

TO ALL PERSONS INTERESTED.

MORAL PROBLEMS OF THE ROAD

Please read the following notes on "The Menace of the Lorry Girl." Bring the matter up in your own organisations and if necessary, see your local Member of Parliament. **But, at present, the important point is to prepare public opinion to demand, in all cases, a single high standard of moral responsibility for both men and women.**

"Menace of the Lorry Girl."

This is a headline which ran half across the centre page of the *News Chronicle* on October 23rd. Similar words are used in the City of Salford Report on the Venereal Diseases Scheme (March, 1936). There we read, "the menace of these women." It seems that of 6,220 men who from 1928 to 1934 attended the Salford Venereal Disease Clinic, 748—or 12·02 per cent.—were road transport drivers. This seemed to indicate to the doctors that there is some factor operating which has the effect of rendering those engaged in such work specially liable to acquire venereal infection. Inquiries of the 748 men revealed the existence of the "lorry girl," *i.e.* girls who accept or ask for lifts on the road. So the "lorry girl" is the cause of men getting venereal disease; apparently the men themselves have no choice in the matter.

It seems to be a fact that lorry drivers, taken as a class, do tend to become infected in a greater ratio than other workers in sharply defined industrial or commercial groups. The Medical Research Council published in 1929 a survey of records from St. Thomas's Hospital Venereal Disease Clinic, and of 3,598 cases treated there 369 men, or over 10 per cent. gave their occupation as that of road transport workers. The Air Force records also show that their lorry drivers have a higher rate of venereal disease than most of the occupational groups within the Force. This is not surprising; lorry drivers who have to drive long distances, often during the night, have a life of considerable strain and monotony and one which tends to cut them off from their homes and from normal associations for recreation and friendship from their fellows. But to many people the cause of these men being infected is just the wickedness of certain women. Others, remembering the very high rates of venereal disease which once prevailed in our own Army and which have been brought down from 248 cases per 1,000 to 9 per 1,000, think that is one of those "so simple" solutions which do not solve anything. We should like to know more about the conditions of the men's work, their opportunities for decent recreation, whether anyone has ever put it to them that they have a personal responsibility for spreading infection when they are themselves diseased. It is not only women who infect men; men know, or should know, the risk they run in promiscuous intercourse and that they may

take back infection to their own family. According to press reports the officials of the Transport and General Workers' Union and of the Commercial Motor Users' Association are determined to drive the lorry girl from the roads of Great Britain. It is curious that not one word has been said in the press as to the equal responsibility for his own conduct of the lorry man. We do not want to suggest that his troubles are all his own fault, but it is quite senseless to pretend that the venereal infection of lorry drivers is entirely due to the wickedness of the girls. This point of view is true to the old Adam; if the man eats of forbidden fruit it is because the woman tempted him; nevertheless, in Genesis, they both were turned out of their Eden and not just the woman.

What are the facts so far as we know them? Owing to the habit in all cities of car owners driving out thirty miles or more in the evenings to an hotel or café for dinner and a dance, or in the summer for swimming in the pools provided, there are now "road houses" at intervals all along the great main roads or just off them. It is well known that some of these places are made use of for irregular purposes by persons who prefer to make these appointments away from where they live; dance partners can be found and unconventional friendships begun and carried on. All hotels have a possibility of being made use of in this way, no matter how much the proprietors dislike it. The woman who lives by her sex appeal, whether professionally or otherwise, also frequents these places if she can pick up partners; in fact, just as in the United States, prostitution is tending to remove from the cities and to follow the motor-car to places of rendezvous outside. The poorer woman follows suit; road houses and cafés for men on the road are springing up in greater numbers and lorry drivers and other men who use these places for meals, etc., often find that women hang about and offer themselves for hire. That is one aspect, the side which has to do with prostitution, but there is another. For various reasons connected with the lack of work in depressed areas, girls move about from town to town looking for jobs or return home from domestic service posts, to which they have been sent by the local Unemployment Exchange, because they are homesick or because they are lacking in determination and cannot persevere with the new work. These girls ask lorry drivers for lifts and what happens depends both on the character of the driver and of the girl. Some girls obtain lifts and receive only kindness from the men; others are made to feel they must pay for the lift by allowing intercourse; others may seduce the man, while some just slip into trouble without intention by lack of self-control. And the same thing applies to the man. There is temptation and opportunity for both the girl and the man and what comes of it depends on their own personal character in each case. Many of these young "lorry-jumpers" are at first quite respectable girls and may be seduced and infected and eventually reduced to becoming habitual parasites on the lorry

men just because they were ignorant or foolish or unable to deal with the situation in the first place.

