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WHEN OUGHT WE KILL THE SICK?

The Obstacles in the Way of a Court of Death Which Would Be Formed to Pass upon the Fate of Incurables

By ADA PATTERSON

A SMALL, stricken woman, white and pinched of face, unable to rise from the bed to which pain and helplessness have chained her for three years, has uttered a cry that is echoing round the world.

Mrs. Sarah Harris, at thirty-five, was felled to earth as suddenly and surely as lightning shatters an oak. But, Mrs. Harris thinks, more cruelly, for the lightning riven oak dies, and she has lived for three years, lived helplessly, unwillingly, merely lived. She cannot recover, more doctors than she can recall have told her. Life has become a burden to her for the three years that she has lain there waiting to die. Since nature is so slow to relieve her of the heavy weight of life she begs New York to do so. She asks the State to become her executioner.

"End my suffering and my helplessness," she says, and that voice from the cot at Audubon Sanitarium has rung through all the civilized world. "I am hopelessly paralyzed. Great doctors and surgeons, I can't remember how many, an army of them, have told me that there is not the slightest chance that I can get well. They tell me that I am likely to live for a long, long time. But I don't want to live."

"My baby died when it was eleven months old because I was stricken and could not take care of it. Had I been put out of the way, gently and mercifully, when my case was found hopeless, the child might still be alive. It might have grown to be of some use in the world, while I am worse than useless. I have two other little ones, but I do not permit them to come to see me, for they are young and impressionable and I don't want them



"THE COURT OF DEATH"---The Six Great Physicians and Surgeons Sitting as a Jury upon the "Incurable." Death the District-Attorney. Life the Counsel for the Defense.



Dorothy Kerin, the English Girl Who, after Being a Helpless Paralytic for Five Years, and Blind and Deaf for Two Weeks, "Saw a Light," and Was Immediately Cured. This Photograph Shows Her Two Days after. Such Cases as These Are the Great Stumbling Blocks in the Way of Euthanasia.

to know there is anything as gruesome as myself in the world.

"I am a burden to my family, both financially and as an unending emotional drain.

"So I claim the right to die. I lie here unable to move a muscle, so cannot end my own misery. I ask the State to devise some means to rid me of the horror of my life."

Mrs. Sarah Sypher, who asphyxiated her children and tried, but failed, to end her own life in the same way, made the plea that two at least of her children were better dead, as she would be.

"I was born under melancholy circumstances," she said. "I was cursed with a morbidly sensitive nature. My little girl inherited it. My older son had 'spells,' tantrums, and he, too, was unhappy. Such natures should never have been born. They are treading the path of nervous prostration and insanity are one."

Jacob Hess, sixty-seven, and struggling hopelessly against poverty, killed himself and his two elder children. To his wife, whose life, with that of their youngest child, a babe, he spared, he wrote:

"Take the money in the bank and go back to Germany with the children. You can manage to feed one but not three. I am old and useless. I take with me the two children so that you will not be burdened by them."

"TORCHLIGHTS ON EUTHANASIA'S DARK PATH."

These three cases, all part of the news chronicles of a week in Greater New York, are torchlights flaring upon the dark path of euthanasia. In this art of painless death science has long been interested. It is as old as the Roman civilization which practiced it, and the period of the beautiful Greeks who ended their lives when life was no longer desirable to them. Their physicians prescribed it and their philosophers practiced it. The world has been vaguely interested in it as a fascinating, though abstract theme, but recently individuals have applied it to their personal problems.

It has been by two of these pleaders for euthanasia, taken off the plane of mere physiology. They have offered it as a cure for sociological conditions.

With their argument that painful life should be voluntarily brought to an end by painless death, that incurable conditions should be ended by the great cure-all of all conscious conditions, death, many agree. Those who agree maintain that while life is a battle with a chance to win, every man should prove himself a hero. But when cancer, in its hopeless stage, or paralysis beyond cure afflicts him, or when that social condition that makes it impossible for him to earn a living for himself and his own has gripped him, the advocates of this doctrine believe that he is a hero as well who, by ending his life at will, outwits the lurking, tedious enemy, death.

Again and again physicians have asserted their belief that it was their duty, when patients, and the families of the patients, wished to

terminate prolonged suffering, to end that suffering by merciful means. As it is humane to chloroform a consumptive kitten, or to shoot a dog that is being slowly tortured to death, so, they argue, it is humane to end the suffering among those of the highest form of animal life.

Leaving out the spiritual element, considering the welfare of humanity on a purely scientific basis, this strong doctrine is in line with the forward march of better conditions for life, as is the doctrine of eugenics and the elimination of the unfit, another form of euthanasia.

The arguments for this means of relief from conditions that are hopeless and almost unendurable, seem unanswerable in the cold upper air of science. Yet occasionally a case like that of Dorothy Kerin appears to be an answer.

Dorothy Kerin, an English girl of twenty-one, was apparently instantaneously cured of seemingly hopeless conditions of paralysis, blindness and deafness. For seven years this girl had been an invalid. For five years she had been bedridden by paralysis. For two years she had not walked. For two weeks she had been blind and deaf. The last of the twenty-eight physicians who had attended her and had pronounced her case utterly hopeless, had told her family that she could live at most for six hours.

Yet, suddenly, to the amazement of the physician, she arose from what they were convinced was her deathbed and walked about the room in full possession of all her faculties. Moreover, she has not returned to her bed except for eight hours of sound sleep from the twenty-four of each day. The prettiness she lost during the long illness has come back. She looks scarcely seventeen. She runs up and down stairs, makes her own bed, assists in the cooking, lays the table and sits down before it, eating mutton chops and sliced tomatoes with a robust appetite.

