

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE VICIOUS

There are many vices and seven deadly sins. But of late years many of the seven have contrived to pass themselves off as virtues. Avarice, for instance; and Pride, when re-baptised thrift and self-respect, have become the guardian angels of Christian civilisation; and as for Envy, it is the corner-stone upon which much of our competitive system is founded. There are still two vices which are fortunate, or unfortunate, enough to remain undisguised, not even concealing from themselves the fact that they are vices and not virtues. One is drunkenness; the other fornication. The viciousness of these vices is so little disguised, even from those who habitually practise them, that there will be a protest against merely describing one of them by the right Biblical name. Why not say prostitution? For this reason: prostitution is a word applied to only one half of the vice, and that the most pitiable. Fornication hits both sinners alike. Prostitution applies only to the woman.

When, however, we cease to regard this vice from the point of view of morality and religion, and look at it solely as a factor in the social problem, the word prostitution is less objectionable. For the social burden of this vice is borne almost entirely by women. The male sinner does not, by the mere fact of his sin, find himself in a worse position in obtaining employment, in finding a home, or even in securing a wife. His wrong-doing only hits him in his purse, or, perhaps, in his health. His incontinence, excepting so far as it relates to the woman whose degradation it necessitates, does not add to the number of those for whom society has to provide. It is an immense addition to the infamy of this vice in man that its consequences have to be borne almost exclusively by woman.

The difficulty of dealing with drunkards and harlots is almost insurmountable. Were it not that I utterly repudiate as a funda-

mental denial of the essential principle of the Christian religion the popular pseudo-scientific doctrine that any man or woman is past saving by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit, I would sometimes be disposed to despair when contemplating these victims of the Devil. The doctrine of Heredity and the suggestion of Irresponsibility come perilously near re-establishing, on scientific bases, the awful dogma of Reprobation which has cast so terrible a shadow over the Christian Church. For thousands upon thousands of these poor wretches are, as Bishop South truly said, "not so much born into this world as damned into it." The bastard of a harlot, born in a brothel, suckled on gin, and familiar from earliest infancy with all the bestialities of debauch, violated before she is twelve, and driven out into the streets by her mother a year or two later, what chance is there for such a girl in this world—I say nothing about the next? Yet such a case is not exceptional. There are many such differing in detail, but in essentials the same. And with boys it is almost as bad. There are thousands who were begotten when both parents were besotted with drink, whose mothers saturated themselves with alcohol every day of their pregnancy, who may be said to have sucked in a taste for strong drink with their mothers' milk, and who were surrounded from childhood with opportunities and incitements to drink. How can we marvel that the constitution thus disposed to intemperance finds the stimulus of drink indispensable? Even if they make a stand against it, the increasing pressure of exhaustion and of scanty food drives them back to the cup. Of these poor wretches, born slaves of the bottle, predestined to drunkenness from their mother's womb, there are—who can say how many? Yet they are all men; all with what the Russian peasants call "a spark of God" in them, which can never be wholly obscured and destroyed while life exists, and if any social scheme is to be comprehensive and practical it must deal with these men. It must provide for the drunkard and the harlot as it provides for the improvident and the out-of-work. But who is sufficient for these things?

I will take the question of the drunkard, for the drink difficulty lies at the root of everything. Nine-tenths of our poverty, squalor, vice, and crime spring from this poisonous tap-root. Many of our social evils, which overshadow the land like so many upas trees, would dwindle away and die if they were not constantly watered with strong drink. There is universal agreement on that point; in fact, the

agreement as to the evils of intemperance is almost as universal as the conviction that politicians will do nothing practical to interfere with them. In Ireland, Mr. Justice Fitzgerald says that intemperance leads to nineteen-twentieths of the crime in that country, but no one proposes a Coercion Act to deal with that evil. In England, the judges all say the same thing. Of course it is a mistake to assume that a murder, for instance, would never be committed by sober men, because murderers in most cases prime themselves for their deadly work by a glass of Dutch courage. But the facility of securing a reinforcement of passion undoubtedly tends to render always dangerous, and sometimes irresistible, the temptation to violate the laws of God and man.

