

EPIDEMICS OF CRIME.

MANIAS AND VICES THAT ARE CONTAGIOUS.



FEW years ago the French physiologist Ribot called attention to some remarkable facts, illustrating the moral influence of climate and diet. 'The infirmities of the mind,' he said, 'appear to be subject to laws strikingly similar to those governing the disorders of the body. Moreover, the progress of medical science has left no doubt that the predisposition to almost every vice and every virtue can be stimulated by the action of special drugs.'

And, to complete the analogy, moral aberrations seem, under certain circumstances, to become as contagious as physical epidemics.

The Hindoo mania of self-torture has repeatedly spread beyond the Mediterranean, and there was a time when almost every Christian community of Southern Europe had a scar-covered anchorite or a fasting club of its own. It might be supposed that life in the middle ages was so miserable that its renunciation required no special effort of self-denial; but

SUICIDE MANIAS

became epidemic at several periods of an era that has been celebrated as the golden age of Paganism, and in B.C. 235 Egypt, then ruled by one of the most enlightened successors of Alexander the Great, was invaded by a craze of that sort. Corpses were found dangling from almost every tree in the palastra, or gymnasium park, of Alexandria, the reedy shores of the Nile-delta were covered with dead bodies, and agnostic philosophers fanned the mania by travelling about the country and delivering lectures in true Buddhist fakir style, on the blessing of annihilation. One of these fanatics, called the

'ORATOR OF DEATH.'

was chased across the border by order of King Ptolemy, but suicides continued till the war against Syria turned the attention of the public to other topics of sensation.

Six hundred years ago the natives of Campania, in Southern Italy, were seized with a similar epidemic. At Castellamare, some twenty miles South of Naples, a whirlpool became the grave of hundreds who leaped over the cliffs in spite of the protests of the custom-house guards, and on the road from the inland town of Benevento processions of life-weary fanatics were seen hurrying coastward at a trot, chanting a weird song with the burden:

A la mare me portati,
Si volete che me sanati.

Expostulations they drowned by the simple device of roaring in chorus, and at the attempt to stop them by force they would scatter, but manage to regain the road further down, and hurry on to self-chosen destruction.

In Northern Europe about the same time the lack of intellectual resources had developed an

EPIDEMIC OF INTemperance,

or rather of alcohol worship, since the reckless topeis contented themselves with the simplest and scantiest bill of

fare. A piece of rye bread and a slice of salt beef were considered a luncheon fit for any gentleman, since the rustics had only rye bread and water; but over their cups the higher classes vied in excesses, which nowadays would hardly be credited outside of the Munich Hof-Brau-Haus. Among the curiosities of the Royal Museum of Stuttgart in a beaker holding fourteen Arabian quarts, and marked with the names of several cavaliers who succeeded in emptying that monster vessel to the last drop. The historian Pollnitz describes a visit to the court of the Elector of the Palatinate, who forced his guests to drink till many of them rolled under the table, where they were collected and stacked up like sacks in a corner of the banquet hall. One of his courtiers, the Count de Goerz, was in the habit of waking his boys at midnight and urging them to join his nocturnal revels, and if they asked permission to retire would break forth in pathetic lamentations: 'Oh, this degenerate age! Is it possible that children of mine should thus disgrace themselves!'

But the most striking proof of the universality of intemperance is a record of the transactions during the convention known as the Peace of Westphalia (terminating the Thirty Years War). On not less than four different occasions the historian states that the plenipotentiaries had to adjourn on account of the befuddled condition of His Excellency, Count Oxenstiern, the great statesman representing the Swedish nation and the North-German Protestants.

HASHISH FIENDS

once became so numerous in Western Asia that the Sheik hul Jebel availed himself of the mania to enlist a corps of desperadoes, who, at his command, would get drunk together and rush upon their enemies with the fury of Spanish mastiffs, till the word assassination (hashish rampage) became a synonym of murder.

But even without the aid of drugs, manslaughter manias have more than once assumed an epidemic form. The soldiers of Tamerlane and Ali Pasha revelled in carnage with a gusto that needed no other stimulus, and found a horrible expression in the remark of a Bashi-Bazook chieftain that 'those who have once tried it are apt to prefer a first-rate man-hunt to every other sport.' Muhamed Babers' troopers, too, howled for battle and needed all the stern resolution of their leader to keep them from provoking a quarrel with the timid natives of Northern Hindustan, but at the first show of resistance their destructive passion was given full rein, and it may be doubted if without an inducement of that sort Suwaroff would have succeeded in leading his man-butchers from the Volga to the Alps.

During the

CARNIVAL OF BLOOD

preceding the fall of Robespierre not men only, but women, got drunk with crime and ranged the country clamouring for the privilege of massacre, on general principles if no special act of 'unpatriotism' could be made to furnish a pretext for revenge. Of the 280,000 victims butchered in the course of a year and a half at least a quarter of a million were sacrificed on the altar of wanton blood thirst. During the peasants' war, too, murder continued after the hunger of retaliation had been satiated by the death of the feudal

oppressors. In the little town of Weinsberg six knights were dragged from their hiding places and impaled by the rabid rustics, who then proceeded to avenge the disappointment of their search for additional victims by falling upon helpless non-combatants and hewing away left and right till their axes got blunt with the smashing of human skulls.

Dr. Livingston in the chronicle of his African travels describes a Kafir chieftain who seemed to be seized with semi-annual fits of a butcher mania, which obliged him to extend his man hunt to tribes who had been entirely innocent of any act that could be construed into a fair *casus belli*, so much so, indeed, that some of them were ignorant of the very name of their invader. The commander of his swashbucklers shared his passion, and justified it on the ground that it was necessary to keep their men in practice.

For similar purposes Malay pirates often

ATTACK AND BUTCHER THE CREWS

of vessels carrying nothing but ballast, or such unprofitable cargoes as sea-moss and leak weed. One of these human sea-monsters, hanged a few years ago at Singapore, confessed to have sunk or burned eighty-five Chinese junks, a circumstance which he merely mentioned because his capture had been effected by a French man-of-war, and the French were just then not on the best of terms with China. In the thousand islands skirting the coast of Sumatra the arrival of a hoochie-freighted corsair will often stimulate a general revival of piracy, and induce scores of fishermen to sell their tackle for fire-arms.

A still uglier epidemic, however, was the

CRAZE OF PERSECUTION

which almost depopulated the Netherlands during the administration of the Duke of Alba. A frenzy appeared to seize the Spanish soldiers, and during a heretic hunt of three years not less than 23,000 persons were burnt alive, hanged or slain in the fields and woods like wild beasts. The desperate energy of the contest thus inaugurated may be inferred from the fact that the attempt to quell the insurrection was not abandoned till the Spanish kings had expended 750,000,000 pesos and lost 100,000 men in battles and sieges.

PRECIOUS JEWELS.

Faithfulness in the humblest part
Is better at least than proud success;
And patience and love in a chastened heart
Are pearls more precious than happiness;
And in the morning when we shall wake
To the spring-time freshness of youth again,
All troubles will seem but a flying flake,
And lifelong sorrow a breath on the pane.

KEW GARDENS.—A large bed of the Gladiola (Childs) was seen in Kew Gardens last summer and attracted much attention. At that time they were not named, but Mr Watson, the Curator, writing to the American paper, *Garden and Forest*, stated that 'the raisers might be congratulated on the excellence of their seedlings; that some of the spikes were fully six feet high, well furnished with flower larger than any other Gladiolus previously seen, and that the colours were brilliant, as well as variable.'

THE HABIT OF HEALTH.



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