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The Physician And Sexuality in Victorian America

John S. Haller, Robin M. Haller

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“A highly readable, thoughtful, and detailed study …. No one has yet set the story of Victorian sexuality so firmly in the context of medical history.” ?*Journal of American History*

“Men and women in late nineteenth-century America,” write John S. Haller and Robin M. Haller, “faced a bewildering and conflicting array of roles forced on them by a newly industrialized society.” Nowhere were these roles more sharply drawn than in the area of sexuality. Growing numbers of Victorians found themselves unable to confide in husbands, wives, or relatives on personal matters. Increasingly, they turned to advice columns in newspapers, etiquette books, philanthropic organizations, marriage manuals, private counselors?and to the physician. The peculiar relationship that existed between the physician and his patient enabled the medical profession to exert a powerful influence: the doctor found himself with the responsibility of acting as the arbiter of fashion, the watchman of morals, and the judge of personal needs. And because the medical profession held itself responsible for the moral and spiritual health of the nation, doctors felt it necessary to bring their professional authority to bear against those elements?such as the women’s rights movement?which threatened the stability of society.

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