

class sorrowfully admit that the number who come under their care are but a very small proportion of the entire class, and even of these only a moiety are permanently improved. The secretary of a large society of this sort (Mr. Talbot) estimates that in the eighty years previous to 1845 only 14,000 or 15,000 women had been within the walls of all these institutions in London, or less than 200 per year.

To sum up then from the female side of this institution, our conclusion would be that it is concerned principally with the most worthless varieties of women, the degenerates or criminals, and the idle, the mercenary and shameless of the working classes, women in short, whom the community can well afford to spare.

That these women, when fairly in its grasp, are practically, absolutely, prevented from propagating their kind during their career, and rapidly destroyed if they remain in it. That very few marry, and those who do so are barren in a high degree, in short, it is an eliminative agency of high value and wonderful efficiency for first sterilizing and then rapidly destroying the worst specimens of the sex—women whose “reform” and child-bearing would be a curse to the community. No need to spay the prostitute or castrate the criminal, they’ll do it themselves if they are just given a little time.

What now is the effect of this vice upon the men who indulge in it, and, through them, upon the community? Practically the same, namely, the sterilization of the unfit. The more one studies the venereal diseases the more one becomes impressed with the opinion that their deadly virus is aimed, not at the life of their victim, but at his or her power of reproduction. In fact, both gonorrhœa and syphilis are very seldom fatal in women, and only exceptionally so in men, popular and even professional impression to the contrary notwithstanding. But they are most effective sterilizers for a period varying from six weeks to six or seven years, and not unfrequently totally destroy the reproductive power. This is strikingly true of syphilis. Suppose a man becomes infected at a brothel. Once this disease has appeared, for a period of at least two years, not merely his semen and genitals, but his saliva, his lips, every sore upon his body, every drop of his blood, is actively contagious. He must refrain from sexual

intercourse, or, if he disregards this rule, he will not only infect his wife with the loathsome disease, but what is more significant, any conception resulting, in the great majority of cases, will terminate in a miscarriage, a still-birth, or the production of a child which dies of syphilis within six months of its birth. And this history repeats itself until the taint gradually dies out of the blood, a period of at least two years under the promptest and most skilful treatment, but which, under neglect, or with a later infection of the wife, may extend to five, six, or seven years. This may seem an overdrawn picture, but Turner declares that 85 per cent. of syphilitic children die before the sixth month. Kassowitz gives the percentage of children *born of syphilitic parents*, either still-born or dying within six months, at 55 per cent., and Sturgis reports that 71 per cent. of the children of such parentage, born in the Moscow Hospital, die within that period. By and by the virulence of the poison dies down, a child is born that barely escapes with its life, another by a little wider margin and so on till healthy children can be produced. But what of these who escape? Stunted: bleared-eyed, pitiable, with sunken noses, opalescent cornea, scarred mouths, and notched teeth, they are degeneration incarnate. I have seen hundreds of these poor creatures in our large hospitals, the oldest children of their families, literally victims of “the plague of the first-born,” the first of three, five, even seven, or eight fetuses and children to survive the attack of the virus, and I have yet to see one who has passed thirty years of age.

Iarnowsky reports a suggestive group of three couples infected by syphilis who produced twenty-two children; of all these there came only one healthy adult man. Syphilis is more merciful than the Jehovah of the Decalogue, for it usually suppresses the second generation before it acquires consciousness, and permits no third generation to appear to be “visited with the iniquities of the fathers.” Like all other diseases, it is self-limiting in the individual or the species. It is, however, largely a question of intelligence and self-control on the part of the original victim, for simply by strict abstinence and a rigid adherence to the old saw, “A night with Venus, a moon with Mercury,” for two years syphilis can be as certainly and almost as completely cured as scarlatina or typhoid. And this not only as regards