys don't seem to have one, cats do, and their clitoris is even reinforced with bone. This probably accounts for the frenzied twisting and turning towards the end of copulation. At any rate, if the clitoris and surrounding areas are dulled with Novocaine, the female cat becomes so passive even William Acton would have approved.

CORPUS A cold and clinical term for those other cold and clinical terms, sexual intercourse and copulation.

EGG OR OVUM Women have two ovaries, one on either side of the womb. They also have two Fallopian tubes, connecting the ovaries to the womb. The ovaries contain thousands of potential eggs, and each month, one or other of the ovaries gets an egg ready, and sends it down the Fallopian tubes. If it meets a male sperm coming up the

tube (via the cervix and through the womb) the egg and sperm may fuse together. When this happens, the fertilised egg starts growing as it travels down the tube, and later becomes firmly embedded in the lining of the womb, where it gets nourished by the lining's blood vessels as a tiny embryo. Of course, if the egg doesn't manage a fruitful meeting with a sperm on the way down, it gets expelled unnoticed from the womb, along with the unwanted lining, and the result is a woman's monthly period.

FAMILY PLANNING CLINICS Despite the fact that expenditure for family planning services has recently been trebled by the Government, very few local authorities provide their own family planning clinics. Some of them subsidise independent clinics, but many of them opt out of their responsibilities altogether. Nevertheless, if you want to know where your nearest clinic is, the quickest way is to ring your local Town Hall or Citizens' Advice Bureau.

Provided you're over 16 years of age, advice is given confidentially, and it makes no difference whether you're single or married. Clinics exist to deliver the goods—not moral lectures—though the system gets complicated if you want to go on the Pill. Before the clinic doctor can write out a prescription, he has to contact your own doctor, just in case there are health reasons against it. And if you're between the ages of 16 and 18, your own doctor may press for permission to tell your parents. This doesn't happen very often (the holier-than-thou breed of G.P's. is dying out), and of course, you can always refuse to give it.

Below is a list of family planning clinics, all of them staffed by friendly, dedicated people, and all of them happy to discuss sexual problems with husbands and boyfriends where the need arises. Contraception isn't free (except in

cases of extreme hardship, where it's been prescribed on medical grounds, or where the local authority is especially enlightened), but at the most it costs £2 or £3 a year, with actual contraceptives extra.

The Family Planning Association (Head office: 27 Mortimer Street, London, W1A 4QW), has over 1000 clinics throughout the country, many of them working in conjunction with local authorities. The number of sessions a week varies with local demand.

Brook Advisory Centres (Head office: 233 Tottenham Court Road, London, W1P 9AE), have 15 branches which are open 5 days a week. They deal specifically with young, unmarried people, though obviously anyone who gets married is welcome to stay on their books.

Marie Stopes Memorial Clinic (One branch only, at 108 Whitfield Street, London, W1P 6BE), open 5 days a week, and with an absolutely marvellous staff.

FOETUS From the third month of pregnancy onwards, when the embryo has taken on recognisable human shape, it's known as a foetus until it's born as a 'baby'.

LEGAL SITUATION Most countries have passed anti-contraception laws at some time or another, and it's ridiculous how long the powers-that-be have taken to repeal them. *Canada* waited until 1969, and even now, regulations governing the sale and advertising of contraceptives are stringent. The *USA* is still saddled with Comstock's 1873 law in some states, though it's interpreted freely enough to be fairly harmless. The most it manages to do is restrict sales and advertising, and the last time a state tried to take it literally (Connecticut in the 1960's), the Federal law stepped in and declared the law 'unconstitutional'. *France*

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repealed its anti-contraceptive laws in 1967, but ex-French colonies in *Africa* still cling to them, probably through habit rather than religious or moral convictions. Certainly Roman Catholic *Latin America* has accepted contraception without qualms, although Brazil, Mexico, Venezuela and Paraguay do restrict advertising. In Europe, *Belgium, Greece* and *Italy* are agitating for legal reform—and they'll probably get it. But *Spain, Malta* and *Eire* look like being without contraceptives for many years yet.

There are no legal restrictions on contraception in this country—nor on advertising, though you'd hardly realise it. It was only in 1971 that the Independent Television Authority agreed to accept ads. for Family Planning Services (nothing as vulgar as branded goods). Most local authorities ban the sale of contraceptives through vending machines—and only a few brave publications like the *Hairdressers' Journal* are prepared to take the plunge and advertise Durex. London Transport did advertise Family Planning Services about a decade ago, but withdrew the ads after a few complaints. They were worried about giving offence 'to minorities', which is rich when they continued to give daily offence to majorities with their close-up crutch-ads all the way up the escalators. In fairness, they do carry ads. for contraceptive services now, but like I.T.A., still throw up their hands with horror at the thought of actual products and brand-names.

MENSTRUATION Of all female animals, only apes, monkeys and humans have monthly periods that permit all-year-round sexuality, as opposed to brief periods of being on heat. Rhesus monkeys have 28-day cycles like most women; chimpanzees 35-day cycles; baboons 30–40-day cycles. As

far as primates go, the males never have sex with the females while they are bleeding, but there's no physical reason why a man shouldn't make love to a woman during her period—and the Japanese regard it as a speciality. Surprisingly, the menopause (the ending of a woman's menstruation) is exclusive to humans: perhaps primates don't live long enough to make it necessary.

ORGASM An orgasm is the peak of sexual enjoyment, and in men it's fairly obvious when it's been reached because they ejaculate. Most men have no problem achieving an orgasm (they may have a problem delaying it for the woman's benefit), but women have been so brain-washed into fear of frigidity that they may fail to reach one through anxiety. It isn't much help to be told not to try too hard, but it may be a help to realise that the clitoris is the thing. Small as it is, it's directly and exclusively responsible for the female orgasm, so men ought to concentrate on *how* they penetrate the vagina rather than how far—and forget about so-called 'vaginal' orgasms. It's true that when a woman has an orgasm she experiences it deeply inside her vagina, but this is only because the clitoris sets up rhythmical waves of sensation, rather like far-reaching ripples in a pool. We've said 'men ought to concentrate', but of course, it's no good laying the blame for failure at their door. Every unsatisfied woman should realise it takes two to make love. Orgasms don't just happen—you have to work for them.

OVARIES Each ovary is about the size of a plum, measuring $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches \times $\frac{3}{4}$ inch \times $\frac{1}{2}$ inch (see *Egg* and *Testicles*), and its job in life is to produce eggs and hormones.

PENIS The average male penis measures between 5 and 6
200

inches along its top side when in a state of erection, but anyone less well-endowed should remember that it's quality that counts, not quantity. The human penis becomes erect because blood streams into it, filling its tissues, but some animals (like dogs, bears, seals and weasels) have penises stiffened with bones. They're also covered with erectile nodes, which swell up to fill the vagina and prevent the sperms from flowing out, accounting for the long length of the above animals' copulation. Even reptiles would find it difficult to follow Avicenna's contraceptive advice—'the quick separation of the two individuals'. Their penises (housed in the base of their tails and not usually seen) are fearsome looking objects covered in hooks and barbs. This means that if they get interrupted in the act, whichever one flees first drags his partner behind him.

POPULATION EXPLOSION It took us nearly a million years to reach the world's present population of about 3,500 million people, but the way we're going, it's only going to take us about another 30 years to double it. What's gone wrong?

The death-rate—not the birth-rate. The level of 'natural fertility' for human beings is about 50 births per 1,000 women per year, and until recent centuries, the death-rate was almost as high. This meant population stayed pretty constant, but a look at the United Kingdom shows where the trouble lies. Although we've managed to slash our birth-rate to a modest 17.1 per 1000, because our death-rate's dropped to an even lower 11.9 per 1000, we're still going to double our population in just over 100 years. Other countries are going to double theirs much quicker, and here are a few frightening estimates, with Pakistan providing grist for Enoch Powell's mill by coming top of the league.