Mere lectures against the evil habit are, however, of no avail. We have to recognise, that the gin-palace, like many other evils, although a poisonous, is still a natural outgrowth of our social conditions. The tap-room in many cases is the poor man's only parlour. Many a man takes to beer, not from the love of beer, but from a natural craving for the light, warmth, company, and comfort which is thrown in along with the beer, and which he cannot get excepting by buying beer. Reformers will never get rid of the drink shop until they can outbid it in the subsidiary attractions which it offers to its customers. Then, again, let us never forget that the temptation to drink is strongest when want is sharpest and misery the most acute. A well-fed man is not driven to drink by the craving that torments the hungry; and the comfortable do not crave for the boon of forgetfulness. Gin is the only Lethe of the miserable. The foul and poisoned air of the dens in which thousands live predisposes to a longing for stimulant. Fresh air, with its oxygen and its ozone, being lacking, a man supplies the want with spirit. After a time the longing for drink becomes a mania. Life seems as insupportable without alcohol as without food. It is a disease often inherited, always developed by indulgence, but as clearly a disease as ophthalmia or stone.

All this should predispose us to charity and sympathy. While recognising that the primary responsibility must always rest upon the individual, we may fairly insist that society, which, by its habits, its customs, and its laws, has greased the slope down which these poor creatures slide to perdition, shall seriously take in hand their salvation.

How many are there who are, more or less, under the dominion of strong drink? Statistics abound, but they seldom tell us what

we want to know. We know how many public-houses there are in the land, and how many arrests for drunkenness the police make in a year; but beyond that we know little. Everyone knows that for one man who is arrested for drunkenness there are at least ten—and often twenty—who go home intoxicated. In London, for instance, there are 14,000 drink shops, and every year 20,000 persons are arrested for drunkenness. But who can for a moment believe that there are only 20,000, more or less, habitual drunkards in London? By habitual drunkard I do not mean one who is always drunk, but one who is so much under the dominion of the evil habit that he cannot be depended upon not to get drunk whenever the opportunity offers.

In the United Kingdom there are 190,000 public-houses, and every year there are 200,000 arrests for drunkenness. Of course, several of these arrests refer to the same person, who is locked up again and again. Were this not so, if we allowed six drunkards to each house as an average, or five habitual drunkards for one arrested for drunkenness, we should arrive at a total of a million adults who are more or less prisoners of the publican—as a matter of fact, Wm. Hoyle gives 1 in 12 of the adult population. This may be an excessive estimate, but, if we take half of a million, we shall not be accused of exaggeration. Of these some are in the last stage of confirmed dipsomania; others are but over the verge; but the procession tends ever downwards.

The loss which the maintenance of this huge standing army of a half of a million of men who are more or less always besotted men whose intemperance impairs their working power, consumes their earnings, and renders their homes wretched, has long been a familiar theme of the platform. But what can be done for them? Total abstinence is no doubt admirable, but how are you to get them to be totally abstinent? When a man is drowning in mid-ocean the one thing that is needful, no doubt, is that he should plant his feet firmly on terra firma. But how is he to get there? It is just what he cannot do. And so it is with the drunkards. If they are to be rescued there must be something more done for them than at present is attempted, unless, of course, we decide definitely to allow the iron laws of nature to work themselves out in their destruction. In that case it might be more merciful to facilitate the slow workings of natural law. There is no need of establishing a lethal chamber for drunkards like that into which the lost dogs of London are

driven, to die in peaceful sleep under the influence of carbonic oxide. The State would only need to go a little further than it goes at present in the way of supplying poison to the community. If, in addition to planting a flaming gin palace at each corner, free to all who enter, it were to supply free gin to all who have attained a certain recognised standard of inebriety, delirium tremens would soon reduce our drunken population to manageable proportions. I can imagine a cynical millionaire of the scientific philanthropic school making a clearance of all the drunkards in a district by the simple expedient of an unlimited allowance of alcohol. But that for us is out of the question. The problem of what to do with our half of a million drunkards remains to be solved, and few more difficult questions confront the social reformer.

