

Hygiene and Morality.

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PROSTITUTION.

Last week we reviewed the first part of Miss Dock's new book, "Hygiene and Morality," which deals with the Medical, Social, and Legal Aspects of the Venereal Diseases.

In Part II. Miss Dock deals with prostitution and the spasmodic attempts made from time to time during the past ages to control or punish it. These attempts, we read, usually took the form of grotesque and brutal punishments for women, rarely for men. As a rule the vicious male seems to have been overlooked or regarded as an insignificant factor in the problem. Punishment meted out to the woman was chiefly hypocritical or vindictive, not in the least preventive. Sometimes she was put into an iron cage and dipped into the river—almost, but not quite, drowned; sometimes her nose was cut off, or she was whipped or compelled to wear a distinguishing dress. She has always been the victim of blackmail, and the methods by which this has been levied show a remarkable similarity right down through the ages to modern times: they were usually the enactment of non-preventive legislation of a petty and harassing character, with the imposition of heavy fines for breach of observance. As such legislation simply made it more difficult for her to earn her bread in the only way open to her, it of course had to be violated, and the fines collected were divided between the accuser and the city government. All such legislation rested, as it still does, on the acceptance (once unquestioned, but to-day no longer so) of the double standard of morals.

"The double standard tacitly permits men to indulge freely and unchecked in sexual irregularity without consequent loss of social standing, but it dooms the women who are necessarily involved in these irregularities to social ostracism and even to complete degradation.

"In order to justify immoral practices among themselves, and to have a plausible explanation ready if criticism offered, the doctrine of 'physical necessity' has been invented for men by themselves, and has even been fortified by the positive teachings of prominent medical men. This doctrine, however, has never been extended to women, but instead the cowardly and cruel theory of innate depravity has been industriously disseminated as applying to 'fallen women,' thus skilfully ensuring an isolated position for these unfortunates, and

effectually checking the outgrowth of pity for them among women of the protected classes. The practical results of this psychological jugglery have been that, of two partners in one and the same act, neither one of whom could execute this act alone, and with whom if the element of compulsion entered as a complication, it could not possibly be present in the case of the stronger partner—men, the stronger, have remained free from blame; women, the weaker, have lived under a curse. The fact that this way of regarding the woman concerned disproves the argument of 'physical necessity' is only a part of the illogicality of the whole. It is evident that if unregulated sexual practice were really necessary for men there could be no element of shame or wrong in it, and there could therefore, obviously, be none for the women, for no act that is physically necessary is wrong, no matter how primal it may be."

Miss Dock then deals with modern systems of regulation, and shows why and how these have failed. She describes the establishment of the Contagious Diseases Acts in this country, and shows how under this law, as an English writer pointed out, "the police spies, acting on hints given them by persons acting in jealousy or revenge, and from motives of blackmail," held the honour and reputation of every woman among the poorer classes absolutely at their disposal. The repeal of these Acts, owing to the crusade under the leadership of Mrs. Josephine Butler, of honoured memory, is now a matter of history. The protest embodying the reasons for this crusade appeared in the *Daily News*, January 1st, 1870, and was signed by 250 of the great moral leaders among Englishwomen. The first signature is that of Harriet Martineau, and half way down the column appears the name of Florence Nightingale.

The whole of this section of the book should be carefully studied; it is the most lucid presentment of "the social institution called prostitution." Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell wrote in 1880: "The fact must be clearly perceived and accepted that male chastity is a fundamental virtue in a State; that it secures the chastity of women, on which the moral qualities of fidelity, humanity, and trust depend, and that it secures the strength and truth of men, on which the intellectual vigour and wise government of a State depend. . . . From that time on women physicians as an entire body have stood unitedly for a single standard of morals and for the education of the public." In the United States of America they have been publicly called upon by their colleagues in the medical profession to carry the teachings of hygiene to the women of the land.

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