	<i>Birth-rate</i> <i>per 1000</i>	<i>Death-rate</i> <i>per 1000</i>	<i>Population</i> <i>in 1969</i>	<i>Population likely to</i> <i>be doubled within</i>
Pakistan	49	18	112,000,000	21 years
Latin America	40	11	276,000,000	22 years
Africa	45	21	345,000,000	27 years
India	41.7	22.8	537,000,000	28 years
China	34	11	740,000,000	50 years
USA	17.7	9.5	203,216,000	70 years
USSR	19	7	240,000,000	70 years

SCROTUM The loose bag beneath the penis, containing the testicles.

TESTICLES The testicles correspond to the ovaries in women, and they even start life in just the same way, situated up in the abdominal cavity. It's only just before a boy is actually born that they slide down into the scrotum—a very vulnerable home, because even a glancing blow can be excruciating. The testicles produce hormones and sperms, but despite proximity, the sperms don't whizz straight into the penis when they're needed. They have to go on a magical mystery tour first, travelling through 20 to 30 foot of tubing (the last bit of tubing being the *vas deferens*) before they can finally be ejaculated.

UTERUS see Womb.

VAGINA The vagina is the passage leading to the cervix, and it's into this passage that the man places his penis during sexual intercourse. It measures about 3 to 4 inches in length, and though we've already seen that an erect penis

is longer, there's no cause for alarm, because the penis doesn't penetrate up to the hilt.

VENEREAL DISEASE V.D. takes two main forms: gonorrhea and syphilis. Gonorrhea seems to have been around since time began (the Chinese were grumbling about it 5,000 years ago, and ancient Arabs, Greeks, Hindus and Romans all seem to have been afflicted). But although gonorrhea's extremely unpleasant and can cause sterility, it's not a killer. Syphilis is, and it's syphilis that swept across Europe in the early 16th century, killing off about a third of the population. One theory has it that Columbus brought it back from America, but most people think syphilis existed in Europe before, masquerading under the name of leprosy. Whatever version's right, the disease prompted Fallopius to invent his protective linen sheath, which speeded up the coming of the condom.

WOMB The womb or uterus is a small pear-shaped organ, which only measures 3 inches by 2 inches wide by 1 inch deep. Like the vaginal passage, it's extremely elastic, and it needs to be to accommodate a 9-month-old foetus.

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*“There will be no more.”
Hoorah!*



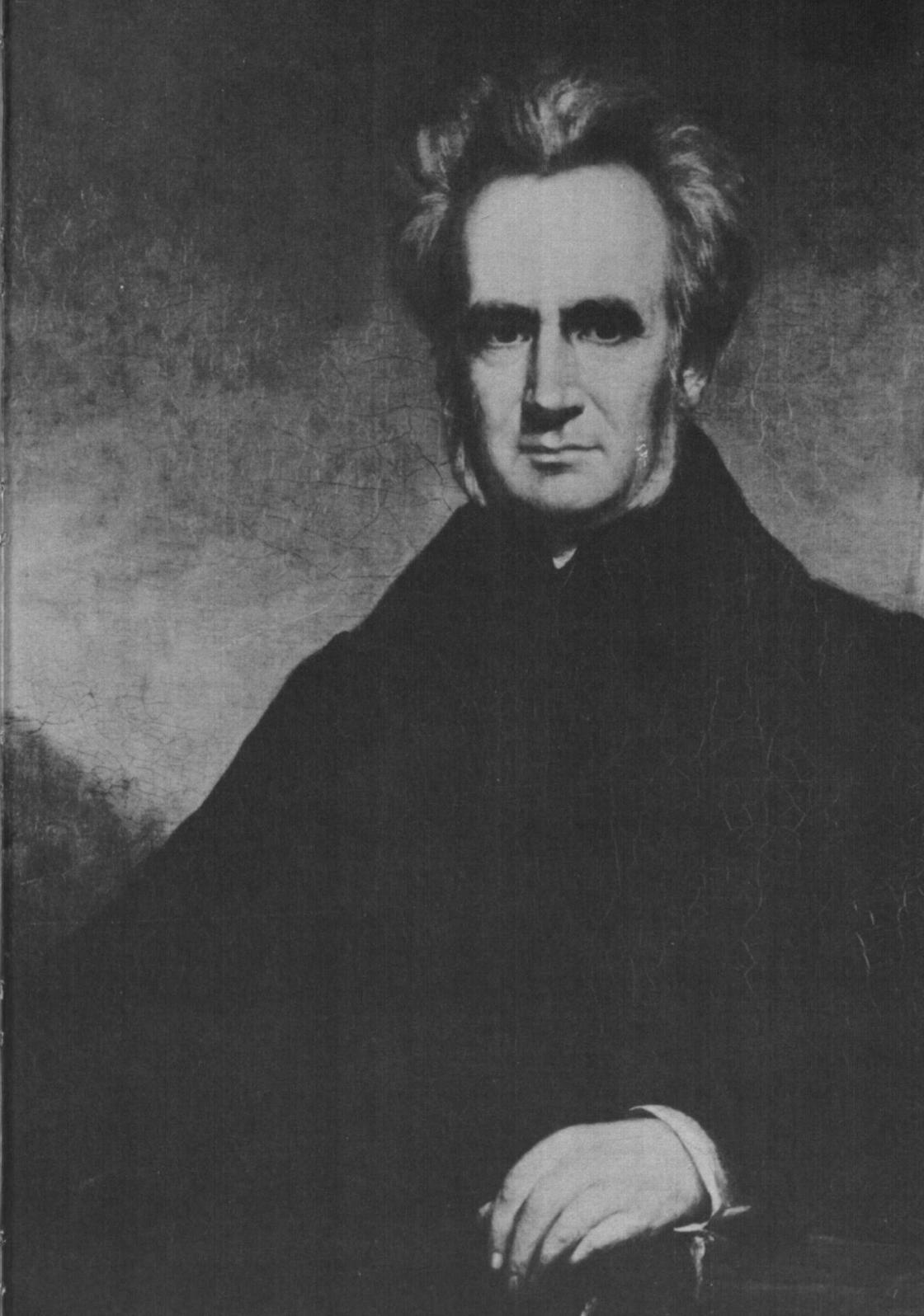


Man from the Ming Dynasty shows the 'stream of life', with the semen supposedly whizzing back up the spinal cord to the brain. All he had to do to re-route it was grip part of his testicles tightly just before ejaculation; alternatively, he could nip his *Ping-i* point—situated just above the right nipple!

vos bonū mutum istū esse dicatis
sed talem adhuc in doctrina dabit
magistru ut totus mirabitur mūndus.

