

Why Social Workers in the Slums Become Depraved

The Strange Mystery of Jessie McCann; the Murder of General Sigel's Daughter, and Other Mishaps Among Women Missionaries, Discussed by Prof. Rice, the Psychologist.



Miss Elsie Sigel, the "Slum Angel," Who Was Mysteriously Murdered in Chinatown.

Why Women Charity Workers Go Wrong.

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THE wide discrepancy that may exist between precept and practice is never more strikingly illustrated than when some prominent religious leader or guardian of civic rights or some individual who is active in political or social reforms falls a victim to the very evils which it is his duty or avowed purpose to correct. Crime and vice among those who cannot be presumed to know better are accepted as matters of course. But when the same faults occur in persons whose training, occupation or habits of life justify the expectation of better things, our attention is challenged and our curiosity aroused.

The past several years have produced an unusually large number of examples of these inconsistencies of human conduct. Now it is a judge of the Federal courts who is convicted of accepting bribes from parties to suits tried before him, in violation of the law which through his entire life he had been trained to reverence and support. At another time it is a high police official, who, so far from making an honest effort to suppress vice, is found guilty of actually instigating murder in order that his long record of grafting may not be brought to light. Now it is the chief executive of a great State whose conspicuous efforts along the lines of political reform are brought to a sudden and ignominious halt by the charge that he himself has been guilty of offenses equally as serious as those which he is endeavoring to suppress.

Or, again, it may be the honored and trusted pastor of a fashionable congregation who first betrays, and then, to hide his first offense, basely murders one of his flock who in her innocence and simple faith looks to him for spiritual guidance and friendly help. Although these offenses of those who "ought to know better" surprise and shock us more than similar offenses committed by individuals in less conspicuous walks of life, experience shows us that they are not exceptional, and that they spring from the same passions of the human soul.

We know that no vocation or line of activity is in itself a guarantee of the absolute integrity of those who are thus engaged. The "human side," by which, to be more accurate, we usually mean human frailties, is the common possession of every man. Even those who may be justly classed as great may, as respects the ordinary virtues of humanity, fall as far below the average as they are above it because of their special endowments. Milton, for example, who has endowed our language with the finest and noblest poetry it possesses, and who has given expression to some of the most sublime thoughts the world has known, was notorious for his violence of speech and for his bitterness and meanness in disputes with his personal enemies.

In view of these universal characteristics of human nature, therefore, instances of the kind cited above are not difficult of explanation. The expectation of personal gain or the overwhelming force of passion temporarily dominates the consciousness of the victim to the exclusion of sane and wiser considerations. The force of good habits may make the conflict harder and thus postpone the hour of surrender to the evil, but the processes and results are the same as in the case of those with natural tendencies to crime.

There is, however, another class of cases of very similar character where individuals whose intentions are of the best and whose training is presumably of the best surrender to impulses of which they themselves must obviously be the victims and for which no reasonable excuse can be offered. We refer to the large number of social workers who, while apparently devoting themselves to benevolent work among the criminal and unfortunate classes, are themselves drawn down to the level of those whom they have undertaken to help to better things. It is important to note that the victims of this tendency to retrogression are invariably women, a fact which it will be helpful to have in mind when we come to seek an explanation of it.

Attention was forcibly called to this peculiar phenomenon a few years ago by the revolting murder of Elsie Sigel, a young girl of prominent family who had volunteered her services as a missionary for personal work among the Chinese on the East Side. Investiga-

THE mystery of the disappearance and death recently of Miss Jessie McCann, a social worker in the New York slums, whose battered body was found on the Coney Island beach, the arrest in a nearby city of a prominent "angel of the slums" for writing anonymous scandalous letters about her fellow social workers, the cold-blooded murder of one of his parishioners by the man Schmidt last Fall, the murder of Miss Elsie Sigel, a social

worker in Chinatown, who had become involved in love affairs with Chinamen—these and many other similar instances have naturally suggested the question as to why social and charity workers go wrong.

Why should men, and especially women, with a high sense of duty and firmly fixed moral standards be drawn down to the level of degradation of those they seek to help? An interesting analysis of this phenomenon is presented by Prof. Rice, the psychologist.



A Photograph of an Opium Den in New York's Chinatown, Where Social Workers Try to Redeem Unfortunates.

tions into her death revealed the fact that she had become entangled in love affairs with several Chinamen to whose rooms she made a practice of going in her capacity of teacher, and that her murder was the result of jealousy which she herself had to a great extent encouraged.