The question of the harlots is, however, quite as insoluble by the ordinary methods. For these unfortunates no one who looks below the surface can fail to have the deepest sympathy. Some there are, no doubt, perhaps many, who—whether from inherited passion or from evil education—have deliberately embarked upon a life of vice, but with the majority it is not so. Even those who deliberately and of free choice adopt the profession of a prostitute, do so under the stress of temptations which few moralists seem to realise. Terrible as the fact is, there is no doubt it is a fact that there is no industrial career in which for a short time a beautiful girl can make as much money with as little trouble as the profession of a courtesan. The case recently tried at the Lewes assizes, in which the wife of an officer in the army admitted that while living as a kept mistress she had received as much as £4,000 a year, was no doubt very exceptional. Even the most successful adventuresses seldom make the income of a Cabinet Minister. But take women in professions and in businesses all round, and the number of young women who have received £500 in one year for the sale of their person is larger than the number of women of all ages who make a similar sum by honest industry. It is only the very few who draw these gilded prizes, and they only do it for a very short time. But it is the few prizes in every profession which allure the multitude, who think little of the many blanks. And speaking broadly, vice offers to every good-looking girl during the first bloom of her youth and beauty more money than she can earn by labour in any field of industry open to her sex. The penalty exacted afterwards is disease, degradation and death, but these things at first are hidden from her sight.

The profession of a prostitute is the only career in which the maximum income is paid to the newest apprentice. It is the one calling in which at the beginning the only exertion is that of self-indulgence; all the prizes are at the commencement. It is the ever-new embodiment of the old fable of the sale of the soul to the Devil. The tempter offers wealth, comfort, excitement, but in return the victim must sell her soul, nor does the other party forget to exact his due to the uttermost farthing. Human nature, however, is short-sighted. Giddy girls, chafing against the restraints of uncongenial industry, see the glittering bait continually before them. They are told that if they will but "do as others do" they will make more in a night, if they are lucky, than they can make in a week at their sewing; and who can wonder that in many cases the irrevocable step is taken before they realise that it is irrevocable, and that they have bartered away the future of their lives for the paltry chance of a year's ill-gotten gains?

Of the severity of the punishment there can be no question. If the premium is high at the beginning, the penalty is terrible at the close. And this penalty is exacted equally from those who have deliberately said, "Evil, be thou my Good," and for those who have been decoyed, snared, trapped into the life which is a living death. When you see a girl on the street you can never say without enquiry whether she is one of the most-to-be condemned, or the most-to-be pitied of her sex. Many of them find themselves where they are because of a too trusting disposition, confidence born of innocence being often the unsuspecting ally of the procuress and seducer. Others are as much the innocent victims of crime as if they had been stabbed or maimed by the dagger of the assassin. The records of our Rescue Homes abound with life-stories, some of which we have been able to verify to the letter—which prove only too conclusively the existence of numbers of innocent victims whose entry upon this dismal life can in no way be attributed to any act of their own will. Many are orphans or the children of depraved mothers, whose one idea of a daughter is to make money out of her prostitution. Here are a few cases on our register :—

E. C., aged 18, a soldier's child, born on the sea. Her father died, and her mother, a thoroughly depraved woman, assisted to secure her daughter's prostitution.

P. S., aged 20, illegitimate child. Went to consult a doctor one time about some ailment. The doctor abused his position and took advantage of his patient,

and when she complained, gave her £4 as compensation. When that was spent, having lost her character, she came on the town. We looked the doctor up, and he fled.

E. A., aged 17, was left an orphan very early in life, and adopted by her god-father, who himself was the means of her ruin at the age of 10.

A girl in her teens lived with her mother in the "Dusthole," the lowest part of Woolwich. This woman forced her out upon the streets, and profited by her prostitution up to the very night of her confinement. The mother had all the time been the receiver of the gains.

E., neither father nor mother, was taken care of by a grandmother till, at an early age, accounted old enough. Married a soldier; but shortly before the birth of her first child, found that her deceiver had a wife and family in a distant part of the country, and she was soon left friendless and alone. She sought an asylum in the Workhouse for a few weeks, after which she vainly tried to get honest employment. Failing that, and being on the very verge of starvation, she entered a lodging-house in Westminster and "did as other girls." Here our lieutenant found and persuaded her to leave and enter one of our Homes, where she soon gave abundant proof of her conversion by a thoroughly changed life. She is now a faithful and trusted servant in a clergyman's family.

