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EDITORIAL.

EQUAL MORAL STANDARD FOR DIVORCE.

Major Entwistle, M.P., is to be congratulated on the support accorded to his Matrimonial Causes (England and Wales) Bill in the House of Commons on March 2nd, when the second reading was carried by a majority of 204, only 27 voting against the measure, which practically is a one-clause Bill, providing that "it shall be lawful for any wife to present a petition praying that her marriage may be dissolved on the ground that her husband has since the celebration thereof been guilty of adultery."

Major Entwistle stated that the one object of the measure was to give equality to the sexes in the matter of divorce; it was a simple matter of justice and equity, and was practically universally demanded by the women of this country. It was an attempt to remove an anachronism and an indefensible anomaly. It was scandalous that the law gave the husband complete licence to commit adultery with impunity. Practically every civilised country, with the exception of Spain, recognised an equal right of the wife to divorce.

To the nursing profession the Bill is of interest not only on the ground of morality, but because it is a great hygienic measure, and, if it passes into law, will, we believe, have the effect of materially raising the standard of national health. It is an incontestable fact that unfaithfulness on the part of either husband or wife exposes the innocent partner to the danger of contracting disease of a most loathsome character and of far-reaching consequences.

Moreover, as we descend in the social scale the danger of infection from the venereal diseases increases, because the rich are able to maintain separate establishments if they desire to indulge in this particular way, whereas those not so well endowed have recourse to promiscuity, and to quote Miss L. L. Dock in

"Hygiene and Morality," "bred and cultivated in prostitution, venereal diseases spread thence through the community, attacking the innocent as well as the guilty, the pure as well as the impure, just as typhoid fever is no respecter of persons, no matter how strict their own personal sanitary standards may be.

"How or why the parasitic powers of the *Spirochaete Pallida* first declared themselves in unlawful not in lawful sexual intercourse is a mystery. But it is certain that this organism is never met with in the relation of marriage unless it has been brought from without. Excesses in the marriage relations, though productive of other evils, do not bring on venereal diseases. They are bred in promiscuity."

Therefore the danger to a wife of an unfaithful partner is evident, a danger not only to herself, but to the children born of the union, and to the State by reason of the maimed, the halt, and the blind which it has to maintain as the result of their infection before birth, and of their non-efficiency as members of the community.

Yet at present, though a husband can divorce his wife on the ground of unfaithfulness, a wife is tied to an unfaithful husband unless she can also prove cruelty, which we believe includes infection with venereal disease. Further, can any greater cruelty be inflicted upon a woman than to decree that she shall live with an unfaithful husband until he has infected her, when she may obtain a tardy release?

From the point of view both of the individual and the State, we welcome Major Entwistle's Bill, and hope that its reception by the House of Commons, on its second reading, foreshadows its speedy inscription on the Statute Book of these Realms.

It is interesting to note that in the course of the debate those members who opposed the Bill, and advocated a different standard for men and women, found no favour with the Labour Party.

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