
PROCTORS AND PROSTITUTES.

THE moral condition of most University towns is confessedly low, and the temptations surrounding the student who may tread the classic halls which consecrate them in the eyes of the learned and refined, both numerous and seductive. That all possible means should be adopted to banish such temptations, and create a healthier moral tone in the neighbourhoods surrounding our justly famed seats of learning, we very readily admit. There is something repulsive in the idea of the young mind wandering from the pure and life-giving stream of knowledge, to drink at the muddy and poisoned fountains of sensualism,—forsaking a communion with the noblest, to dally with the grossest objects which can invoke human attention, and obtain an empire over the affections and the thoughts; and hence, we do not quarrel with any legitimate arrangements which may be made for the protection of virtue, and the repression of vice, provided that such arrangements are calculated to accomplish an end so desirable, and do not interfere in any arbitrary manner with the liberty of the subject.

We must, however, deny in toto that students can be made moral, or their temptations destroyed by any attempt at coercion, either in reference to themselves, or the varied sirens which may allure them. Purity of mind, elevation of taste and aspiration must fore-run any thing like delicacy of feeling and propriety of conduct. The young man who finds himself beset by spies who note his every movement, and seek by inquisitorial meddling to terrify him into virtue, may perchance be driven into a cautious hypocrisy for the sake of keeping up appearances, but will not by any such means be drilled into the discipleship of morality; he may choose a time of darkness for his lawless indulgences; he may become skulking and designing for the purpose of steering clear of his overlookers; he may wander out of the bounds of orthodox perambulation, and visit vice-banned regions, where impunity revels on the outskirts of college law; but in point of fact not a single victory has been achieved in favour of virtue so far as he is concerned; he is taught simply to *conceal* his vices, not to *renounce* them; he learns to cheat the proctors, and not to venerate purity and in spite of them pursues a course of reckless prodigality and dissipation, until time has matured his judgment and quickened his moral feelings, or his vices plunge him into an early grave. The proctor, or university *spy-system* has been demonstrated by experience to be, for all moral purposes, a complete failure; has done more in favor of deception than it has ever accomplished for virtue; has made vice a mask wearer, but nothing more. But apart from the proved inefficiency of the system, we must object in toto to the species of power with which its instruments are armed. To assert that any woman, even suspected of immorality, shall be liable to arbitrary arrest, and consigned to some filthy and repulsive cell, even though she be quietly pursuing her way along the streets;—to assert that she, on account of her vocation, shall not be suffered to enjoy the citizen privilege of using the thoroughfare open to all, merely because it may happen to be night; to assert this is in direct opposition to everything like justice, and at once creates in our mind an idea of a system most arbitrary and oppressive, as thoroughly opposed to the spirit of these modern days, as it may have been accordant with the temper of days gone by; and every way antagonistic to the great principle of citizen liberty, which is as applicable to the suspected as the unsuspected,—to which the vicious have as good a right as the virtuous, and which cannot be infringed on without the perpetration of a wrong most fragrant, even supposing the victim to be destitute of delicacy, and to have lost that fair and unspotted reputation which was the pride and joy of happier, but bygone hours.

An inquest recently held at Cambridge, on the body of one of these unfortunates, who may be truly denominated a victim of the arbitrary system which we are now condemning, has sufficed to direct public attention to the subject, and aroused an amount of indignation, against which it can no more stand than the superstitions and prejudices of whose reign it is the repulsive figment. Elizabeth Howe, a ladylike, and in many respects a lovely girl, but NINETEEN years of age, was arrested by one of the gentleman censors, called Proctors, without, on her part, the least provocation, or violation of law and decency, merely because she was represented to him as the member of an abandoned class. She abused nobody, robbed nobody, molested nobody, and yet was she arrested herself, dragged to a damp, fireless den, and there exposed to influences which at length became the causes of her untimely death. The evidence given at the inquest all went to show both the iniquity of the power itself, and the downright incompetency of the men who wield it. The Proctor simply stated, that being told that the deceased was a prostitute, he took her into custody, and deposited her in a certain loathsome place, called "The Spinning House," where a damp bed, and the cold air entering through a broken window, completed the destruction which vice and treachery had commenced. The ideas of this gentleman were apparently as confused as his memory was treacherous;—he thought this same spinning-house a fit place to confine females in, and yet he was not very sure whether he had ever been inside it, though he was quite sure that when he was last there, a certain pane of glass was broken; it is his business to fulfil the duties of Proctor, and yet he owned to never having read the clause in the antiquated act which armed him with his despotic authority, and qualified him to arrest, on a mere suspicion as to her virtue, an unoffending girl, without its being even pretended that she had committed any crime, and consign her to an unwholesome, contaminated, and infamous receptacle for the moral vermin of the community. A nice sort of man this, to be invested with a power so consummate over the liberty of the subject as the one referred to! Is it not, we ask, high time the competency of university officials were investigated, lest proctors be, ere long, found as ignorant and reckless as their, so-called, bull-dogs? Most assuredly it is, and on this point we believe the great majority of our readers will agree with us.

But we are anxious to inquire whether it is just, or decent that such a law should be retained, even on the statute-book of an university, in an age like the present ; when the safety of every person from official molestation is guaranteed by society, unless they are found guilty of perpetrating some crime ? Will any one be prepared to contend that there is anything righteous or dignified in their allowing the vice-hunters of a college and their minions to arrest, confine, and injure those unprotected females, whose crime often is their pursuance of that pathway of dishonor and shame, from which the prejudices of society allow them no avenue of escape. True, they are morally degraded, but so long as they break no law, they are entitled to liberty—they claim protection from insult, violence, and fraud, and cannot be legitimately punished, unless all prostitution shall be formally declared an offence against the demands of criminal jurisprudence, in which case we should propose that at all events the *male* encouragers and perpetrators of such prostitution be treated as equal in point of infamy and guilt.

It is high time these arbitrary old powers were crushed, and these despotic privileges dispensed with ; —they are figments of a past state of things, opposed to the genius of the present age, and hence need reforming altogether for the sake of decency, humanity, and common sense.

As to university morality, it must be upheld by other means—vindicated by other agencies, or 'tis a sorry sort of thing after all—amounting to little else than a poor BASTARD virtue—the child of force, fear, and reckless tyranny. We call upon the public to protest against the continuance of this arbitrary, this odious custom—to rise, and trample down a power so monstrous, so tyrannical, so opposed to our every concep-

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tion of citizen right. Let proctors be taught to mind their own business, to keep within their own legitimate bounds, instead of persecuting the poor unfortunates who throng around our colleges, the sad demonstrators of how low a moral standard is conformed to there; and were the office of proctor abolished altogether, or its duties changed, and virtue left to plead her own cause, without the aid of consecrated spies, and their bulldog followers, we do believe that it were well both for our colleges, and the community in general.