Et hos agnos









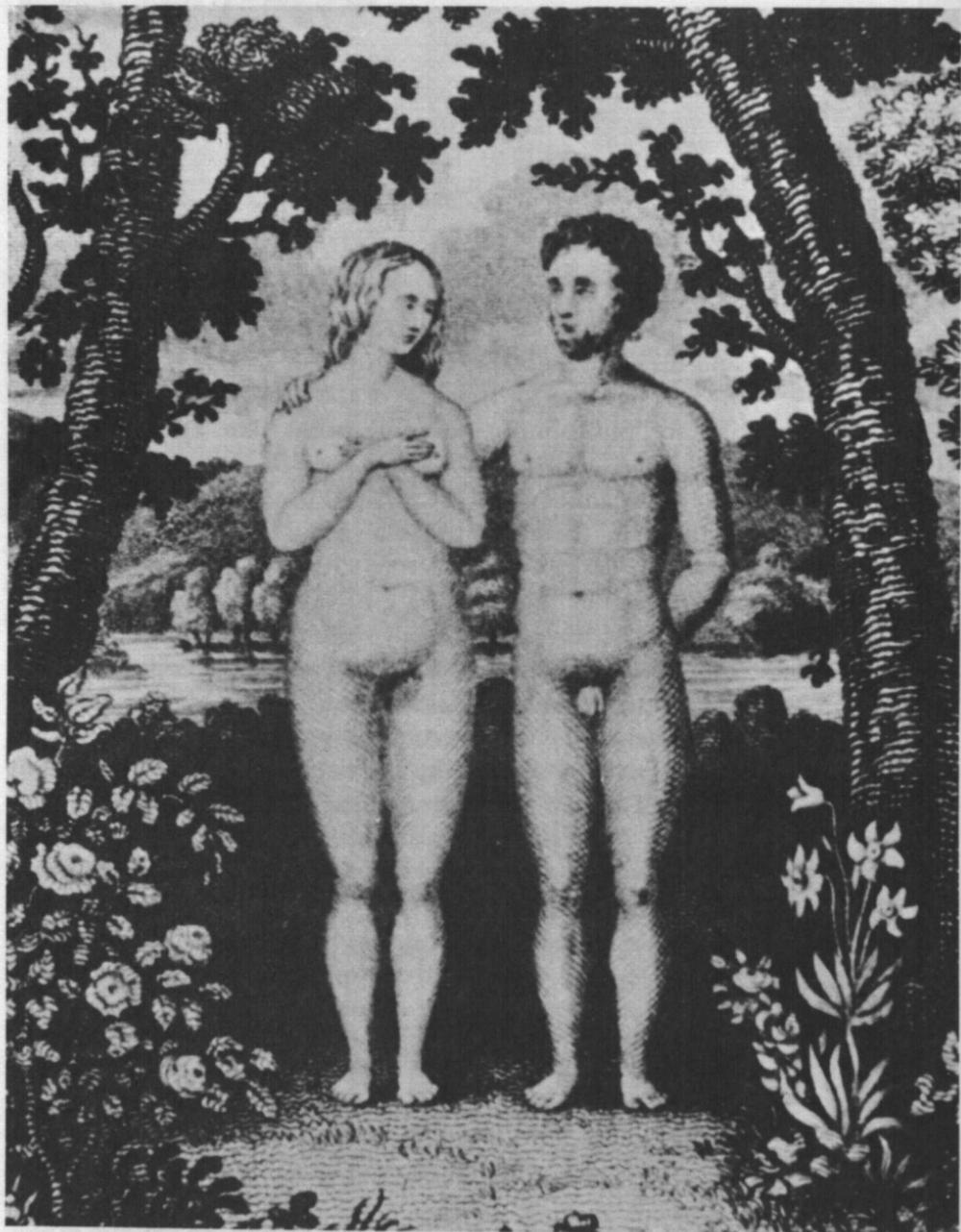
Anthony Comstock, perpetrator in the 1870's of America's 'blue laws', which turned anyone who sent contraceptive information through the post into a 'criminal'. He liked making his arrests personally—and left an incredibly long legacy in some States. As late as 1961 attempts to open a birth control clinic in Connecticut resulted in arrests, fines and closure.



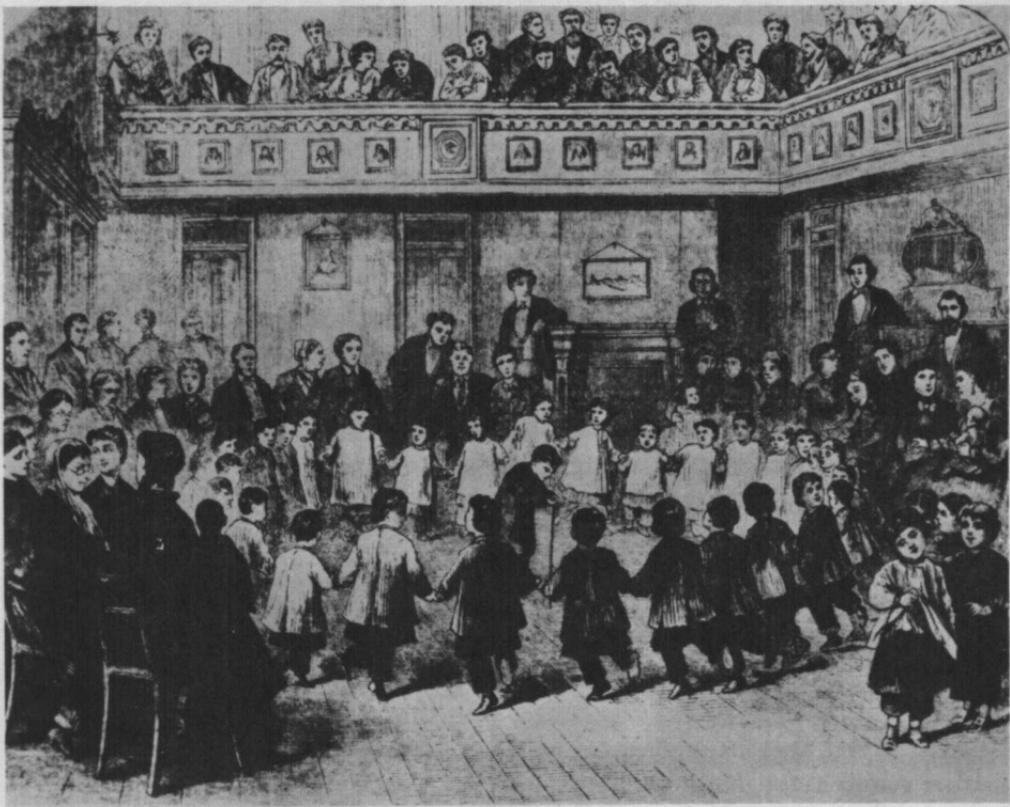
Public opinion was as anti-contraception as the Church in 1868. When Viscount Amberley (Bertrand Russell's father) made a few harmless remarks about restricting large families, he was promptly nick-named the 'Vice-Count'. 'No more babies,' the balloon has him saying, as he sells 'depopulation mixture' in this cartoon. 'Never mind your marriage vows, never mind poisoning your mind or your Wives . . .'



Sex was an integral part of Indian religion, and in some sects, contraception played a leading, if unintentional, rôle. Men made love to 'those of the banana thighs' but avoided ejaculation, so that the semen could return to the brain and 'become One with the Deity'.



Full frontal nudity on the frontispiece of Carlyle's 1826 *Every Woman's Book*, which placed great faith in withdrawal as a means of contraception. 'Some women, particularly those of the Continent, will make it a part of the contract for intercourse, and look upon the man as a dishonest brute who does not attend to it,' he confided to his readers.



Playtime at the American Oneida community. 'In a holy community there is no more reason why sexual intercourse should be restrained by law, than why eating and drinking should be', claimed 19th-century founder John Humphrey Noyes. Matings were arranged for breeding purposes, but where sex was a 'purely social affair', it was a free-for-all, with men practising 'male continence' to avoid confusing the issue.



R A S I S



AVICENA



Dioscorides' 2nd-century *Herbal* was a standard medical textbook well into the 16th century. This illustration typifies its contents. He's being handed a mandrake, supposed to promote fertility, and only capable of being uprooted by a dog, which dies (note the death throes) in the process.

MALTHUSIAN APPLIANCES.



The Improved Appliance is a powerful Enema of Higginson's pattern, fitted with a new receiving and filtering valve for preventing undissolved particles from entering and irritating the person; this is an improvement of great importance, and not obtainable in any other Enema Syringe; also a new Vertical and Reverse Current Vaginal Tube, producing a continual current treble the power of the ordinary tubes used for this purpose, thoroughly cleansing the parts it is applied to. It is to be used with injection of sufficient power to destroy the life properties of the spermatic fluid without injury to the person, and if the instructions are followed it can be used with success and safety.