A girl was some time ago discharged from a city hospital after an illness. She was homeless and friendless, an orphan, and obliged to work for her living. Walking down the street and wondering what she should do next, she met a girl, who came up to her in a most friendly fashion and speedily won her confidence.

"Discharged ill, and nowhere to go, are you?" said her new friend. "Well, come home to my mother's; she will lodge you, and we'll go to work together, when you are quite strong."

The girl consented gladly, but found herself conducted to the very lowest part of Woolwich and ushered into a brothel; there was no mother in the case. She was hoaxed, and powerless to resist. Her protestations were too late to save her, and having had her character forced from her she became hopeless, and stayed on to live the life of her false friend.

There is no need for me to go into the details of the way in which men and women, whose whole livelihood depends upon their success in disarming the suspicions of their victims and luring them to their doom, contrive to overcome the reluctance of the young girl without parents, friends, or helpers to enter their toils. What fraud fails to accomplish, a little force succeeds in effecting; and a girl who has been guilty of nothing but imprudence finds herself an outcast for life.

The very innocence of a girl tells against her. A woman of the world, once entrapped, would have all her wits about her to

extricate herself from the position in which she found herself. A perfectly virtuous girl is often so overcome with shame and horror that there seems nothing in life worth struggling for. She accepts her doom without further struggle, and treads the long and torturing path-way of "the streets" to the grave.

"Judge not, that ye be not judged" is a saying that applies most appropriately of all to these unfortunates. Many of them would have escaped their evil fate had they been less innocent. They are where they are because they loved too utterly to calculate consequences, and trusted too absolutely to dare to suspect evil. And others are there because of the false education which confounds ignorance with virtue, and throws our young people into the midst of a great city, with all its excitements and all its temptations, without more preparation or warning than if they were going to live in the Garden of Eden.

Whatever sin they have committed, a terrible penalty is exacted. While the man who caused their ruin passes as a respectable member of society, to whom virtuous matrons gladly marry—if he is rich—their maiden daughters, they are crushed beneath the millstone of social excommunication.

Here let me quote from a report made to me by the head of our Rescue Homes as to the actual life of these unfortunates.

The following hundred cases are taken as they come from our Rescue Register. The statements are those of the girls themselves. They are certainly frank, and it will be noticed that only two out of the hundred allege that they took to the life out of poverty:—

CAUSE OF FALL				CONDITION WHEN APPLYING			
Drink	...	...	14				
Seduction	...	...	33	Rags	...	...	25
Wilful choice	...	...	24	Destitution	...	...	27
Bad company	...	...	27	Decently dressed	...	...	48
Poverty	...	...	2				
			—			Total	100
		Total	100				—

Out of these girls twenty-three have been in prison.

The girls suffer so much that the shortness of their miserable life is the only redeeming feature. Whether we look at the wretchedness of the life itself; their perpetual intoxication; the cruel treatment to which they are subjected by their task-masters and mistresses or bullies; the hopelessness, suffering and despair induced by their circumstances and surroundings; the depths of misery, degra-

dation and poverty to which they eventually descend; or their treatment in sickness, their friendlessness and loneliness in death, it must be admitted that a more dismal lot seldom falls to the fate of a human being. I will take each of these in turn.

HEALTH.—This life induces insanity, rheumatism, consumption, and all forms of syphilis. Rheumatism and gout are the commonest of these evils. Some were quite crippled by both—young though they were. Consumption sows its seeds broadcast. The life is a hot-bed for the development of any constitutional and hereditary germs of the disease. We have found girls in Piccadilly at midnight who are continually prostrated by haemorrhage, yet who have no other way of life open, so struggle on in this awful manner between whiles.

DRINK.—This is an inevitable part of the business. All confess that they could never lead their miserable lives if it were not for its influence.

A girl, who was educated at college, and who had a home in which was every comfort, but who, when ruined, had fallen even to the depth of Woolwich “Dusthole,” exclaimed to us indignantly—“Do you think I could ever, ever do this if it weren’t for the drink? I always have to be in drink if I want to sin.” No girl has ever come into our Homes *from street-life* but has been more or less a prey to drink.

