

The Midwife.

THE MATERNAL INSTINCT.

One of the most poignant questions at the present time is that of the rape of women by both officers and men of the German Army. Neither youth, nor sickness, nor the vows of religious, have been an effective restraint, or appealed to the better instincts of men in many instances fathers. The result of these unspeakable outrages is that in this country alone, there are to-day awaiting the ordeal of maternity more than 1,000 Belgian girls and women—some of them dedicated to the religious life—under circumstances of unparalleled horror.

Inevitably, there arises in the minds of many, to whom, under ordinary circumstances, the destruction of life at any stage is an unspeakable crime, the question of its legitimacy in these cases. The Roman church, which has always strongly defended the rights of the unborn child and which prohibits the operation of craniotomy where delivery by ordinary means is impossible, enjoining the mother to take the greater risk of Caesarian section, and so save the life of her child, even at the expense of her own, has as yet not expressed an authoritative opinion on the subject, but that individual priests feel strongly may be gathered from a sermon recently preached in a Flemish city by an aged priest, in the course of which he said:

"Yes, my sisters, for it is to you alone that I desire to speak now in the name of the God of vengeance, who condemns, and of the God of pity, who absolves. You will not wish to perpetuate the abomination of which you have been the innocent and holy victims. The dregs of darkness must not appear in the light of day. Let each of you become the pitiless Herod of the opprobrious line which the infamous Amalekites have raised up on their bloody paths. Proscribe, extirpate, exterminate without scruple the filthy and criminal tares which would dishonour one day the pure wheat of our plains, upon which blows the breath of liberty.

"It is I, the man of God, strong in the cry of revolt of my conscience and in the supreme sense of the Divine word, who confer boldly upon you the right, and calmly indicate to you the duty, of letting no impure blood corrupt the treasure of your veins, in which sleep, awaiting the re-awakening of century-old liberties, the high destinies of our race. I give you absolution before God and man, and if there is sin, let the expiation and the weight fall upon me."

Again, not only the church but the State is stirred to action. It is reported from Paris that

"Writing in the *Echo de Paris*, M. Maurice Barres proposes a law *ad hoc*, providing that in the districts invaded by the enemy, women who

fall victims to his violence, may ask the Mayor to have the child resulting from the crime registered as born of 'an unknown father and mother.' The Mayor would automatically consent, and the child would, if so desired, be consigned to an orphanage."

M. Louis Martin, a member of the Senate in Paris, proposes that under certain conditions the penalties for abortion shall be suspended; but M. Malvy, Minister of the Interior, in informing the Social Needs Committee of the Interior of the measures he intended to take with regard to women violated by the enemy, declared that it was necessary to oppose the tendency to encourage abortion or infanticide by violated women.

The Committee unanimously agreed to his proposal of measures permitting victims to be assisted to abandon the child, so that all trace of its origin shall disappear, making provision enabling the mother to regain it should she so desire.

There are also many medical men who consider that under the circumstances the production of abortion is quite legitimate.

But even though the Church, the State, and the profession of medicine consider that exceptional circumstances require exceptional remedies, and that what is ordinarily a crime is permissible, the last word has not been said. That remains with the expectant mother.

One can only dimly guess the horror of the situation for the women subjected to so intolerable an outrage—the school-girl, rudely awakened from day-dreams to the essential facts of life in most appalling circumstances, the affianced bride looking forward to the day when she shall bear a child to the man whom she loves, and by whom she is beloved, the religious, who has deliberately renounced earthly ties that body, soul and spirit may be devoted to the Master whom she desires to serve, all these are agonising with the shock of past outrage, and with the knowledge that in the immediate future they will bear a child begotten by a father whose ruthless disregard for their honour has laid the whole fabric of their lives in ruins. What wonder if such a woman looks forward with loathing to the advent of her child, or that she may conceivably consider herself justified in compassing its destruction?

And yet, when life falls in ruins around us, and we are left desolate, there remains the stern path of duty. It may be a thorny one to tread, but "none ever lost himself along a straight road," and as we walk upon it we discern flowers springing up by the wayside. Is there any consolation we can bring to our sisters now in their Gethsemane?

To discover and to do their duty will, we believe, be their sheet anchor. This will strengthen them to endure, to preserve inviolate the undesired life enshrined, until the appointed time,

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