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Cause of Suicide

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 12.

crime by giving mental discipline, poise and self-control. It should also supply objects of interest in art, literature, science, philosophy and philanthropy that should banish brooding and encourage optimism and heroism.

This raises the question of moral training and moral teaching. Here we must admit that though even in ancient and pagan literature there are noble passages showing that in spite of the element of physical courage that may sometimes be involved yet at bottom suicide is a species of moral cowardice; nevertheless, we must admit that since the time of the Stoics we find examples of moralists inventing plausible and pernicious arguments in favour of deliberate suicide. Even in quite modern times the subtle and able thinker, David Hume, is found among these apologists for suicide and when one notes the ability he displays in dealing with other subjects one is simply amazed at the drivel he is guilty of writing on this topic. The following has been frequently quoted from David Hume as justifying suicide: "It would be no crime for me to divert the Nile or Danube from its course if I could, where then is the crime of turning a few ounces of blood out of its natural channel?"

Now as a matter of fact, neither an individual nor a nation even has the right at a mere whim to turn rivers from their courses regardless of consequences, or what is the sense in international waterways commissions? But where there is the most glaring fallacy and begging of the question at issue is in assuming that what may be done with a stream of water may also be permitted with a stream of blood. Curiously enough, too, it has never been noticed by those who quote this argument so glibly that it might be applied about as well to justify murder. Such contemptible quibbling scarcely deserves the attention of serious refutation. One would suppose that it could hardly impose on any but the most hopelessly stupid, but unfortunately many morbid minds contemplating suicide have little power of accurate reasoning and are powerfully impressed by such sophistries.

What has literature done to counteract these false conceptions? Much has been done but still not enough. That the rate of suicide among clergymen is so strikingly different from that among soldiers shows something as to the value and influence of right views of life. The early Christian Church by its most explicit teaching and discipline did much to check suicide. Judas Iscariot is not a good model for imitation.

In our own day the great popular educator is the newspaper. Very often it palliates or excuses this crime. More frequently by its realistic accounts of harrowing details of suicide with full details of the means employed it actually stimulates and initiates suicidal epidemics, continuing to pile up new excitements toward it and more complete instructions as to the way to do it.

We no longer allow the public to gloat on the public execution of criminals. We are attempting to eliminate the improper or suggestive of crime from our billboards; how long are we going to allow the pestiferous "yellow journal" to debauch the imagination and destroy weaker brethren struggling with this temptation? It must not be forgotten that the actual suicides are only a small proportion of those who have been tempted and many are living very near the edge of a precipice. How despicable to push them over!



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