

THE AMERICAN PLAN

As Seen by an Englishwoman

THE AMERICAN SOCIAL HYGIENE ASSOCIATION
Incorporated

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AMERICA AND THE SOCIAL EVIL

By EDITH PICTON-TURBERVILL

IN April, 1917, America declared war on Germany and threw in her lot with the Allies. From that day onwards the American nation put all its strength into winning the war with an enthusiasm so great that it was necessary to come in actual close touch with it before it could be realized. Some Americans felt, no doubt, that the nation had come in none too soon, and there was time to be redeemed: be that as it may, no one who has had the privilege of visiting America during the past two years can have failed to be deeply impressed with the whole-hearted enthusiasm displayed, the preparedness of the nation for any sacrifice that might be needed, and the stupendous efforts to strengthen the hands of the Allies put forth by the people of that country. This is not the place to enlarge upon these things, but it is not too much to say that the vaunted organization of Germany pales into insignificance beside the speedy and thorough organization of the American nation when it arose to meet the emergencies of the war.

Fear has been expressed that America, coming late into the war, yet possibly being the means of turning the balance in favor of the Allies, might overestimate her share in the great victory that has been achieved. This fear is groundless. During the eight weeks I was in America last autumn I met men and women of every shade of opinion and in many walks of life. They continually emphasized the fact, in a manner that touched me, that their share in the war had only been carried on during a short eighteen months, while we had struggled for over four years. They maintained that economically compared with Britain and France their country was hardly feeling the war, that there had been comparatively little suffering, no shortage of food, and no danger to life and property in their land. In the end, they said, a straw may turn the balance, and this was fully realized. All this may be true, yet it was the generosity of spirit with which these facts were so continually asserted that deeply impressed one who knew

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how great had been the efforts of this non-martial nation, and how large had been its share in winning the victory.

It has always been recognized—though never so fully as in these days—that one of the most deadly of our enemies in time of peace as well as in time of war is venereal disease. It is a matter of history that prostitution follows the army, and it is now common knowledge that in some armies as many men are put out of action by the ravages of these diseases as by the wounds inflicted by the enemy. In no department of its many activities has the American government shown greater enthusiasm and thoroughness than in the special department that was created for the suppression of alcohol and vice. The Secretary of War was empowered and directed by act of Congress "to do everything by him deemed necessary" to protect men in military training from the evils of prostitution. For this purpose the War and Navy Department Commission on Training Camp Activities was formed. This Commission appointed various committees and sections, some of which will be referred to later.

CONTINENCE AS AN OFFICIAL POLICY

Before beginning its activities the government officially announced to the nation that "continence is compatible with health, and that it is the best prevention of venereal disease." This was made widely known throughout the services and continually emphasized by official authorities. Those who have had some little share in facing, in England, this problem so vitally affecting the youth of our country, find it difficult not to contrast that lofty standard with the standard set forth by our own War Office in the House of Commons last year, when defending the use of tolerated brothels by our troops in France.

The Commission went further and clearly set forth the evils of the segregated area. There are many men and women in England to-day who, in spite of the findings of scientific experts such as Dr. Abraham Flexner and others, cling to the belief that the adoption of segregated areas will remove many evils. Segregation of prostitutes, a method which has been so completely shown to be ineffective that it has not even a crutch to stand on, is often regarded as the best solution of the problem. People hesitate to express this belief publicly as in days gone by, yet as many still cherish it, I do not hesitate to insert here the two sides of the question as it was stated and widely circulated by the American government.

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THE TWO SIDES

It is claimed that—

Segregation

1. Concentrates prostitution, thus facilitating control and reduction.
2. Decreases prostitution by regulation.
3. Decreases venereal diseases through medical inspection.
4. Enables control of the liquor traffic in connection with prostitution.
5. Prevents crimes against women.
6. Protects the community from offensive and detrimental proximity of prostitution.
7. Decreases graft in connection with prostitution, and the exploitation of the prostitute.
8. Decreases crime by enabling police supervision of a recognized crime centre.
9. Protects boys and young men from contact with the prostitute by removing temptation from the streets and residence districts.

