

THE WORLD MOVEMENT TOWARDS MORAL EQUALITY*

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LIFE, as we know it, is one long struggle for supremacy of the highest, and it is not without significance that man, having turned the elemental and material forces of the universe to his service by discovering and obeying the laws inherent in creation, should have aimed at discovering the laws of the invisible world. This conquest and obedience to the laws of the invisible world is responsible for such developments as the use of wireless, the conquest of the air, the discovery of the Atom, the use of heliotherapy, and the study of mind processes, grouped together under the term psychology. Scientific minds, not only of the Behaviourist groups, are recognising the truth that health and conduct are influenced by the thoughts of the mind; in other words that spiritually self-conscious man must be, not only self-controlled and community-controlled, but also God-controlled. Human beings are fundamentally spirits, enshrined in a physical body, with the instrument of mind. Spirits can attain to their fullest development only when they are in touch with their true environment, *i.e.*, the free spirit of self-sacrificing love.

The third outstanding revolution of thought may be summed up in the words "The emancipation of Womanhood." Throughout the world, a wave of consecrated rebellion on the part of, and on behalf of, womanhood, has taken place. Central in the Woman's Movement is the demand for moral equality. In countries where women are still denied full human dignity, equal educational opportunity, freedom of choice, and lack of full citizenship rights, this demand for moral equality is a slow and often bitter fight. Women demand the right of personal liberty and dignity and choice in the very sphere in which tradition and custom is most likely to deny to women their rights *i.e.*, in the sphere of sex relationships.

Two factors help man to fail in regard to personal chastity. One factor is *the low standard of expectation in this regard from men*: and another is *the failure to grant equal human value to womanhood*. But the current belief amongst many of the races of India that the women are only safe when secluded in purdah, married very early, without equal educational opportunity, or civic responsibility, tends to promote two false ideas: first, that women are only physically and morally safe when excluded from normal life: second, that men cannot be expected to behave rightly if decent women are allowed ordinary social opportunities.

There are two main reasons why the Woman's Movement in every country lays such stress on the abolition of all forms of legal injustice towards women, such injustices culminating in the system which provides

* Read at T. N. A. I. Conference, 1931.

for the segregation and medical examination of women, falsely supposed to be needed for the immoral practices of men. The first reason is that to challenge this double moral standard attacks masculine privilege and irresponsibility towards women. The second reason is that any form of State or police toleration of segregated areas and registered women, with recognised brothels, is the most brutal expression of the subjection of women. For medical women the third reason is vital—that any such system does not decrease, but gravely increases, the incidence of the social diseases.

What is the history of this world movement towards moral equality?

Without more time than this lecture may take, it is impossible to do more than refer in passing to the earlier Greek and Babylonian nations, and to note the fact that the fall of the Roman and other Empires was largely due to the collapse of virtue. In recent years, in Europe, it is common knowledge that the Napoleonic wars produced a system (which came to be known as the Regulationist System or Napoleonic Code), providing for—

(1) The compulsory periodical examination and registration of all “common prostitutes,”

(2) Police arrest and detention in special “certified” hospitals until discharged, when registration, and residence in special areas was arranged.

(3) The provision to such women of certificates, certifying freedom from infection, or the contrary, and

(4) The provision of Police des Moeurs who arrested women who would not submit to examination, and could not produce the certificates and permits of their Trade.

Provision was also made for brothel keepers to pay a registration tax to the State. It is to the lasting shame of English Law, that, in 1864 these unscientific principles were embodied in the *Contagious Diseases Acts*, and made applicable to eighteen ports and military stations in England. The result was an immediate increase of venereal diseases amongst the troops; the incidence in 1864 and 1867 being 258 and 250 per thousand. In spite of the fact that, by 1884, the incidence had risen to 270 per thousand, the lawyers and medicals of that day opposed the challenge to these laws made by Mrs. Josephine Butler on grounds of justice and the respect due to human personality. In 1886, due to Mrs. Josephine Butler's untiring perseverance the *Contagious Diseases Acts* in England were abolished. It is significant that, at the *Brussels International Medical Congress* held in 1899, the medicals of that generation refused to vote in support of the Regulation System, and it is encouraging

to realise that ever since that date, in all countries, whether Regulationist or not, the wiser and more thoughtful medical men and women have steadily opposed the Regulation System, under whatever guise it appears.

But Mrs. Butler's work was not confined to the abolition of the Contagious Diseases Acts in England. In 1880, she found that a large traffic in young girls, for the profit of procurers, was in existence between Belgium and Britain. After her investigation, and the passing in 1885 of the Criminal Law Amendment Act, which prohibited the procurement of any woman under 21, she gathered together friends in various countries in Europe, and, together with Mr. Goots of the Vigilance Association in London, attempted to promote *international co-operation* on this matter.