"TWENTY-EIGHT PUZZLED DOCTORS."

The attending physician has not yet fully recovered from his stupefaction. "I have no theory," he said with a shake of the head. "Had I read of the case I should certainly not have believed it. She is well, but how she got so I don't know. I can only say that I cannot claim any credit for the extraordinary occurrence. Under my care the patient lived for months on brandy, opium and starch. Her muscles were without strength. Now they have the strength of a normal, healthy girl. Where it comes from I do not know."

The other twenty-seven physicians also shake their heads and make the brief speech: "I don't know."

Medical men have travelled by scores to the girl's home at Herne Hill, near London, to examine her and to study her case. Dr. Frank C. Richardson, professor of nervous diseases in Boston University, said of it:

"Dorothy Kerin had none of the organic diseases which she was said to have had. She was suffering

from a curable mental or nervous disease which would have been cured if a nerve specialist had been called in. How she was actually cured is a simple matter. Instead of being persuaded to the practice of common sense, she struggled back to it herself. Maybe one of her hysterical emotions set in action this course to health, as I believe other emotions dragged her away from health and her mind from reason. This is no miracle. It is a common occurrence. These poor victims of mimic illnesses come to their senses as swiftly as they lost them. Under scientific treatment for the real functional disorder, not useless dabbling with misleading symptoms, their recovery is much quicker."

Dorothy Kerin, like all others afflicted with mimic diseases, has beyond doubt an unstable disposition. She had a nervous system unduly responsive to every influence, that is, she was easily impressionable. From these impressions weighing upon her, she acquired the idea that she could not do certain things and that she was suffering from other things.

"THE REAL CAUSE—THE MIND."

"A famous clergyman, whose eloquence stirred Boston a few years ago believed he had paralysis of the lower limbs. The paralysis was apparent. For a year and a half he was attended by physicians of skill and integrity. Finally we located the real cause—his mind. By gradual, persuasive treatment he was brought back to a normal condition. He was on his legs again and now he is preaching in a Western State."

Dr. Richardson's scientific presentation is really the answering argument to the theory favoring euthanasia. Suppose the disease be an imaginary one. Or assume, as in the case of all Dorothy Kerin's twenty-eight physicians, who Dr. Richardson said were all right as far as they went, but they didn't go far enough in their treatment, that physicians who held the scales of the chances for life in their hands were all mistaken.

Dorothy Kerin believed that she was death doomed. So did twenty-eight reputable physicians. Yet all of these twenty-nine were mistaken. Suppose that Dorothy Kerin and her twenty-eight physicians agreed that life had lost all savor for the girl and it was for her welfare she die. Murder would have been committed with good intent.

Growing out of this argument of the possible mistake of the patient or the patient's physicians, is the other that while science might be unable to cope with a disease at noon on Monday that by 6 o'clock of that evening there might be a medical discovery that would revolutionize practice in the direction of this disease, and the patient, self-doomed and doctor-doomed, might be saved.

Another possibility looms large and menacing. This is the unscrupulous use of the power to end life that is no longer desired. As hypnotism is dangerous in possession of the unprincipled, this right to close an existence might be a hundred-

fold more menacing. Vast such right in unworthy persons and how often might the pretext of ending life for humane reasons cover a murder for personal gain or revenge?

Assuming that in a scientific sense it is right to terminate life under the hopeless conditions described, how can it be justly and safely done? Who would constitute, and how should be administered the business of the court of death?

Dr. John McCroskey, a trustee of the New York State Hospital for Incurable Pulmonary Tuberculosis, said: "Viewing the matter from a medical standpoint, it is my opinion that it would be a good plan to secure the passage of a law that would give a physician the right to submit any extreme case he may have under his care to a committee composed of a Justice of the Supreme Court, the District Attorney and the Coroner. If after a minute investigation the patient was found to be hopelessly ill, and suffering great pain, and insisted that the deed be done, I think it would be the most humane course to relieve him of his sufferings."

The acting medical superintendent of St. Luke's Hospital favored a jury chosen by the Government, composed of in part, at least, two medical men.

"After the case had been presented to the jury and the absolute certainty of its being incurable ascertained, then, with the patient's consent, I would say the jury should decide whether or not the individual should die," was Dr. McAlpin's conclusion.

"COURT OF DEATH MIGHT BE A BENEFICENT BODY."

Both men suggest a court of death. Composed of humane men, of intelligence and common sense, persons with no tendency to flights of fancy nor excursions into the realm of the impossible, this committee of fate might be a beneficent body.

It would be the part of humanity to permit the patient to choose the manner of death. The chloroform cone, so swift and merciful in some instances, would be a means of torture in others. The individual choice becomes fixed and the mere suggestion of another method would make the dying person's last moments horrible. Gas and ether, likewise, have their friends and foes. The aid of electricity might be summoned were it not that the electric chair, associated with crime and degradation, would revolt the sensitive. In Utah and Nevada, where choice of the means of death is granted to condemned criminals, shooting is nearly always chosen. "It is sooner over," is the explanation of this almost unanimous choice.

If Sarah Harris's cry is heeded New York will establish a court of death. But already the world-old battle between science and sentiment has begun. Mrs. Harris's family oppose such a step. "She may get well," they say. "While there is life there is hope."

The plea that human life transcends the dying person's last moments is being made in the case of Sarah Harris vs. the State of New York.

And there is the nub of it all—the incurable hopelessness of mankind in the face of death.