And the remedy? There is no short and certain remedy, but we suggest provision of hostels and clubs for the men on the road where they can avoid being solicited, and more consideration in regard to the conditions of their work and recreation. For the girls, possibly free transport by train or bus when necessary in the effort to obtain work, as recommended by the Commission on the Depressed Areas, might meet their legitimate needs, and if this were secured transport drivers might be forbidden to give lifts to women. Would it not then be possible to arrange for inspectors to "jump" the lorries from time to time as they now do on buses to examine tickets? If a woman is found on the lorry she might be charged with trespass, and the driver, too, if he is a consenting party. Lorries are owned by different firms but the owners might agree to co-operate in appointing inspectors.* According to the evidence we have, while a number of the drivers object strongly to the solicitation of these women, many of the "heavy" drivers deliberately frequent the cafés where the girls hang about. The following resolution, moved by the Association for Moral and Social Hygiene and adopted at a Conference in October, 1936, indicates our general view:—

"This Conference calls attention to the unfairness of describing the present moral conditions affecting lorry drivers as being due to 'the menace of the lorry-girl,' and points out that this is a problem for which equal moral responsibility lies on both sexes.

"This Conference points out that any attempt to remedy this situation by measures directed solely against the women will be unjust and ineffective, and urges that the underlying causes should be investigated and especially the working conditions of the men employed and the reasons which lead girls to ask for or accept lifts in lorries."

Addendum (January, 1937).

Since the above notes were written, we have received some details of two important inquiries which are being made into conditions affecting lorry-drivers: (1) The Lorry Drivers' Wages Committee, appointed by the Ministries of Labour and Transport, and (2) an inquiry undertaken by the Commercial Motor Users' Association. A report of the latter inquiry is shortly to be issued, prepared by Mr. H. H. Lapsley, Secretary of the Manchester area of the C.M.U. Association. It is stated in the press that this Report will emphasise, among other items:—

(1) The alleged ineffective efforts of certain provincial police authorities to control the conduct of roadside establishments in their areas.

* Or these inspections might be done by the police.

(2) Police failure to remove " a certain type of woman " from the roads.

(3) The amount of venereal disease among motor men.
 The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene has sent copies of the above article on " The Menace of the Lorry-Girl " to the authorities concerned in the results of these inquiries. The A.M.S.H. will welcome improvements in the working conditions of men in the transport industry, but it asks the men concerned, the employers, Members of Parliament and the Ministries to remember that venereal disease has never yet been reduced by dealing harshly and unjustly with the woman partner. An equal *moral* and *medical* responsibility rests on both the men and the women involved, and this fact should be the basis of all action taken.

Warning to Girls.

It might be suitable here to comment on another evil connected with the wide use of the motor-car. Our press-cuttings are full of cases of men charged with criminal and indecent assaults on girls casually met to whom they have offered a lift or have taken out for a drive. In a few instances the man charged is able to convince the court that the girl was a consenting party and he is acquitted if she is over sixteen, but in many of the cases there emerges under cross-examination a story of violence and brutality used against a young woman who, while perhaps extremely foolish to accept a lift from an unknown man, had no evil intent and is found later wandering, or reaches home, in distress, dishevelled and often badly knocked about. There were two shocking cases in May and July of last year. Two men in Ayr were convicted of causing the death of a young woman by " a series of brutal outrages " after taking her for a drive ; their sentences were twelve and three years respectively. The other was the Brighton " girl-in-car " case, when four men were convicted of making a girl drunk and after outraging her, flinging her out of the car almost naked and leaving her there in the rain. The judge said the men had hitherto lived decently but that their conduct " was shocking, disgusting and anti-social . . . they treated this young girl as though this was not a civilised country at all and as though they were not civilised and educated men." These are outstanding examples of bestial behaviour, but there are many others. A girl who accepts a lift from strange men is often running a grave risk ; the " gutter crawler " in a motor-car who drives slowly and endeavours to entice girls into his car to go into the country for a " joy-ride " is a person to be avoided and it is a pity girls do not realise this and ignore his solicitations.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION APPLY TO:—

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