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Is a simply devised instrument of pure soft medicated rubber, to be worn by the female (during coition) as a protection against conception. It is constructed on a common-sense principle, and strictly in accordance with the female organisation; can be worn any length of time with ease and comfort; is easily adjusted and removed, adapts itself perfectly, and no apprehension of it going too far or doing the slightest harm need be felt, and with care will last for years.

*Post free with directions for use,
2s. 3d. each.*

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38-44 MAYFIELD ROAD, KINGSLAND, LONDON, N.**

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Dear Sirs,—Your Syringe should be used by every woman for prevention to conception. I should certainly advise you to have the vertical reverse actions in all your future makes.—Yours truly,

To Messrs. E. Lambert and Son.

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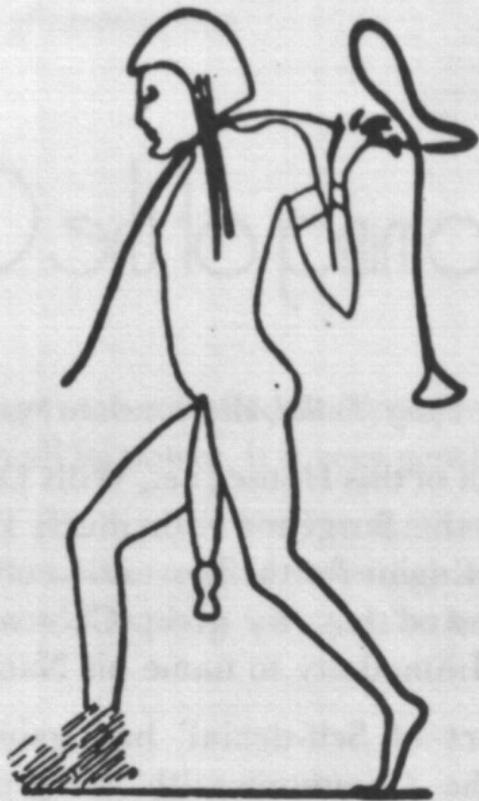
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SURGICAL,
AND
DOMESTIC,
ALL KINDS.

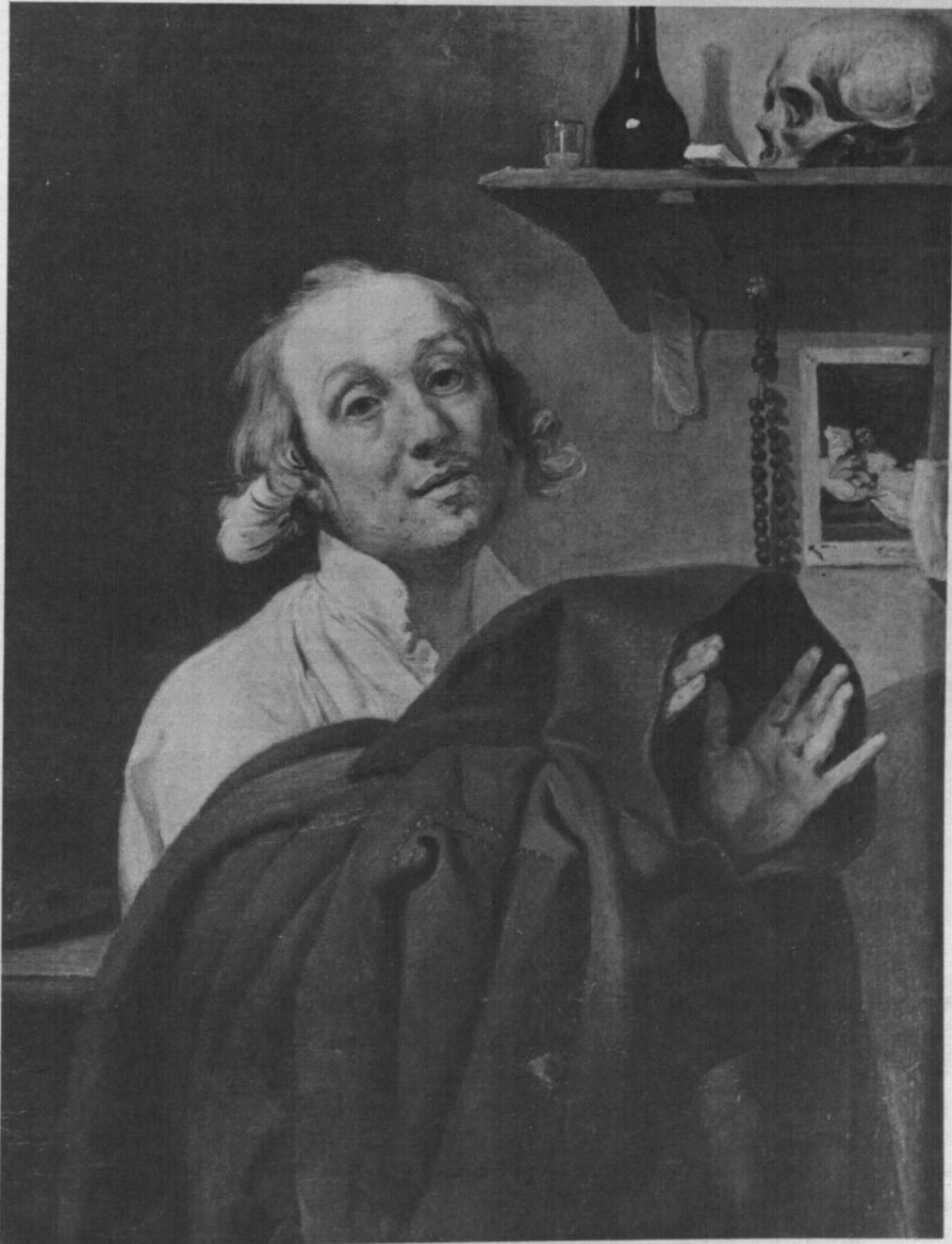
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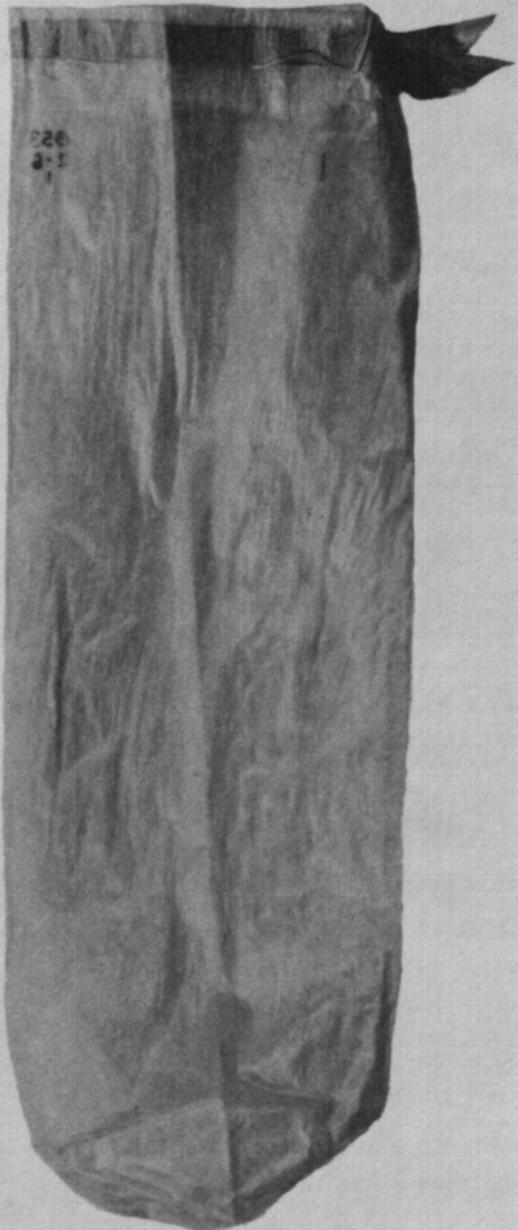
Myra's Journal, a respectable dressmaking publication, carried this advertisement in its November 1905 issue—along with another one for 'surgical rubber goods', five for 'books for wives', seven for 'female pills' and one for a 'Valuable and Reliable Corrective by Skilled Parisienne Specialist.' Meantime, the *Lancet* raged against 'filthy advertisements', that gave any innocent girl a 'second-hand knowledge which could place her on an equal footing with an experienced prostitute'.