CRUEL TREATMENT.—The devotion of these women to their bullies is as remarkable as the brutality of their bullies is abominable. Probably the primary cause of the fall of numberless girls of the lower class, is their great aspiration to the dignity of wifehood;—they are never “somebody” until they are married, and will link themselves to any creature, no matter how debased, in the hope of being ultimately married by him. This consideration, in addition to their helpless condition when once character has gone, makes them suffer cruelties which they would never otherwise endure from the men with whom large numbers of them live.

One case in illustration of this is that of a girl who was once a respectable servant, the daughter of a police sergeant. She was ruined, and shame led her to leave home. At length she drifted to Woolwich, where she came across a man who persuaded her to live with him, and for a considerable length of time she kept him, although his conduct to her was brutal in the extreme.

The girl living in the next room to her has frequently heard him knock her head against the wall, and pound it, when he was out of temper, through her gains of prostitution being less than usual. He lavished upon her every sort of cruelty and abuse, and at length she grew so wretched, and was reduced to so dreadful a plight, that she ceased to attract. At this he became furious, and pawned all her clothing but one thin garment of rags. The week before her first confinement he kicked her black and blue from neck to knees, and she was carried to the police station in a pool of blood, but; she was so loyal to the wretch that she refused to appear against him.

She was going to drown herself in desperation, when our Rescue Officers spoke to her, wrapped their own shawl around her shivering shoulders, took her home with them, and cared for her. The baby was born dead—a tiny, shapeless mass.

This state of things is all too common.

**HOPELESSNESS—SURROUNDINGS.**—The state of hopelessness and despair in which these girls live continually, makes them reckless of consequences, and large numbers commit suicide who are never heard of. A West End policeman assured us that the number of prostitute-suicides was terribly in advance of anything guessed at by the public.

**DEPTHS TO WHICH THEY SINK.**—There is scarcely a lower class of girls to be found than the girls of Woolwich “Dusthole”—where one of our Rescue Slum Homes is established. The women living and following their dreadful business in this neighbourhood are so degraded that even abandoned men will refuse to accompany them home. Soldiers are forbidden to enter the place, or to go down the street, on pain of twenty-five days’ imprisonment; pickets are stationed at either end to prevent this. The streets are much cleaner than many of the rooms we have seen.

One public house there is shut up three or four times in a day sometimes for fear of losing the licence through the terrible brawls which take place within. A policeman never goes down this street alone at night—one having died not long ago from injuries received there—but our two lasses go unharmed and loved at all hours, spending every other night always upon the streets.

The girls sink to the “Dusthole” after coming down several grades. There is but one on record who came there with beautiful clothes, and this poor girl, when last seen by the officers, was a pauper in the workhouse infirmary in a wretched condition.

The lowest class of all is the girls who stand at the pier-head—these sell themselves literally for a bare crust of bread and sleep in the streets.

Filth and vermin abound to an extent to which no one who has not seen it can have any idea.

The “Dusthole” is only one, alas of many similar districts in this highly civilised land.

**SICKNESS, FRIENDLESSNESS—DEATH.**—In hospitals it is a known fact that these girls are not treated at all like other cases; they inspire disgust, and are most frequently discharged before being really cured. Scorned by their relations, and ashamed to make their case known even to those who would help them, unable longer to struggle out on the streets to earn the bread of shame, there are girls lying in many a dark hole in this big city positively rotting away, and maintained by their old companions on the streets. Many are totally friendless, utterly cast out and left to perish by relatives and friends. One of this class came to us, sickened and died, and we buried her, being her only followers to the grave.

It is a sad story, but one that must not be forgotten, for these women constitute a large standing army whose numbers no one can calculate. All estimates that I have seen purely imaginary. The ordinary figure given for London is from 60,000 to 80,000. This may be true if it is meant to include all habitually unchaste women. It is a monstrous exaggeration if it is meant to apply to those who make their living solely and habitually by prostitution. These figures, however, only confuse. We shall have to deal with hundreds every month, whatever estimate we take. How utterly unprepared society is for any such systematic reformation may be seen from the fact that even now at our Homes we are unable to take in all the girls who apply. They cannot escape, even if they would, for want of funds whereby to provide them a way of release.

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