The truth is that—

Segregation

1. Increases prostitution, continually advertising vice by making it familiar. Affords a place of commerce, otherwise uncertain and precarious, to the least competent of prostitutes, mentally and physically.
2. Increases prostitution by increasing the demand, which increases the supply.
3. Increases venereal diseases by deceiving the ignorant into a fancied reliance upon a frequently "faked" and inevitably futile medical inspection.
4. Stimulates an illegal liquor traffic, since commercialized vice fails without liquor.
5. Tends to increase crimes against women by fostering promiscuity and providing a source of sexual brutalization and degeneracy.
6. Exposes the community by advertising vice as a community necessity, making it easily accessible and tolerated, a condition conducive to the moral degradation of the community.
7. Increases graft, by illegal toleration of commercialized vice, tempting the police to exact illegal revenue and confer illegal privilege. Gives free rein to the exploitation of prostitutes.
8. Increases crime by fostering viciousness and disease, providing a meeting-place for the idle and vicious, with whom the prostitutes sympathize and usually cooperate.
9. Exposes boys and young men to contact with the prostitute by presenting an ever-present opportunity to "go down the line and see the sights." Provides a show-place for special obscene and depraved exhibitions to which the youth is lured by "runners" and the sale of lewd pictures.

America believes that the apparently impossible can be accomplished, and it achieved much in dealing with the two ancient problems of drink and prostitution. Five miles round every military camp was converted into a dry zone (with the exception of camps within the limits of incorporated cities and towns); it was an offence not only to sell but to give liquor to members of the military forces. On the menu of every hotel was a notice to that effect. To deal with the problems a Law Enforcement Section on Liquor and Vice Control and a Social Hygiene Division were formed by the Commission on Training Camp Activities, the object of the first being to secure laws against prostitution and to provide reformatories for prostitutes. The Social Hygiene Division was purely educational in its function.

THE EDUCATIONAL WEAPON

The thoroughness of the educational work done by this Division was little short of marvelous and almost beyond praise. No one in America need any longer remain in ignorance as to the ravages of venereal disease. The means of education utilized included lectures, exhibits, stereomotorgraphs, pamphlets, and moving pictures. All kinds of existing bodies were called in to assist in the government's great educational campaign. Every manager of a house of business received a letter on the subject, drawing attention to the fact that he suffered economically from the result of it, and pointing out that his employees were no doubt often temporarily incapacitated. The manager was then invited in his own interests to cooperate in the great educational campaign for the nation. The Young Men's and Young Women's Christian Associations and other kindred societies were flooded with pamphlets with striking illustrations and diagrams on the subject and in simple, forcible language. The cinema was an effective ally, and all over the country a film called "Fit to Fight" was shown, as well as one specially for women and girls. The conspiracy of silence which has held America as well as Britain in its grip has been finally overthrown. The absence of an appeal in the literature to the idealistic side of the young man's and woman's nature was a striking one, and is a lack which many in America have already recognized. To dwell upon the terrible physical result of this evil is necessary, but it may be questioned whether fear is a sufficiently potent restraining power; in youth especially, an appeal to the ideal is a force without which mere knowledge of evil results may prove powerless. The desire to abstain from preaching is easily understood,

and it is no doubt the depth of that desire that has influenced the American government, in its striking literature on the subject, to abstain from the idealistic appeal. Yet the insertion of such an appeal would have been welcomed by those who are versed in the psychology of adolescence.

RECREATION

It would be impossible within the limits of this article to speak of the magnificent constructive work of the Commission. The Commission appointed no less than twelve divisions to aid it in its work, and with clubs, recreation rooms, gymnasiums, libraries, hostess houses, etc., succeeded in providing for the troops so healthy a social life that this in itself was a powerful ally in combating the evils of vice and disease. Before describing some of the methods that have been used for this purpose it will be well to state briefly how the soldier himself is dealt with. Prophylactics do not form a part of the man's equipment when he goes on leave. In America every soldier who has exposed himself to danger of disease is ordered to report, and it is only then that treatment is given. The soldier loses his pay while disabled from venereal disease and is confined to camp as long as he is infectious.

The special committee (Section on Vice and Liquor Control) dealing with the most ancient of all evils arrayed its forces in three main directions: against the red-light district, or segregated area, which happily does not exist in Britain; secondly, against the scattered houses of ill fame; and thirdly, against the street-walking and clandestine women. In the first two both men and women were dealt with, and the steps taken met with marked success. Measures taken against the street-walker and clandestine women have met with apparent success; whether that success is a permanent one still remains to be seen.

The government had a powerful lever which it rightly used. Every city was desirous to have the troops in its midst. Enthusiasm for the "boys" and patriotism were at a high level. The Secretary of War positively refused to allow any troops to go to a city in which there was a segregated district. Not only so but he also publicly declared that if any community in which a camp was located refused to remove disorderly houses in its midst, the camp would be re-

moved, regardless of the expense which the government had incurred in its establishment.

