

The following article on that momentous question, the "Social Evil," from the N. Y. World, graphically sets forth evils which are sapping the foundations of human life throughout the world, and which are the natural outgrowth of the present unnatural social system of Christendom and all other monogamic nations:

The question of licensing the "social evil," as it is called, has been discussed at a recent meeting in Columbus, Ohio; and by a close vote it was decided that the evil must be "regulated" in effect, that it was an evil that cannot be prohibited; and that it is so gigantic, so deeply-rooted in the very foundation of society, that it is useless to hope for its eradication. This is an unfortunate and mournful conclusion for the Christianity and civilization of the world, and good men and good women will pause before they accept it. It is a confession of inability to grapple with the crime, and of despair at doing anything more than check some of its evils.

The truth, in my opinion, is that very little is known of it, beyond the fact of its existence. Certain general statements have been accepted without question, but there are many phases of it, and many developments of it, which, though can be little doubt, neither science nor morality has investigated, much less settled. There is a natural delicacy pertaining to a discussion of it, which obviously stands in the way of its free treatment as a topic of thought and speech; and one of the first steps in solving the great problem must be the discovery of some method of talking about it which will neither suppress the truth nor close the ears of the sensitive by boldly exposing its evils.

A recent English writer declares that its miasmas are destroying the health and vigor of a large proportion of the inhabitants of the British Islands, tainting their blood with an irradicable poison. It is, in his opinion, the worst disease which afflicts humanity. It is the most persistent, most terrible, most complicated in its moral and social aspects, most saddening in its whole aspect, most difficult in its cure. Its annihilation stands pre-eminent among the social problems, and yet it seems the most insoluble. Its mere statement is beset with insuperable difficulties; its discussion is almost prohibited. Society does not allow itself to speak about it above a whisper. Women offer the most powerful resistance to any agitation of the question. Some hypocritically pretend ignorance of it, others from a genuine delicacy avert their eyes and resolutely ignore it. Yet, directly and indirectly, it is destroying the lives of their brothers, sons and husbands, and of their infants before and after birth. The saddest feature of the subject is the despair that exists on the part of writers on this subject in regard to its future; and the conviction seems to deepen with their knowledge of the subject that it is a permanent and abiding evil.

Some more superficial people see in it a Providential dispensation, just as some people regard poverty as a sort of discipline for the poor and a developing agency of the benevolent faculties; and one pious woman once expressed her gratitude for prostitution because it afforded an outlet for the passions which might otherwise jeopardize the virtue of her own daughters. The medical and the scientific writers, for the most part, have declared that the evil is inevitable, and all hope of eradicating it must be given up. Against this "practical infidelity" the writer we have referred to (a contributor to the Westminster Review) says our best feelings all rise up in rebellion. One shrinks from this desolate and paralyzing scepticism, so awful and so hopeless and one's instinct, interwoven with the whole texture of thought, avers that we will never see this judgement. He disputes, and by the aid of statistics, seeks to disprove, that the evil results to the women who practice it, are as terrible as they are generally described to be. It is generally held that they do not live, on an average, more than five or six years after commencing their careers. But there are reasons for believing this idea to be exaggerated. It is true that they disappear within that time, but it is found that many enter service in distant towns or in the country, or become married. But the effects on society at large of the disease engendered are not to be exaggerated. It may be doubted if they are even fully known. The statistics of medical science are frightful. They teach us that the insidious subtle poison will propagate itself into the system, and will remain there after an apparent cure, and contaminate wife and children, though it may not have shown the slightest symptom of its existence in many years of the man's unmarried life. The warning to young men who suppose that its evils can be easily thwarted and cured is terrible. It may be so absorbed by the wife's constitution as to betray itself in the children of a second husband. It may be conveyed to an unwedded child by the breast of its mother, even when mother and child were entirely uninfected at the child's birth. A child affected with it may communicate it to the breast of a nurse, and she in turn to her own children, or to others.

Numerous instances are known of contamination by kissing, and surgeons and others have been affected by contact with some slight abrasion on their skins. And what is worst of all, though treatment may subdue it, the disease cannot be rooted out of the system. There is no absolute security against a fresh outbreak of it in some form or another. Besides, many die from consumption, bronchial affections, diseases of the liver and kidneys, and all forms of scrofula, which ought properly to be attributed to this source. The modes and shapes in which it appears is incalculable, because they are not all definitely known, but the catalogue of those that are ascertainable are frightful. The English writer declares that the vital statistics of the last thirty years shows a great increase in the fatality of diseases noted for their fatality; and there is especially an increase in that class of diseases, which are cognate with the malady referred to. Under these circumstances it is not surprising to find that within these thirty years the average duration of life has steadily lessened. "Power over disease is not increasing with a knowledge of it." If, in spite of the labors of the medical pro-

feccion, and new hygienic influences and new remedies, the death-rate increases, there must be some degenerative agent which is slowly, but surely, destroying the health and strength of the British people. And what is true of Great Britain, is in all probability, true of this country. Though we have not the facilities for ascertaining the facts statistically, yet many of the same conditions are present,—the growth of large cities with their increasing poverty on one hand, and wealth on the other, their vice, and ignorance, and vanities, which contribute so mightily to this evil. The philanthropist has here a task before him that will demand a large wisdom, an almost infinite patience, a persistent mediation, and an intense love and sympathy for stricken humanity. The question of licensing, will not for the present, at least, be accepted as the best, certainly not the final, solution of the difficulty. It has been tried in Paris, and, taking the community at large, there is little or no evidence that it has diminished the evil itself, or the diseases incident to it. It has been tried in Japan, though with what success we are unable to say. It is very certain, however, that the "social evil" is very prevalent there, and the lower classes especially are very sensual and vicious. The question in this country is becoming all the more interesting, because the impure stream we have been considering is not likely to be purified by the tide of immigration which is to pour into it from the Asiatic side. The first thing necessary is to arouse public attention, not only to the extent but to the hideousness and danger of the evil, and we shall have a stronger public opinion bearing against it than we have now, including, as we hope, the same law and the same scorn for the man, as for the woman who offends—which is not the case at present.

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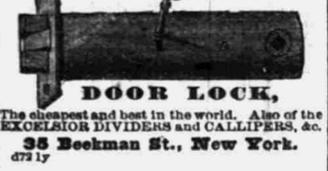
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