Ancient Egyptians sometimes wore sheaths—and nothing else—but as decorations rather than contraceptives. This sketch depicts part of a XIX Dynasty (1350 to 1200 B.C.) original



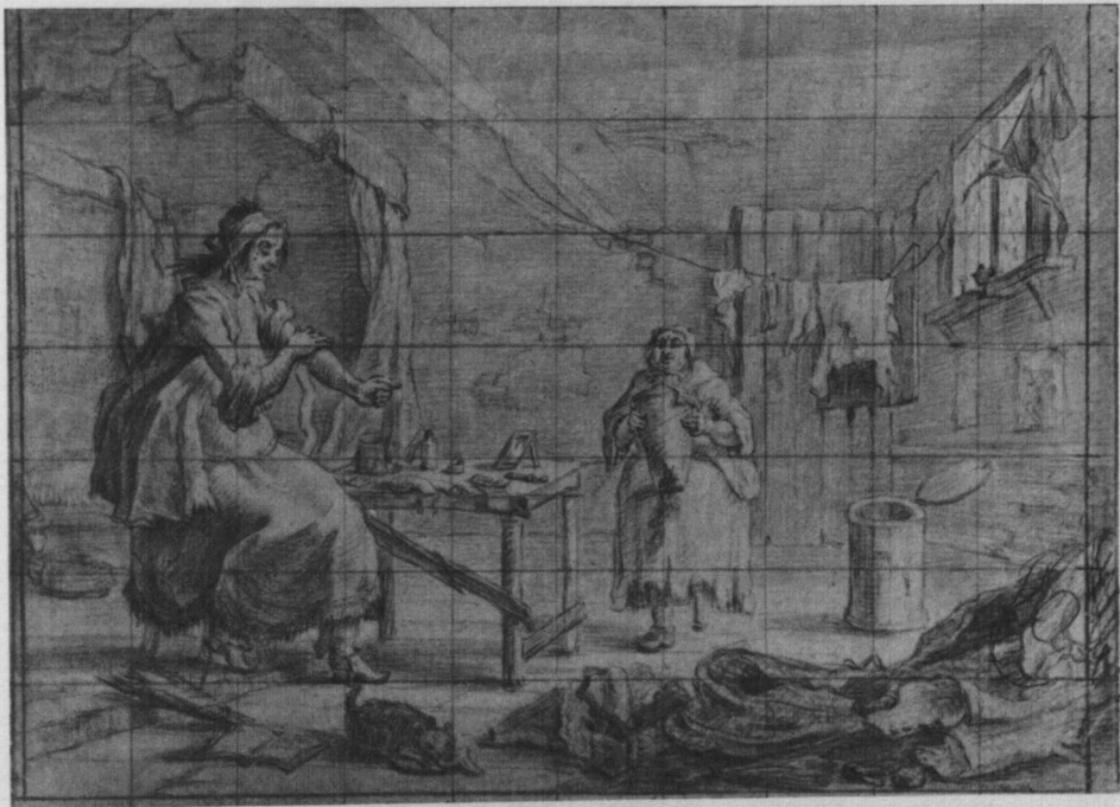
German artist Zoffany, patronised by George III, painted this dissipated self-portrait in 1779. Symbols of moral rot include a bottle of wine, the pack of playing cards on the shelf, a small portrait of Venus—and the two condoms hanging from a nail in the wall.



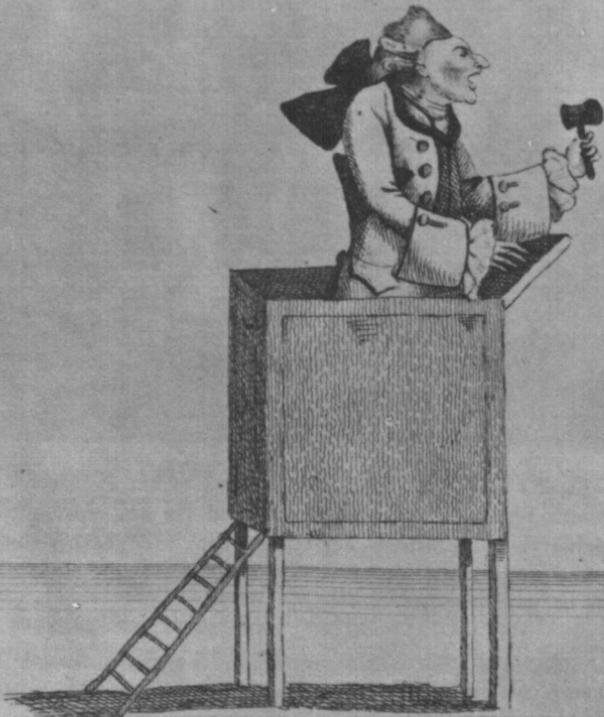
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Late 18th-century English condom, made from animal membrane, and tied round the top with a pink silk ribbon. These condoms worked best if they were wetted first, as Boswell found out when he dipped his 'machine' in the lake at St James's Park and 'performed most manfully'.





Hogarth's Harlot, coming to the end of her Progress, as she loses her looks. She's lost her health, too, and the beribboned condoms on the table probably protect her clients from V.D., rather than herself. Note the syringe, which American Dr. Knowlton was to claim as his 'invention' in the next century.



ET. iud.*

To be sold to the best Bidder.

