MEASURES FOR RESTRAINING THE PROPAGATION OF VENERO-SYPHILITIC DISEASES.

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One of the greatest plagues that undermines society and causes innumerable victims besides bringing about the unhappiness of a great number of persons, is to be found in the venero-syphilitic diseases that afflict mankind. There can be no doubt that any labor undertaken with the object of restraining the propagation of this terrible evil would be of immense benefit to mankind.

Seeing that prostitution is the principal focus from which these diseases are spread, we must fix our special attention on that point and study the means that ought to be adopted in practice, in order to counteract its injurious influence.

These means can be divided into two classes, of which the first is legislative and the second hygienic. The former, which I confine myself to merely indicating, are all those that, like education, the increase of wages, the anti-alcoholic campaign, tend to improve the intellectual and moral level of the people and diminish the misery of the poorer classes of society, from which issue all that group of women, who rather than repulsion, inspire pity, and who try by the hire of their bodies to obtain food for themselves, for their sick mother or for a small child, which otherwise they would with difficulty obtain.

The second method that I propose, and the only one which in a way comes under the influence of this Association, covers all those measures that are taken, not to prevent prostitution, but to avoid its carrying the contagion. The principal measures are similar to those general ones that are recommended to restrain the propagation of any other transmissible disease, amongst which the most important is the isolation of the patient, and the publication of the personal precautions that ought to be taken by the persons who come into contact with the patients or run any risk of so doing.

The efficacy of the isolation of a patient who might carry his disease to healthy persons, is no longer a matter of doubt. We in Mexico every day see the isolation of persons suffering from typhus, leprosy, etc., and we have very lately observed the magnificent results obtained in the campaign against the bubonic plague, which Doctor Liceaga so ably directed, and yet notwithstanding these evident proofs, we still see that this “trade in poisonous goods” is freely permitted whilst in other diseases, the strictest quarantine is imposed, careful
disinfections are made of persons and baggage and in one word, by means of isolation, attendance on and disinfection of the patient, we erect a barrier against the transmission of the germ. Why cannot we apply the same method of procedure against a disease, that if not so rapid in its progress is no less certain in its results? Why cannot we decree the isolation of diseased prostitutes, who by their trade so extensively propagate the evil?

The principal difficulties in carrying this measure into practice, lie in the enactment and in the prudent application of the necessary regulations.

The defenders of the free exercise of prostitution, plead in its favour, that statistics prove that the number of diseased women is greater amongst those who are subject to regulations than among those who are not, or who evade its fulfilment. These statistics prove nothing because they start from a false basis, and in order to destroy their value we need only draw attention to their principal defects. The women who are subject to regulations or who are licensed appear in those statistics whilst those whose names are not taken or who are left at liberty, mostly escape when they get sick; hence the proportion shown by the statistics refer to the total number of the former class, but only to a fraction of the latter, and consequently the proportions are false, and the deductions therefrom are also necessarily false.

It is also said that in those towns in which public women are attended in the hospitals when sick, no improvement has been observed in the public health. To destroy this argument, we need only give a glance at any of the hospitals in which these women are received, for example, our own Morelos Hospital, and see there about 400 women suffering from venereal and syphilitic diseases, of whom the majority would find no difficulty in continuing their trade, and thus constituting themselves, each and everyone, foci of disease. Can it be denied that the public health would gain immensely by the elimination from their trade, of this large number of diseased women? Unquestionably it would.

Others plead the immorality of the law which would regulate prostitution, because, according to these persons, the government which enacts such regulations converts itself into a protector and tutor of prostitution. But it may equally well be said that the government does not by this degrade itself, but on the contrary exercises the noble and elevated mission of a protector of society.

And lastly, as a strong argument they ask; why should the law be so strict only with the prostitutes and leave at entire liberty and outside of its action, the man who when he gets sick, is allowed to carry the contagion to other persons? The reason of this is very
plain: the law respects the man as it respects the modest woman because they do not trade with their bodies.

Having demonstrated, even though briefly, the efficacy of the isolation of diseased prostitutes and the necessity of this being enforced by regulations on the matter, I will not detain you to study the provisions that ought to exist in a good set of regulations, because that would make this paper too long, and also because they ought to be made the subject of a special study, and I will therefore proceed to mention some of the individual precautions that ought to be taken in order to prevent infection.

[The paper then gives in detail recommendations against infection and concludes as follows:]

The efficacy of these measures is well known to us, but they lose all their efficacy from the point of view of public health, if they are not communicated to the interested parties. The most efficacious method for doing so, would be to oblige the proprietors of assignation houses to instruct their clients in the above means of safety, to print in the licenses that are issued to prostitutes, the recommendations relating to the hygiene of the woman, and to fix in prominent places inside of the brothels, such instructions printed in large letters, relating to the precautions that ought to be taken by the visitors.

In concluding this brief paper, I will state:

1. That the regulation of prostitution is the basis on which measures taken to detain the propagation of venero-syphilitic diseases should rest.

2. That diseased prostitutes ought to be isolated during sickness in special hospitals, it being also desirable that such hospitals should present some means of reformation, such as work, instruction, etc.

3. That prostitutes should be instructed in the means which they must take to avoid infection in their own persons or in those of their clients.

4. That the visitors to brothels should be informed of the means which they ought to employ for the same purpose.