ELIMINATING THE RED LIGHT

A magnificent work was done. No less than eighty-one red-light districts were wiped out of existence. Officials coöperated with the government in most drastic methods of suppression, the amazing thing being that they were willing to coöperate in methods contrary to long-established habits. Though custom, tradition and habit are ever powerful, there was nothing of any real weight to be said in defence of these districts, and what many people had maintained was an impossibility or would take years to achieve was accomplished by the determination of those who had the matter in hand. Lieutenant George Anderson, director of this section, writes: "Even that Gibraltar of commercialized vice, notorious not only on this continent but abroad, the New Orleans district, which comprised twenty-four solid blocks given over to human degradation and lust, and housing six to eight hundred women, has gone down with the rest." The scattered houses of ill fame were a more difficult problem, but the owners and keepers of such places were reached and, by the coöperation of civic and municipal authorities, the whole operation of the business has become so dangerous and unprofitable that thousands of such houses have quietly closed down, and the owners, both men and women, have gone in for other business.

The argument which seems to paralyze action in this matter in England, that if evil is suppressed in one direction it only emerges in another, has little weight in America. Very well, they say, if it emerges in another we will strike it there too, and so on until it ceases to emerge at all, or at any rate is reduced to an enormous extent, to the great benefit of the community. The simple fact is that the whole business, by the increasing activities of municipal authorities, has become so dangerous that it simply does not pay, and it is an established fact that men and women owning houses of ill fame have in large numbers been compelled to seek other means of livelihood.

The most difficult part of the whole problem was that of the street-walking prostitute and the clandestine. America certainly grappled that question fearlessly, for the act of Congress which enabled the Secretary of War to "do everything by him deemed necessary to

protect soldiers from prostitution," put unlimited powers in his hands. Any woman found within camp zones and city limits for immoral purposes could be promptly arrested, medically examined, and when necessary, compulsorily quarantined or brought before the court, and imprisoned or sent to a house of detention. As far we can see, this put even greater power in the hands of the police than did 40 D of the Defence of the Realm Act in this country. In the carrying out of the crusade against these women and girls a special section was formed which has been active in securing the arrest of an enormous number of women deemed a menace to the health of the troops. While action has been taken with the protection of the troops as its main object, the welfare of the young girls and women has certainly loomed very large in the eyes of the authorities; there is a genuine desire to protect the women as well as the men, and to save young girls who have committed their first sex offence from the downward path. This is continually emphasized by those engaged in the work. As with us, however, the laws are, as carried out, one-sided. The word "persons" is used as in our towns, and operates entirely against women. A test case in Brooklyn, where an effort was made to secure a conviction against a man for loitering in the streets for the purpose of inducing some woman to commit an immoral act, failed. Legislators in both England and America have been inclined to put their trust in the ever-facile, but hollow, belief that this problem can be solved by dealing mainly with the women or dealing with them alone. Detention homes and reformatories for delinquent women and girls are a part of the American system; the objection so often manifested in England against compulsory examination for venereal disease seems absent; all entering the homes and reformatories are examined. Indeed, any woman convicted of prostitution can be so examined. What is known as the "Whitney Law" was put through last spring as an emergency measure in New York state to protect the army and navy against venereal disease. It provides that a woman convicted of prostitution shall by virtue of that conviction be suspected of having venereal disease and shall be given a physical examination. The detention homes and reformatories save the sending of young girls to common prisons and in that way serve a most useful end.

While it does not appear possible to approve of the very free arresting of women and the methods employed to secure convictions, too much cannot be said in praise of the care that is taken of the girls

when once a conviction is secured. The judge has four different methods of dealing with offenders. A girl who has committed her first offence, and is considered a hopeful case, is put on probation; she is supervised by the woman probation officer, who finds a suitable place in which she can live; and the officer interests herself in the girl's education and recreation. More difficult cases are sent to charitable reformatory homes, older and more experienced prostitutes are sent to the State Reformatory for women at Bedford Hills, N. Y., and the least hopeful cases are sent to the workhouse. There is no mixing up of all kinds of women and girls under one roof.