The widespread criticism of the plan of missionary work in vogue among the Chinese resulting from this incident disclosed a startling and absolutely incredible state of affairs as to the relations existing between the missionary workers and their pupils. It was found that the work was being carried on largely by inexperienced girls and young women who had gone into it as a temporary diversion, and that these women were often the aggressive parties in the establishment of relationships of the most dangerous kind. The following statement by an experienced director of social work, Miss Helen Clark, affords an interesting insight into the characteristics of these women:

"The picture I have seen of young, foolish, frivolous-minded white women deliberately egging the Chinese Bible students on to dangerous flirtations makes me shudder over the results. * * * The evils of this system are more subtle and far-reaching than even its most bitter opponents have ever dreamed. For years the practice of permitting American women to teach Chinese pupils individually has accumulated its results of tragedy and sorrow. Life after life has been blasted and homes wrecked and blighted, and there has been no restraining hand. More than once our mission has sheltered some heart-broken woman, the dupe of an infatuation or of an alliance that was even worse."

"Deliver me," said another prominent mission worker, "from the women that come here from fashionable uptown districts—from Riverside Drive and Fifth avenue—who come here with bibles in one hand and with the other stretched out in coquetry to these young Chinamen. If their husbands knew one-quarter of what I could tell them—things I have seen these women do, the places they have gone with these would-be Christian converts—the divorce courts would do a lively business for some time to come. I will tell you plainly that the Chinese do not need conversion so much as the white women of Chinatown need it, and many of the women missionaries need it more than the circles of Chinese young men whom they fawn upon as they teach from the word of God. The Chinese men do not need it, and nobody knows this better than the would-be missionaries. Hypocrites they are, in almost every instance, I would say."

That these statements of the situation are not mere empty exaggerations is shown by the fact, vouched for by the best authority, that a large number of the degraded white women now living in the Chinese sections found their way there originally under the influence of their misdirected missionary zeal or through their equally morbid curiosity to study social conditions in the slums at first hand.

While it is manifestly unfair to put all social workers into the same class without discrimination, it is nevertheless true, as pointed out by the women referred to above, that the ranks of social workers are recruited largely from the higher classes of society. This is so for two reasons—first, because the young women of the higher classes are, generally speaking, the only ones who can find leisure for this kind of work; and, second, because, lacking definite occupations, they are the only ones who feel the need of this sort of outlet for their natural activities, repressed as they are by the artificial conditions of their life.

It is hard for the masculine mind to appreciate, and still harder adequately to describe, the peculiar form of soul to which young women of these classes are subject, and which in many cases constitutes their sole reason for entering social work. The whole subject, however, has been treated by a woman, Mrs. Hansson, with so keen psychological insight that her statement is worthy of quotation at considerable length:

"The young girl of wealth and social position is insulated from life; she sees its deep red, its beating pulse, its sweet surprises and sudden disclosures from afar like a pale phantasmagoria, or it passes before her in the distorted reflections of half-forbidden, fashionable reading, and she returns every evening to her own inward void. She may live love romances if she wishes to, and later, when married, she can, if she likes, make up by the number of her love affairs for the lack of variety; but that deep, healthy restoration which the staking of one's whole being upon another in the hour of danger brings—that moment of bliss when all the inner fountains gush forth and body and soul are so glowing that they no longer perceive external cold—these remain hidden from her. And yet it is these for which she pines."

"Externally she is only permitted to move in prescribed forms, and she feels with deadly weariness that only prescribed feelings meet and will continue to meet her. * * * In the weariness of their disappoint-

ment many of the most promising young women revolt from marriage, in which they expect only a lukewarm affection. Precisely in those circles where no material obstacles exist many of the prettiest and healthiest women remain single. And when, after unenjoyed enjoyments, festivities, distinctions, proposals, etc., a constantly increasing and more suffocating depression overpowers them—when body and soul gradually lose their resisting powers, then the pretty ones become pliant and the healthy delicate.

"They look about them for something which can give their idle days a purpose, the emptiness of their existence a meaning which can restore their weakened vital energies, something which can release them from the interminable society of their ego—a duty, a sacrifice or a diversion which they can clothe in these fine names. Their womanly instincts, so long warped, repressed and cheated, waken in their original strength. The instincts of motherhood, which consist in bearing, enduring, waiting, helping, sympathizing, and which have never gained free outlet and expansion because their owners had lost faith in motherhood in their own cases, are now turned to others. They feel personally and strongly in their own bodies the tortures of starving mothers, suffering children and unemployed fathers, the whole misery of the poor and the robbed. And they yearn to help, out of a wild desire which is really to help themselves, to find peace, to get relief from pain which they, reflecting on the suffering around them, feel as if in the body of the child they do not bear."

