

THE GROWTH OF KLEPTOMANIA.

It will doubtless be astonishing to those who have not studied the question to learn that kleptomania has grown so much during the last few years that American merchants have, so to speak, formed a co-operative union of self-protection against the evil. Shoplifters are easily dealt with and disposed of, as they are generally of a class who can be punished to the full extent of the law, but the kleptomaniac is usually a woman of refinement, good family and possessed of ample means, which permit of the gratification of their most extravagant needs.

Strange as the assertion may seem, it is so true and has assumed such proportions that in the majority of New York stores there is a book kept in the private office of the firm in which are written the names of the women who are known to be thus afflicted, and when they are caught in the act a bill for the goods stolen is

further story will tell what the store detectives think of it:—

'Among the ordinary phenomena of minds that are not regarded as insane or criminal are observed inordinate tendencies to acquire, to collect, to hoard. So long as such an impulse does not interfere with the rights and properties of others, or involve a flagrant breach of law, it is readily admitted as an indication of disease or as an absurdity and eccentricity which may fairly assign the individual to an asylum or to contempt, but concerns no one else. But whenever the amount of the object appropriated or the circumstances under which it is purloined bring the matter into a court of law the act is treated as a theft and punished. In many cases, however, such conduct is the obvious result of disease. The inclination to steal is a premonitory indication of many forms of mental disorder; it is a characteristic symptom of many others, where violence or delusion or incoherence leave no doubt as to the source from which it

such quantities that tons of these collections were presented to the custom house officers. A clergyman of respectable bearing and great usefulness abstracted from book shops and stalls hundreds of copies of the Bible, perhaps with the intention of distributing. A physician pocketed some small object whenever he entered the apartment of a patient, and another member of this profession stole nothing but tablecloths. The incongruities of such narratives point to the existence of deep seated ill-health. It is observed in extreme youth, it is associated with pregnancy, it is hereditary and often follows affections of the brain and those critical and crucial changes in disposition which are only explicable on the supposition of corresponding alterations in the organization.'

The culprit is never arrested in the store, as that would only make a fuss and entail unnecessary publicity for the woman, but the detective generally follows her out in the street, and after walking a short distance will politely accost her and request her to return to the store. In nearly every case they go back without a protest, and the goods are delivered to a member of the firm in the office, or are charged to the person who has made himself responsible, and who pays the bill without a murmur. These kleptomaniacs rarely want the things they take, and for this reason present a more interesting field of study than the professional shoplifter, who takes the things for the money they being her in, and who generally has a confederate waiting for her outside who disposes of her spoils.

Not long ago a woman was arrested for stealing in one of the largest and most fashionable of our dry goods stores. She had been a charge customer in the store for twenty-five years. The detective who made the arrest said:—'I had absolutely no sympathy for the woman, as she could have bought anything she craved, but I did feel sorry for her husband, who was broken-hearted and said:—"For thirty-six years she has been a model of all that was purest for my children, until that unhappy tendency developed a few years ago."'

One kleptomaniac recently arrested had thirty-eight yards of silk, three dozen neckties, and a bolt of ribbon, very clumsily secreted upon her person. The number of children who are caught pocketing silver articles and odds and ends of jewellery and bits of ribbons, laces and silks is astonishing.

Another detective employed by a large firm when questioned as to kleptomaniacs replied:—

'I do not believe in kleptomania. I have more respect for the woman caught stealing who is really poor, than for the fashionably-dressed woman who steals because it is born in her. I have three classes to deal with—professionals, who generally have some one to steal for them; people with plenty of money, who steal because thieving is born in them, and those who steal from dire need.'

The detectives tell me that they find the professional and so-called 'lady' the hardest to deal with. Women who steal from necessity when caught generally give up the things without any fuss, but the others are loud in their protestations of injured innocence. Another very peculiar class who give the detectives considerable trouble are what they call the 'bundle lifters.' These are generally well-dressed women, who go from counter to counter snapping up every bundle laid down by a busy shopper. They are often arrested with an armful of bundles, the contents of which are utterly unknown to them.

When Queen Victoria is robed for such a state occasion as a drawing room, it is not unusual to see her display £13,000 worth of jewellery.



MARIA THERESA REVIEWING HER TROOPS.

sent to the husband, father or the person who has made himself responsible for the things taken. It was found necessary to do this after two or three arrests had been made and the culprit found upon investigation to belong to some well-known family.

An extract from a clinical book on nervous diseases defines kleptomania very clearly, but whether the merchants look upon it as a disease, or merely close their eyes to the crime for the sake of the sinner's family is a problem which it behoves me not to probe too deeply. This is what the medical science says of it, and my

springs. But there are other cases in which the morbid origin cannot be so clearly demonstrated, when the mind is clear and cogent, the morals pure, and where theft is the only proof of insanity. There is evidence, however, in favour of the opinion that the propensity to acquire may become so irresistible and the will so impotent that the appropriation is involuntary and the perpetrator irresponsible.'

Further on these cases are stated:—

'A baronet of large fortune stole, while on the Continent, pieces of old iron and of broken crockery, and in



THE PRINCESS OF WALES IN THE HUNTING FIELD.