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THE ECONOMICS OF PROSTITUTION.*

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Reproduction is heaven's first law. The first commandment in Genesis is "be fruitful and multiply," and is of more importance than all the other ten put together. It is also much easier to keep. It has always been pretty generally observed without much assistance from Church or State; indeed in spite of a good deal of opposition from both at times. The attitude of so-called "morality" and religion toward this magnificent impulse is characteristic. The burden of their childish song is "Thou shalt not." They have much to say in reprobation, but very little in approval of a process, whose dignity and beauty they are utterly incapable of appreciating, and whose magnificent perfection they haven't the brains to comprehend.

Because, forsooth, it is a hard thing to control, it is to be condemned entirely, and scarcely a religion or a philosophy can be found which has not advised, nay, even ordered, its absolute repression, and held up celibacy as the ideal state. Here, as elsewhere, morality is far too exclusively engaged in shrieking—"Don't!!"

Fortunately, however, its counsels, commands, and threats have about as much effect upon the mighty sweep of this holy impulse as Dame Parthington's broom had upon the tide of the Atlantic. And because it dares to defy their petty authority and disregard their edicts, priest and philosopher alike proclaim it an outlaw, and a war of extermination is set on foot. This soon collapses and they decide to tolerate it. As a last stab, they unite in stigmatizing it as a low, "animal"

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appetite, and that alone was enough to damn it for centuries. But the latter term carries no condemnation with it nowadays. On the contrary, the fact of an instinct being shared by the lower animals is good presumptive proof that it is of great benefit and value.

We have reason to thank God that the sexual instinct, one of the noblest, holiest, and most elevating that stirs our bosom is an "animal" one, and consequently far older and stronger than we are. It is backed by the life of all the ages and throbs with all the pulses of nature.

Its worst, and I had almost said its only, perversions are *human*, and the results of "reason" and convention.

But this is not the only ban under which this wonderful faculty of ours is laid. Not only is its exercise to be barely tolerated as a concession to weak, sinful human nature, but its very existence is to be ignored as completely as possible, and an imitation instinct known as "modesty" has been invented and developed for that special purpose. Its principal function is to deny the existence of the very sentiment which called it into being. That it is a virtue of the finest water, all sorts and conditions of men unite in testifying, but it has one peculiarity so singular as to provoke mention. It begins just where innocence ceases. The first thing that our first parents in Eden did *after they had fallen* was to discover that they were naked and make unto themselves aprons of fig leaves. Between these two influences our grand sexual functions have gradually come to be regarded as positively disgraceful in themselves, and the parts concerned in them as something to be absolutely ashamed of. Even in scientific nomenclature they are styled the "pudenda," "things one ought to be ashamed of." As for the sexual appetite, the most important and overmastering impulse which moves the race, instead of its excesses alone being reprobated, it has become a sentiment, the movings of which no moral man would dare to avow openly, and which a modest woman would die rather than confess to her nearest friend. The impulse has been degraded so low that its mere possession is sinful. Is this a natural, healthy, rational attitude No, nor a moral one either. This feeling alone produces the very excesses it was invented to check.

And what is the real rank and dignity of this