It is, then, in these powerful natural impulses of the woman that we are to find the key to her weakness as well as her greatness. With the maternal instinct strong within her, the woman, however normal and sane she may be, is in a condition of unstable equilibrium, and it is largely a matter of chance in which direction she is likely to incline. If a strong and worthy love comes into her life, the impulse finds its natural outlet in a happy married life.

If, on the other hand, the real soul mate fails to



Miss Jessie McCann, Whose Death Is Shrouded in Mystery.



Marriage of a White Woman Slum Missionary to a Chinaman.

appear at the psychological moment and these impulses must be repressed, they grow in strength like a spring that is gradually compressed until a point is finally reached where the tension is too strong to be controlled. In earlier times the cloisters afforded a safe retreat for the young woman who had reached this critical stage. To-day the only alternatives seem to be either an unworthy and scandalous alliance, which is soon repented of in sorrow, or some form of social service.

In the latter case the outcome again is problematical. Women who are endowed with a high order of intelligence and a strong sense of the direct and practical, and who go into their work under proper restrictions and guidance, become a strong and permanent force for social betterment—a Jane Addams or a Katherine Bement Davis.

But too often, unfortunately, this saving common sense and wholesome guidance are lacking, the broader view is lost, and, as in the case of the teachers of Chinamen, the interests become wholly individual and personal. The woman unwittingly places herself in a compromising position from which there is no escape except through open acknowledgment of her shame or through a mysterious and sudden disappearance.

Love Is a Poison; You Can Be Vaccinated for It

ONE noted French physician, Dr. Maurice de Fleury, has discovered that love is a poison, and another, Jules Cheron, has prepared a serum for the cure of it.

Dr. de Fleury, who is a noted specialist on mental and nervous diseases, in a new book says that love is a form of intoxication to be classed with alcoholism and the use of morphine, cocaine and other nerve poisons. Dr. Fleury says: "The state of being in love, whether passionately or platonically—but especially platonically, rest assured of that—with its delusion, blindness, blundering and melancholy, is, beyond any doubt, a condition of mental poisoning quite comparable with the other intoxicants called voluntary. . . . It is a poison, and acts like a poison."

Dr. de Fleury's firm opinion is that sentimental love is decidedly of the

same order as the voluntary intoxications described by doctors. And further—and this is glad news—that love is one of the mildest of these poisons, and that its noxious action is most easily repressed. This is the order in which he places their danger:

1. Alcohol.
2. Opium and hashish.
3. Morphine, cocaine, ether.
4. Tobacco.
5. Love.

"To be morbidly in love," says Dr. Fleury, "means that the 'subject' cannot live away from the person he loved, suffers in absence, and is at each parting more in love than before, more intoxicated than ever."

Dr. Fleury took such victims and experimented with them. He applied the process of demonstration which is used in the natural sciences. He traced the curve of love fever as the curve of typhoid is traced. He made

a chart, or temperature sheet, checked the subject's nervous condition and so was able to see exactly how badly the victim was suffering.

One patient was hopelessly, madly in love. He tried a journey, but turned back. His will was not his own. It would not act.

Dr. Fleury prescribed a treatment of isolation and special tonics for the nervous system, according to their chart variations. The patient hesitated for ten days, and then, after "a frightful scene," he yielded. Dr. Fleury sent him to a hydropathic establishment, and he got the patient to sign an agreement not to leave the house without leave.

Dr. Fleury also had the co-operation of the woman in the case. "As morphine is given in doses," he says, "so I dosed this man. The first week he went to see the woman every other day, the second week he saw her twice, the third on her reception

day at 5 o'clock, only in the presence of others. Then, without warning, I stopped his going out and kept him as though in prison, until his cure was complete."

"At first it was terrible. He cried, struggled, reproached me furiously, declared he would apply to the police and have me shut up in my turn for violation of liberty. He implored, wept, tried all sorts of tricks, suffered a thousand tortures."

"He tried cunning, protested that that he was cured, but I was firm, being convinced that suicide would be the end of the affair if I failed. At the end of five weeks he was again calm and set to work. After two months he was completely cured."

Dr. Fleury is convinced that these "love intoxications" can be cured as morphine-mania is cured—by separation, humanely graduated, by electrical treatment, and by the serum of his colleague, Dr. Jules Cheron.