

ORIGINAL CORRESPONDENCE.

"Sit mihi Fas scribere audita."

PARIS, 1869.

From a long conversation which I have had with M. Lefort on the subject of Paris prostitution, I have gathered the following facts:

Prostitution in Paris is of two kinds—the licensed and the clandestine. The first is again divided into two classes—(a) houses of tolerance, (b) women living single, and provided with cards from the Bureau des Mœurs.

The houses of tolerance—223 in number in 1845, 165 in 1867, a decrease which must be attributed to the increase of clandestine prostitution—are distributed in and around Paris. The inmates of these houses are inspected once a week by a physician from the Bureau des Mœurs; if any are found diseased, they are sent to St. Lazare, our venereal hospital for prostitutes, to undergo treatment. The sending to St. Lazare is of but little importance to these women—some of them even look upon this trip as a sort of recreation—consequently it is to them no punishment. The inspections do not suffice. Moreover, we may ask, are these examinations rigorously enforced? Does the medical man in attendance do so with the necessary care? It is doubtful, and those best informed say no.

But, even as it is, venereal diseases come least from the licensed houses, and this can be easily understood; any disease from them is immediately shipped to the hospital,

whereas, if occurring in those not at all examined—clandestine prostitution—it is allowed to spread indefinitely.

The houses of tolerance situated in the faubourgs of Paris, divided again into those of the *petite* and *grande banlieue*, are not, like those in the centre of the city, visited by the physician, but their inmates are brought to the Bureau for examination once a week in an omnibus.

The second class of licensed prostitutes, larger in number—there are about 6000 in the city, and daily increasing—are also more dangerous to the community and the public health than the first class. They are provided with cards from the Bureau des Mœurs, where they are inscribed. They live singly, and only have to report themselves at the Bureau once every two weeks for inspection. They are permitted, from sundown until 11 o'clock at night, to frequent any of the streets of the city excepting the boulevards and the Champs-Élysées.

This class is gathered from the so-called clandestine prostitutes. These, whenever they become too flagrant, are arrested and brought before the Bureau for examination. In case they can show no honest means of support they are inscribed, provided with cards, and made subject to the rules and regulations of carded women above mentioned. If they are found diseased—which has been the case in one out of three every time such arrests have been made—they go at once to St. Lazare. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to make these arrests, and, as M. Lefort justly remarked, it is hard to say where libertinism ceases and where prostitution begins. The police of the Bureau employed for this purpose are not in uniform; consequently their opportunities for espionage are very extensive, and it very often happens that proof is not wanting. But even then the case is not lost; the parents, if the culprit is less than 21 years of age, which is nearly

always the case, call for their child, and claim her under the law of minors. Thus out of 13,000 arrests made in the last five years, only 1200 subjects could be held and put upon the register.

As some few mistakes have happened in these arrests—at least, there was no clear proof—the agents have to be extremely cautious. It sometimes occurs, though seldom, that a call is made at the Bureau for a card. In these cases, after the unfortunate tells her story of being alone, abandoned, without money, and no support, the Bureau—be it said in its praise—generally uses the best effort to procure employment, and means and money are often furnished. In this manner, though the cases are very rare, an occasional soul is saved.

As to the police rules laid down for a woman put upon the register, we wish to say nothing; the only point of interest to us, for the moment, is the measures which are taken to prevent disease. As I have said before, the examinations are not made at the place of residence; the women report themselves every two weeks at the Bureau. One out of every seven is found diseased, which alone proves that the time which is allowed to elapse between each inspection is entirely too long. There are many, however, who do not report themselves, especially if diseased, for fear of being sent to St. Lazare; thus many escape inspection for a long time, but their commerce continues and infection spreads. If the inspections were made twice a week and rigorously, instead of every two weeks, which is merely absurd, venereal disease would be materially lessened among this class of women, and what the Bureau would lose pecuniarily in calling a few more physicians in aid, would be gained in lessening the St. Lazare expenses and in protecting the public health, which ought to be the aim.

The last and worst class of prostitutes, the clandestine,

remains to be considered. They are on the increase; their number for the city of Paris is estimated at 40,000. The greatest ratio of syphilis has its source here. As before said, one out of every three arrested was found diseased; and of 4070 male patients treated by M. Lefort at the Midi, 2302 had contracted the disease from private women. But this is not all. The larger class of the public—those who have any means at all—do not consult the Midi surgeons at their hospital. If we could gather a similar statistic from M. Ricord and many others whose clients come from the wealthier portion of the community, we should be sure to find by far the largest amount of disease coming from *bonnes fortunes*.

The efforts of the Bureau des Mœurs in attempting to remedy this great evil are paralysed as long as the father has the right to claim his child. In nine cases out of ten this is merely done to protect them in their shameful commerce. Only for those who have passed the age of 21 can inscription be enforced. If, says M. Lefort, the father could be held responsible for his child by making him pay a penalty, or, in case of a second offence, the Bureau could have the right to cause the arrest to be made, so as to permit inspection and register, much good might be expected.

As it is, syphilis is increasing in Paris; but not only because of the increase of clandestine prostitution, but also because the examinations of the *filles publiques* do not accomplish the desired end.—*Med. Times and Gaz.*

NOTE.—These valuable facts teach the lesson inculcated by the examinations of Dr. Andrews, of the United States, who has investigated this subject at most of the large European and American cities, that the system of examining and licensing prostitutes is powerless to arrest or diminish the spread of venereal disease. [—ED.]