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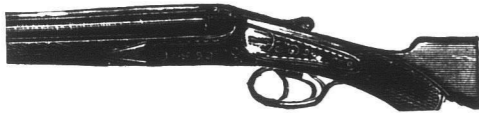
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Painful Social Ills May be Cured.

By M. A. LANE.

Public sympathy and common humanity are periodically shocked by proposals of certain persons to chloroform or otherwise kill the inefficient members of society. Every now and then some fatuous and perfectly insane individual makes an address in which is advocated the deliberate murder of the diseased young, the diseased old, or the presumably vicious or incurably insane. The phenomenon sometimes takes the form of a proposal to pass a law refusing marriage licenses to all persons who cannot "pass a medical examination."

It is deemed a virtue among the Eskimos to slaughter the incompetent aged; and the Chinese, when their children are insupportably numerous, drown them. Deliberate murder is practised in the first case because of the scarcity of food, and in the second because of overpopulation — which amounts to the same thing. Among ourselves there is no such strong economic pressure, and therefore some of our reformers limit their advocacy of murder to the criminal and diseased.

Within the last few years numerous proposals of this kind have been made in America. A prominent educator a few years ago said that all diseased children should be "put out of the way." More recently a clubwoman censured President Roosevelt for "encouraging large families among the poor"—as if the size of poor families could be influenced by President Roosevelt or by anybody else! But the most painful proposition was that of a "lady sociologist" who thought it would be a good thing to "kill the children of the slums."

All proposals of this kind are perfectly impossible. They are about as practicable. Where, in fact, are we to find the men who will do the killing? It is all very well to hold that it would be a good thing were thousands of babies, helplessly sick, and insane persons killed every day, but where will we find volunteers for the work of death? Who is to designate the individual to be "put out of the way"? Whose verdict will be final as to the incurability of the insane, the hopelessly vicious, and the hopelessly diseased child? Who could frame a law answering these questions to the satisfaction of the people, and what public official would be willing to earn his bread by killing his fellow men as animals are killed in great shambles?

Reformers who urge such crude methods of social purification, I often think, are themselves "degenerates." They are to be classified with the very persons whom they would remove. They may be well intentioned or may think they are, but to the vast majority of normally sympathetic persons they are frightful monstrosities.

Another type of reformer we hear much from is the person who advocates "medical examination" before permission to marry is granted. This kind of philosophy is so mildly insane as to be harmless. Those who advocate it, like the child killers, imagine that a law of that kind could be enforced by some mysterious power. They say that this "ought" to be done and that that "ought" to be done, but they never point out who is to do it. What legislature, for example, would pass a law forbidding marriage except after medical examination, and who will appoint the physicians who are to make the examinations? Who shall pass upon the qualifications of the doctors in question, and what shall be the last court of appeal—for doctors are notably given to disagreement in matters of fine diagnoses? The difficulties of good diagnoses are better known to physicians than to anybody else. Finally, how is the law to be enforced? The purpose of the law would be to prevent not legal or formal marriage, but actual marriage, and no law under the sun could prevent that.

Alas, no! The cure for the propagation of diseased and criminal human beings lies far afield from mere murder and empty statutes. It lies in a state of society from which poverty shall have been banished, in which there shall be no slums; in which children

and women will not be required to labor for their bread; in which every man who is willing to work will be compensated with a wage which shall enable him to live like a man rather than like a brute; in which all children will be educated as are children of the well-to-do classes now.

General education, with wealth under it, is the only conceivable cure for the slums and the social products of the slums. The moral code which would issue from such a system would, in a few generations, eliminate much of the disease and virtually all the crimes which now distress the sympathetic man. The degenerate, the primitive man and woman would be generally known by the physical marks which stamp them for what they are. Public sentiment would positively prevent marriage with such an individual, even as now the convicted felon finds it impossible to secure a wife or a husband among respectable people, however poor.

The working of this same moral code, established and maintained by general education, would prevent the propagation of transmissible disease in like manner. A man or woman with a known family history of disease would find it most difficult to secure a mate in marriage.

To cure the disease we must remove the cause. This old proverb of the medical art applies with equal force to diseases of the body social. Indiscriminate propagation is the cause of the evils complained of by our radical and unsympathetic reformers. Ignorance is the cause of indiscriminate propagation, and poverty is the cause of ignorance. To all enthusiastic reformers this piece of salutary advice may be given: Remove poverty and most of the ills which afflict society will be removed with it.

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