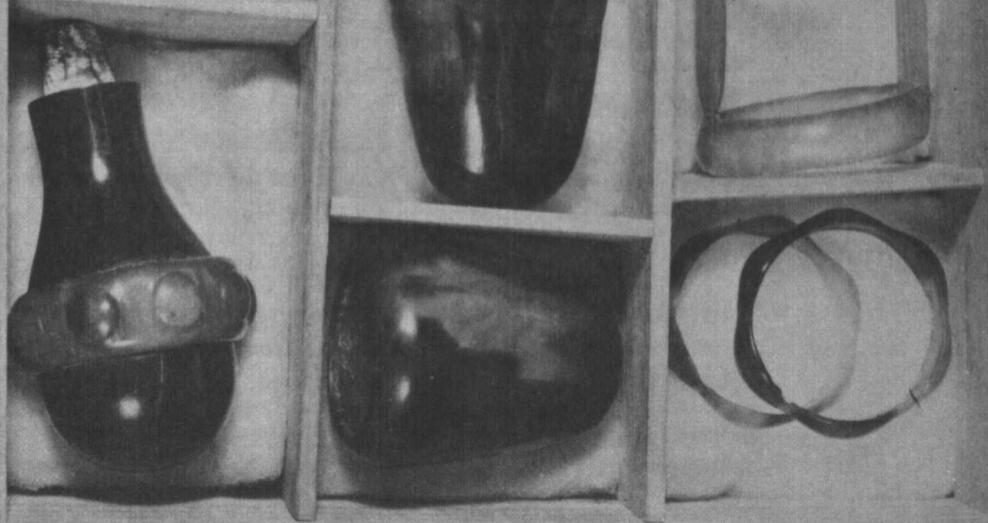
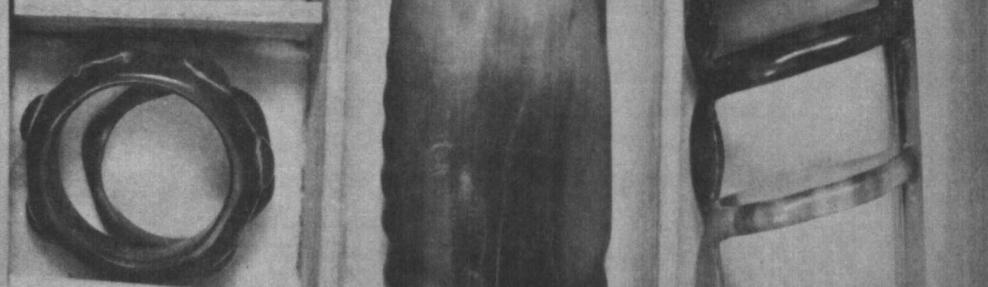
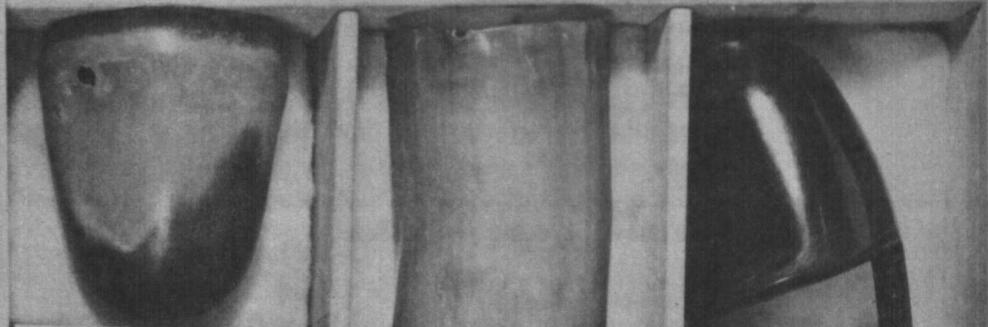
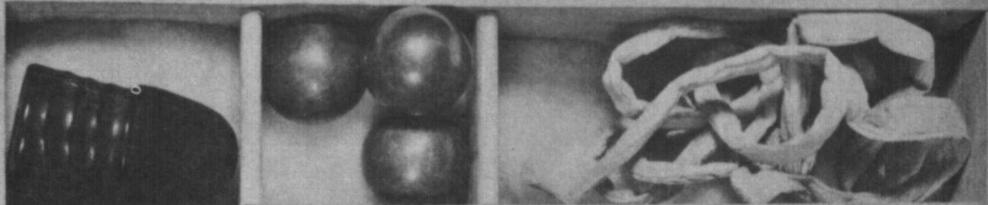
All the valuable goods and effects of a Scavoir-Vivre Bankrupt consisting of a collection of very scarce Books, (not to be met with in any of the Public Libraries) containing the most approved list of Cosmetics Paints, washes &c for beautifying the Skin: together with an unique set of Antiques after the present mode and an exquisite fine Statue of a Venus taken frome herself, when abroad; a number of suits of Cloaths, Hats &c, &c. all au dernier goût & very fit for any one who has an intention of entering on the Business, together with the right of Patronage to the best Productions of the Age, from a late resolution of that Society. 25: the Subscription unpaid — Likewise to be sold a Quantity of Articles in M^r. Phillips's way, not the least worse for Wear.

Printed and Sold by W. Dooly 23 Strand March 15th 1773

Political cartoonist James Gillray satirised the permissive society of his day. *To be Sold to the Best Bidder*, 1773, puts up for auction 'All the goods and effects of a Scavoir-vivre Bankrupt', including a quantity of condoms 'not the least worse for Wear'.



Gillray's *A Sale of English-Beauties in the East-Indies*, 1786, shows a bale of condoms as the Auctioneer's 'desk'. It's inscribed 'Mrs. Phillips (the original inventor), Leicester Fields London', and marked 'For the use of the Supreme Council'.