In *Ceylon*, a gallant little band, consisting of Mrs. Human, Mr. John Cowen, Mr. and Mrs. Hogg and their friends, challenged the policy of segregated areas in the towns of that Crown Colony, and after much opposition had been courageously met, those taking part in the traffic were deprived of their offices, and an Act, prohibiting segregated brothel areas, was passed in 1913.

In 1914, Abraham Flexner was sent, from America, to study prostitution in Europe, and those interested in this question cannot do better than to procure his Report (issued by the American Bureau of Social Hygiene) called "Prostitution in Europe". His definition of prostitution has become classical, and the world owes much to the Rockefeller Foundation for making this enquiry possible.

International action in this matter during the *European War* was gravely limited. In *India* certain groups arose who conducted their investigations into the matter away from the War areas. In *Ceylon*, Rangoon, Madras, Calcutta and Bombay, these students of social progress attempted to supplement their European experience by studying the customs in India, which had bearing on commercialised prostitution.

The group associated with Mrs. Butler's work (which became known as the *Association for Moral and Social Hygiene*) still carried on its determined propaganda against unjust laws, wherever they might arise; and in consequence has helped to challenge the Mui Tsai System of child Slavery in Hong-Kong, the custom of registered women in Singapore, the unjust solicitation laws in England, and certain inequalities in law in Malaya and the Straits Settlements. This Association has head-quarters at Livingstone House, Broadway, London, and is the British Branch of the International Abolitionist Federation.

In 1920, a memorial to Mrs. Butler's work, a Training House called after her name, was opened in Liverpool, where educated women desiring to study the legal, psychological and ethical bases of the Abolitionist

policy, could spend sufficient time to ensure a secure foundation for their thinking. To this *Josephine Butler Memorial Training House*, 6, Abercromby Square, Liverpool, a continuous stream of visitors is welcomed. Many missionaries, nurses and medical women from overseas have found it profitable to spend part of their furlough, even for so short a time as two weeks, at this House in order to be made aware of the recent thought and research work into this whole matter.

On the establishment of the *League of Nations* in 1918, article 23-c provided for a Secretariat, with Dame Rachel Crowdy as its Director, to collect information and to influence international public opinion to suppress the traffic in women and children. In 1921 the League summoned an official *Conference* of 34 Nations and in this conference four special points arose which are worthy of notice.

(1) The elimination of the word "white" in all references to the Traffic, so that International Agreements were made applicable to all races alike.

(2) The insertion of the word "children" instead of "girls," thus securing protection for boys also.

(3) The setting up of an advisory and permanent Committee at Geneva to deal with these questions.

(4) The request for annual reports and replies to questionnaires from all signatory nations.

In 1927, the *Commission of the Experts*, appointed by the League, published their two *Reports*: 28 countries, 112 cities, and over 5,000 persons engaged in the Traffic had been unsuspectingly interviewed. To sum up such a Report in a short lecture is impossible, but two main recommendations are of special interest. The Report declares—

(1) That any system of tolerated houses, registration, compulsory medical inspection of women, inevitably increases the Traffic, and does not diminish disease.

(2) That all possible effort should be made to promote a high and equal standard of conduct between the sexes; adequate education and moral training in these matters being given by those who would encourage young people to have a high standard of personal relationships.

In 1928, the British Social Hygiene Council and the Board of Study for the Preparation of Missionaries called a discussion group which met at High Leigh. The 36 members of this group included Colonial Office Administrators, psychologists, biologists, anthropologists, missionaries, social workers and medical workers from different fields. After a week of combined discussion, the conclusions reached were intensely interesting. "The Conference agreed that the Christian ideal of pre-marital chastity,

adequate choice of partners, monogamy and temperance in marriage, must be, not only upheld, but also effectively realised." This ideal received support from the scientific points of view as expressed by the specialists in different departments of Science present at the meeting. As a result of this Conference, special Summer Schools and Refresher Courses have been organised by the joint group (The Board of Missions and the British Social Hygiene Council.) Full information as to these courses can be obtained from the General Secretary, British Social Hygiene Council, Carteret House, Carteret Street, Westminster, London.

In the same year it is significant that the following Statement on Continence was issued over the signatures of men and women, all outstanding experts in their own Departments :

Statement on Continence

We are of the opinion that :—

- (1) In the interest of the race and of individual, it is essential that the stability of the family in marriage should be preserved, and social habits and customs should be adjusted to this end.
- (2) There is overwhelming evidence that irregular sex relations lead to physical, mental and social harm.
- (3) There is no evidence, either from physiology or from experience, that for the unmarried sexual intercourse is a necessity for the maintenance of physical health.
- (4) There is no evidence, either from psychology, or from experience, that for the unmarried, sexual intercourse is a necessity for the maintenance of mental health.

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