Immediately America entered the war and the Commission got to work, laws against solicitation were most stringently enforced. The streets were—and still are—patrolled by plain-clothes policemen who made arrests. They observed girls soliciting and might be themselves solicited. Indeed so thoroughly was the law put into force that lately actual soliciting has practically ceased, for the women simply do not dare; therefore other methods have been adopted to secure convictions.

POLICE METHODS

A captain in the United States Army who was engaged in this special work described to a conference in New York last October one of the means by which convictions are secured. Prostitution itself has been made a punishable offence—*i.e.*, if it can be proved that the woman has taken money. Actual solicitation has been made practically impossible, but no one can prevent a girl looking into a cigar shop, nor can they prevent a man being interested in the same shop a moment afterwards in the same manner, and before long the two walk off together. A plain-clothes official has been watching, he follows them to the apartment to which they go, and after an interval of some fifteen minutes or so raids the room into which they entered. He then informs the man that, if he will swear in court that the woman had been offered and had accepted money for improper intercourse, he will be allowed to go unmolested. In nine cases out of ten the man gives the necessary evidence, the woman is arrested, and he goes free. Methods such as this are certainly effective in removing from the streets women who are considered a danger, yet we may well ask ourselves whether it is possible to defend such action from an ethical standpoint, and are we not beginning to realize at last that what is morally indefensible proves in the end to be practically unsound?

No matter how effective a certain line of action appears to be, unless it stands on firm moral grounds it cannot make for the real welfare of the nation. It is true that the woman who is a source of danger is removed to a place of safety, but we may well pause to consider what a grave moral effect such action must have upon the man. It is not too much to say that for him it must be degrading, and it is well to remember that some remedies can be worse than the disease. Another flaw in such action as described above is not far to seek; it is ultimately ineffective: indeed, the objections raised to the Defence of the Realm Act 40 D (into which we will not enter) seem to apply here. It is of course unjust to arrest the woman and set the man free to continue his evil ways. It is not only unjust but futile, for the man continues his evil ways, and thereby *creates more prostitutes*. The thing continues in a vicious circle, the arrest of the woman having been useless so far as the whole problem is concerned.

SEX DISCRIMINATION

It is the old story which one is compelled almost reluctantly to repeat. So long as the man is not equally—it may be differently—punished, so long will the measures taken against the woman be of little value. Dr. Abraham Flexner said in 1915, addressing a national conference in America, "A direct attack upon prostitution through forcible suppression of its grosser forms operates mainly upon woman, upon the prostitute herself. The moment one goes further the woman is of perhaps less importance than the man." If it is illegal for a woman to sell her body the man who buys what it is illegal to sell should also be dealt with. When a thief sells stolen property it is the buyer as well as the seller who is punished. When this, which appears to us the A B C of justice, is accomplished, we may hope for a permanent better order of things, not before. How futile the arresting of the women alone must be! Sweep Broadway and Piccadilly in one month clear of all women who are infected; as long as infected men go free, make a demand, and are ready to buy, it only means that in three months' time there will be other women, freshly infected, to be taken away, making room for more; and so on *ad infinitum*, unless the buyer shares the punishment with the seller, and the demand is thereby lessened. It is of course not true that the demand entirely creates the supply, but it does so under our present social conditions to a very large extent. The question is not one of men

versus women, but of simple effectiveness. It is said that the woman should be more severely dealt with, as she can infect so large a number of men: a statement carrying much weight, until one reflects that the woman would never have been a source of danger at all had not some man infected her. The weakness of not dealing with the man as with the woman is fully recognized by social hygiene students in America, and attempts are being made, as in England, to alter the laws regarding this subject. The laws in the different states in America vary, but in most of the states prostitution is illegal. Men are, however, not criminally liable for purchasing prostitution.

Even if for the sake of argument it were admitted that the problem can be solved by dealing with the woman alone, it has to be remembered that it is no longer possible to define the word "prostitute" with any real accuracy. In days gone by, the police would have said that even though we cannot define the word we all know what is meant by it. If the definition "a prostitute is a woman who earns her livelihood by the sale of her body" is accepted, as it used to be more or less, and such alone dealt with, then eighty per cent of the women and girls who are infected and therefore a danger to the community are entirely untouched, for it is well known that the greatest danger is not from the professional women.¹