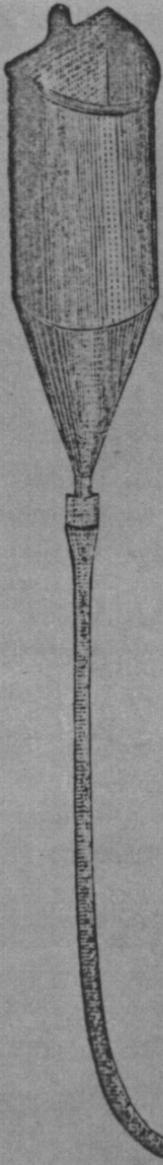


Fig. 2

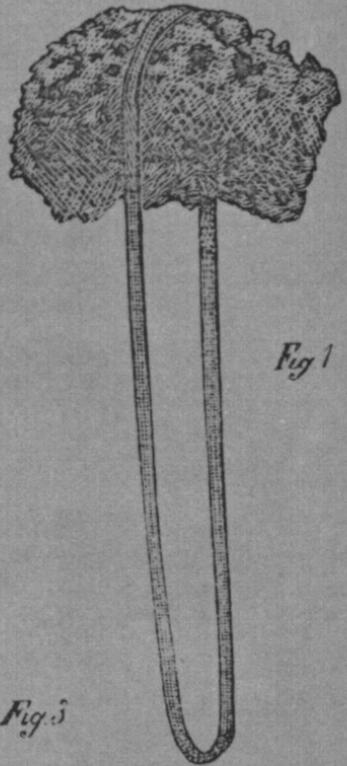


Fig. 1

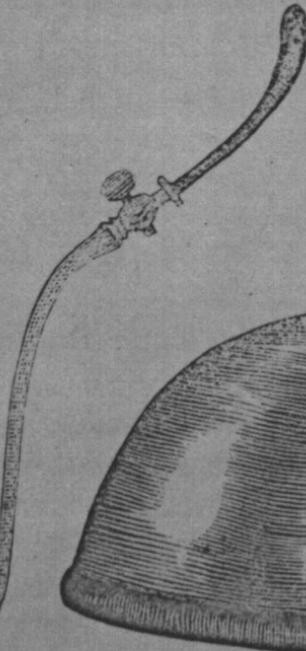
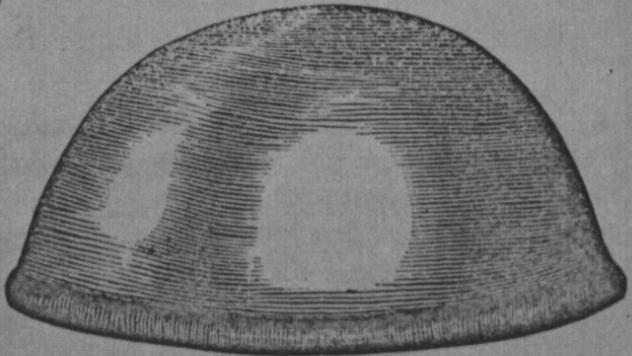
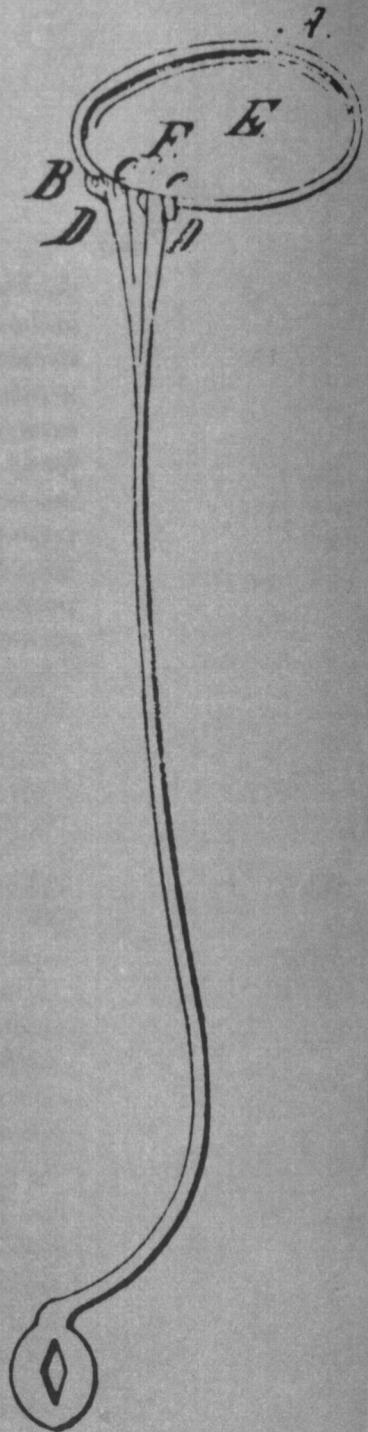
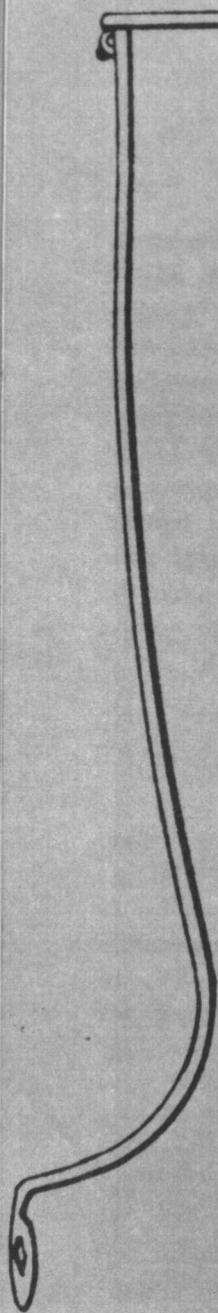
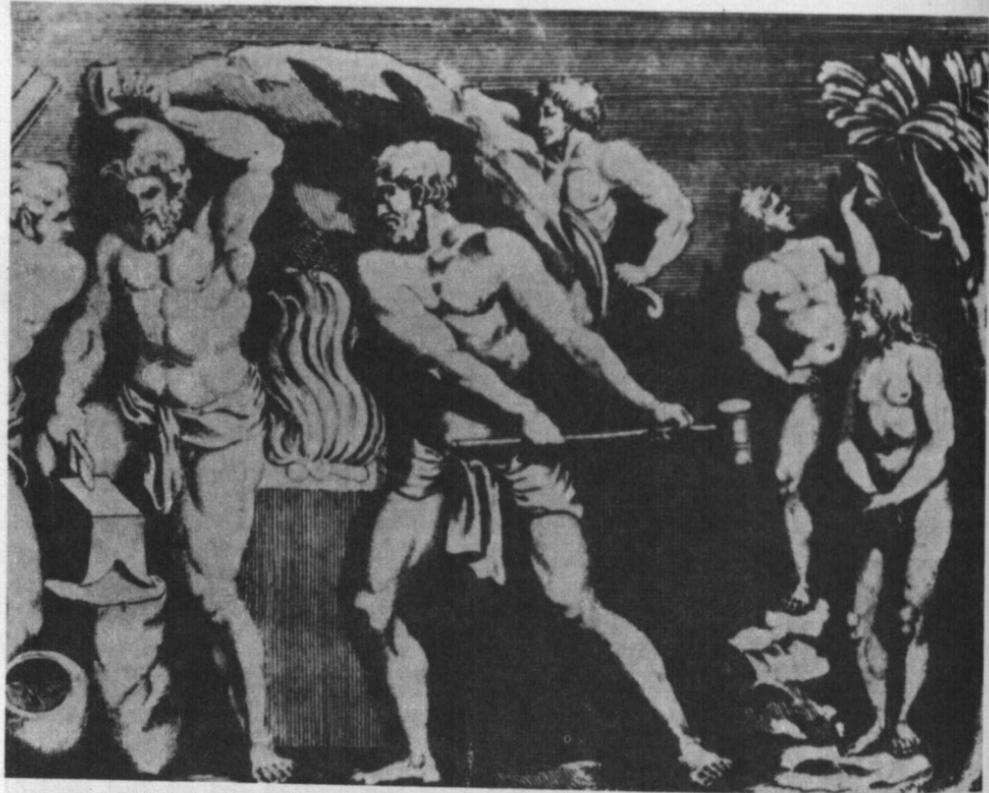


Fig. 3



19th-century devices—but not inventions. One French prostitute was using a syringe in the year 1600; Jewish women were wearing the sponge in the time of Christ; and even the Dutch cap was invented by a German. But Holland can claim one legitimate ‘first’. Dr. Aletta Jacobs opened the world’s first birth control clinic at Amsterdam in 1882.





Classical superstitions easily took root in Europe—and made the blacksmith the most popular man in the village. Greek and Roman women ‘prevented’ pregnancy by drinking water that hot metal had been quenched in, and by the 2nd century, only a smith’s water would do the trick. The belief persisted into this century, though the horseshoe couldn’t have brought many people luck.

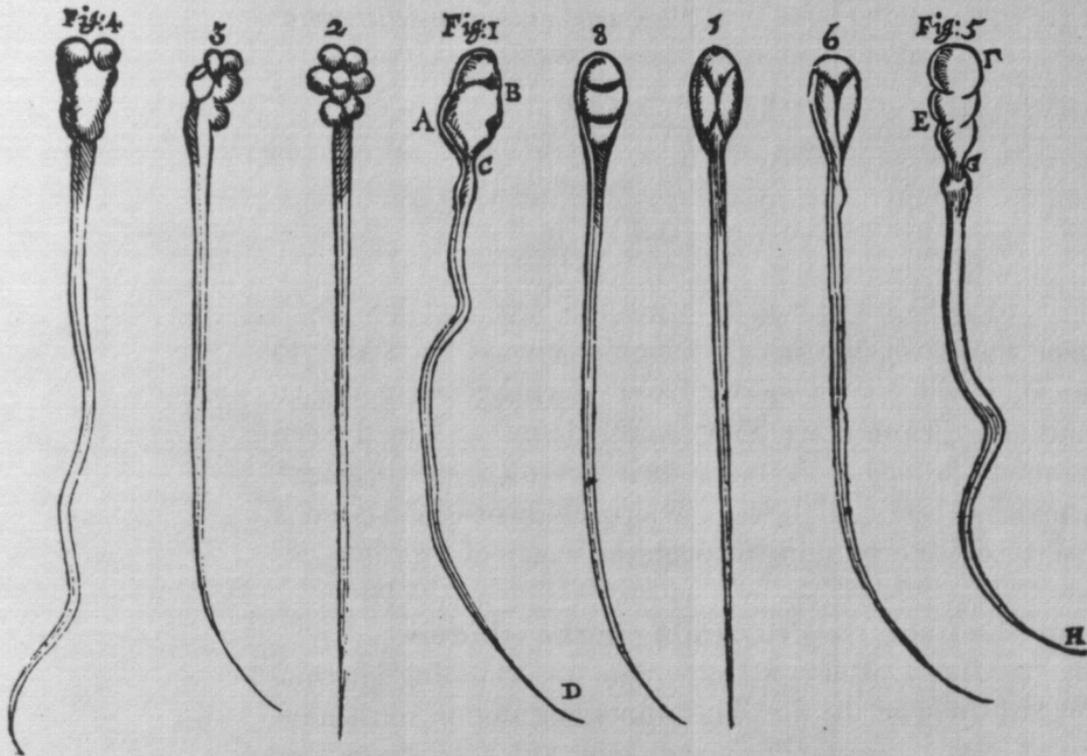


Albert the Great made some original contributions to oral contraception in 13th-century Europe. His *Admirable Secrets* (probably not his, but he got the blame for them), suggested drinking a man's urine. After that, an alternative suggestion to eat bees didn't sound so bad.

