

The opinion of A. M. Ludovici, admittedly an extreme exponent, may well be considered when, in "The Case against Legalized Abortion"* he writes:—

"If only the disingenuous propaganda in favour of legalized abortion would cease, and if only those who carried it on refrained from dinning into the ears of an uninformed gallery of women the alleged safety and harmlessness of abortion carried out under the best hospital conditions, there would be less eagerness to face the ordeal of criminal abortion.

"So long as ignorant women are led to believe that abortion, when skilfully performed, is as easy and harmless as having a corn extracted, they will naturally infer that it can be done just as harmlessly in secret as in public, especially if they are assured that the surreptitious abortionist is skilled, as presumably they always are, and are, moreover, kept in total darkness concerning the kind of operation that is necessary for the interruption of pregnancy.

"If, however, they knew the truth, which is that artificial abortion, even under the best hospital conditions, is a precarious undertaking, so frequently leading to invalidism as never to be 'safe'; if, moreover, we spread the truth about Russia's legalized abortions, and put a stop to the false reports circulated by ill-informed enthusiasts regarding the ease and safety of skilled induced abortion, we should be going a long way towards reducing criminal or surreptitious abortion to vanishing-point."

Sterilization.—Brief mention must be made of *sterilization*—an operation whereby further pregnancy is prevented—which has been put forward by certain witnesses as a method of preventing abortion.

Just as therapeutic abortion is, in certain cases, legitimately performed by medical practitioners, so has the operation of sterilization a recognized place in medical treatment of exceptional cases in which a woman's life is likely to be endangered or her health gravely impaired by further pregnancy.

It can, indeed, be reasonably argued that in such cases sterilization is very definitely to be preferred to the very unsatisfactory alternative of repeated therapeutic abortion.

Nevertheless, any general extension of this practice would, in the opinion of the Committee, be open to serious abuse.

The Committee sees a tendency in some quarters to extend the indications for this operation far beyond the bounds of generally accepted medical opinion.

The attitude of the Committee towards this matter is therefore the same as towards more specific legalization of therapeutic abortion.

The Prosecution of the Criminal Abortionist.—A very disquieting aspect of this problem is the relative immunity of the criminal abortionist from punishment. Conviction for the crime is rare, even in cases where guilt appears to be proved beyond all reasonable doubt.

The Committee has sought to discover the reasons for the failure to obtain conviction.

It is apparent that the police authorities are faced with many difficulties. In the first instance conviction is largely dependent on the evidence of a woman who, in the eyes of the law, is an accomplice to the offence, and corroboration of her evidence may be demanded.

It has been suggested by certain witnesses that, if the woman were legally exempt from penalty, there would be less reticence about giving evidence and a greater fear on the part of the abortionist.

On the other hand, it has been stated to the Committee that where such an indemnity is actually given, this very fact operates against conviction.

The Commissioner of Police gave information that—

"Juries are loth to convict in such cases and appear to be impressed by the argument usually advanced by counsel for the defence that, as it was at the solicitation of the woman that the offence was committed, she is the principal offender, and they adopt the view that unless she also is charged it would be unfair to convict the abortionist. The fact that if the woman was charged she could not be called as a witness, and that, without her evidence, there would be no case, does not appear to weigh with them."

It would therefore appear that legalized exemption of the woman would not be a remedy.

* "Abortion," by Stella Browne. Ludovici and Roberts.