What is to be done? Difficulties beset us on all sides. Meanwhile the evil grows. *The Times* in a leading article some months ago drew attention to the gravity of the present situation, and to the fact that venereal disease is the cause of sterility in men and women. The Report of the Royal Commission tells us it is the frequent cause of antenatal deaths, producing abortion, miscarriage, or stillbirth. To it is due twenty-five per cent of congenital deafness and twenty-five per cent of all blindness. "To blindness and deafness must be added cases of imbecility, idiocy, and various forms of skin, bone, and other diseases which may result from congenital syphilis."² The seriousness of the menace to the nation which up till now has been concealed is becoming generally known, and in view of the return of the troops it is difficult to exaggerate it. Those who, like the present writer, have worked for many years amongst women and girls know full well there is danger of panic, and with it a growing dis-

¹ While this is perhaps the case in Great Britain and in some parts of the United States, it is probably true, on the whole, that the professional prostitute as an individual infects more men than the "charity girl."—*Ed. Note.*

² *Report of Royal Commission*, page 32, Sec. 103.

inclination amongst respectable girls to enter the married state, lest they should be infected by their husbands, to whom they are bound for life. This cannot but be disastrous to the state. Never in her long history has England stood in greater need of citizens than to-day. The stillborns and miscarriages must be reckoned a dead loss to the state. There is a yet further loss.

The children who remain alive but deaf, blind, mentally deficient, rickety, nervously diseased, or otherwise rendered unfit for the battle of life, are much more than a loss, for they have to be supported in a state of complete or partial inefficiency all their lives, cared for in hospitals, lunatic asylums and workhouses, or suppressed in gaols.¹

The situation is difficult, but not without hope. Up till now well-meaning men have sought to solve the problem by means of muddling and ignorant legislation. Women, equally well-meaning, have opened rescue homes which cannot be said to have really touched the problem. Men and women have in the main worked in water-tight compartments, neither understanding the other's point of view, both equally futile in their endeavors. The need for concerted thinking is imperative and immediate. The time has come when, casting away reserve, men and women are at last prepared to confer, consult, and work hand in hand. Therein lies our hope, and it is a bright one. America inspires us in her conviction that as slavery—long thought an impregnable and permanent institution—was abolished, so commercialized prostitution and its attendant resulting evils need find no place in modern life.

A WORKING PROGRAM

A conference on social hygiene was held in New York last October. It was attended by representatives from England, France, and Canada. It sat for two days, some 200 persons being present. A findings committee was appointed on which sat, amongst others, Dr. Abraham Flexner, Lieut. Col. Snow, M. C., of the American Social Hygiene Association, Dr. Exner, Captain Bates, of Canada, Madame Avril de Sainte Croix, Dr. Katharine Davis, and the present writer. The findings committee unanimously accepted the following principles upon which to build future work. The principles were then adopted by the conference:

¹ *Woman and the Sovereign State*, by A. M. Royden (Headley Bros.); a book that social students should read.

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- (1) That the single standard of morals should prevail for men and women.
- (2) That continence is compatible with health and intellectual vigor for both sexes.
- (3) That men and women should serve together whenever possible on bodies whose functions concern the development and enforcement of moral standards.
- (4) That prostitutes be not treated as a class apart from other women and that prostitution be not recognized as a trade.
- (5) That all measures either preventive or repressive concerned with social morality apply impartially to men and women.
- (6) That a simultaneous vigorous attack on venereal disease should be made and that the issues of public health and morals be thoroughly correlated.
- (7) That sound sex education be incorporated in one entire educational system in home, school, college, and the church and press.
- (8) That social and economic adjustments granting to the individual decent living conditions and adequate recreation are essential to progress in social morality. These adjustments concern especially:
 - (a) Housing conditions.
 - (b) Industrial conditions, including conditions of work and wages.
 - (c) Proper and sufficient recreational opportunities.

It will appear that some of these are mere truisms, yet it may well be questioned whether there is a single organization at present existing whose work is entirely in harmony with the principles laid down by the conference.

There are flaws in the way in which both America and England have dealt with the problem, but, as has already been said, both nations have hitherto allowed their men and women to work in the main apart one from the other. The zeal and energy which the Americans have brought into action command our respect and admiration, and their determination to overcome this evil—even if perchance in their zeal the danger of other evils has been overlooked—is an inspiration for which we are grateful. When they, with us, seeking to solve the problem, have called together in every council or committee dealing with the matter an equal number of men and women, who, having knowledge of the subject, share to the depths of their being the certainty that this evil, as either a national or moral danger to the community, need no longer exist, then we are persuaded that the new hope dawning in many hearts and almost passionately held by many of the younger generation will at last be fulfilled.

EDITH PICTON-TURBERVILL.