“There will be no more.”
Hoorah!

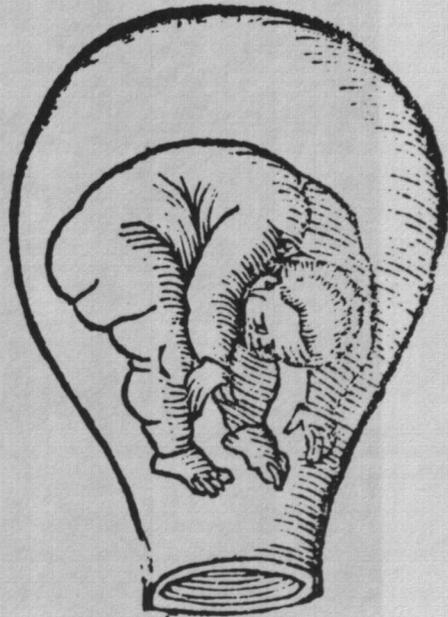
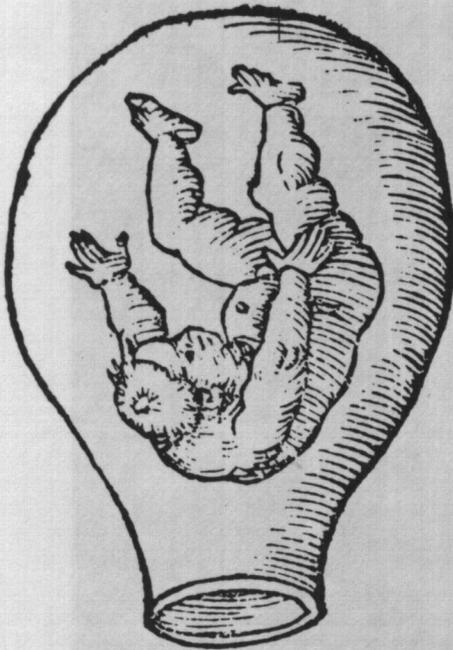


When replying to a questionnaire sent out by the National Life Assurance Society in 1871, the above gentleman, after giving details of his numerous offspring, drew a little picture to express his relief that his wife had reached the menopause. Contraceptives were available—but respectable people didn't use them. Queen Victoria had written that she didn't want to be the *'Mamma d'une nombreuse famille'* but dear Albert made her one all the same.



A Dutchman called Leeuwenhoek discovered 'little animals' swimming in *semine masculina* under his microscope in 1677. His drawings caused quite a stir at the Royal Society of London, though no-one was sure how the little animals caused pregnancy. One woman claimed she conceived 'by attracting the sperm or seminal effluxion' of a man who shared the use of her bath, an immaculate conception if ever there was one.

dem angesicht / wie das mit dem rucken / soll die hebam wie obstat / thun.



Vnnd so das kind mit ein oder beiden füßen beim kopff kem / soll die hebam das haupt

begreifen / die füß vber sich richten / vnd dem kind außhelfen.



Ob das kind getheilt leg / oder auff seim angesicht / so soll die hebam zü der frawen greiffen / vnd gar subtil das kind in der seitten vmbkeren. Oder dz kind richten / also / Welche teil dem außgang aller nechst / die sol sie halten vnnd außfüren / am meisten doch das haupt süchen vnd außfüren.

GABRIEL FALLOPIUS MUTINENSIS AN.

1535

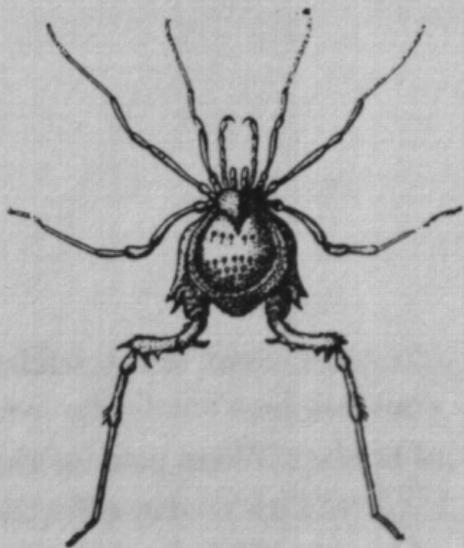
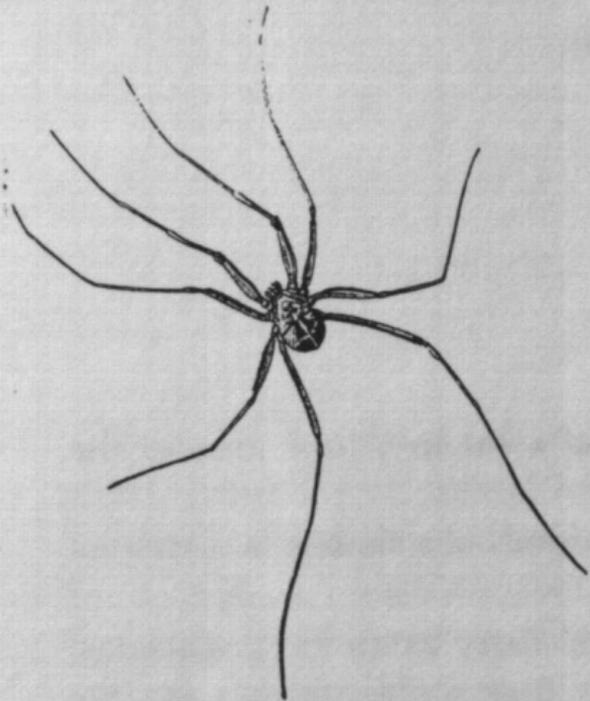
AD ANNO

1561

1565



Gabriello Fallopius, who gave his name to the Fallopian tubes. In the brief flowering of the Renaissance, when it was safe to contradict the ancients, he gave an account of the human embryo and its gradual development in the womb.



Roman historian Pliny sprinkled his 1st-century *Historia Naturalis* with contraceptive old wives' tales. He thought a spider called 'phalangium' (two fat specimens pictured above) an extremely reliable method. All a woman had to do was extract two small worms from it, attach them to her body in a piece of deer's skin before sunrise, and she wouldn't get pregnant.



AD 1550

• JUGOSLAVIJA — POLENSĀK

BEFORE GOING TO THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY THE BRIDE PUT AN UNLOCKED PADLOCK INTO THE BODICE OF HER DRESS. SHE DECIDED UPON THE NUMBER OF HER CHILDLESS YEARS BY MAKING THE SAME NUMBER OF STEPS OUTSIDE HER HOUSE WITH THE PADLOCK UNLOCKED, THEN SHE LOCKED IT.



AD 1600

• JUGOSLAVIJA — PAVLOVCI AT ORMOŽ

WHEN THE BRIDE-GROOM CAME TO TAKE THE BRIDE TO THE MARRIAGE CEREMONY, SHE CLIMBED UP A LADDER AS MANY RUNGS AS SHE WANTED TO HAVE CHILDREN IN HER WEDLOCK.



AD 1650

• JUGOSLAVIJA — ČRNI VRH ABOVE IDRİJA

WOMEN REMAINED CHILDLESS THE SAME NUMBER OF YEARS AS WAS THAT OF THE BARLEY GRAINS THROWN INTO THEIR WEDDING SHOES.

"Much better much better!"



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