

An Open Letter to the Moral Education Society

Lizzie M. Swank

1884

To the Editors of The Radical Review:

I was among the number who listened to the able lecture of Dr. Thomas, on the evening of May 20, in the audience room of the M. E. Church. Will they grant me the privilege of asking a few questions on the subject?

I believe the aims of this society are high and pure, and will result in great good to the human race; but they must be mingled with other reform principles, or no permanent change can come. Allow me to ask the Rev. Dr. Thomas's organization, Why are all the prisons, jails, bridgeswells and hospitals constantly full? It is a question forcing itself in the face of our boasted enlightenment, and the sooner more ministers of the gospel seek for the true solution, instead of wading drearily every Sunday through vague and incomprehensible platitudes, the sooner will the emptying process come. Is it altogether because people are not born right? Do criminals, drunkards, and* tramps, come into the world as such? I fear too often they are made, and out of pretty good, well born material, too. Suppose that a few children might be born under the best possible conditions that the Moral Education Society could ask, that they be reared and trained after the most approved methods, then turned into the world, with no more claim on the masses of children now have, and what would become of them? Civilized society as it exists to-day would crush them out of existence! The children already here, badly born as they are, find it impossible to live up to the good within them. The average child trained in our common schools, faulty as they are, finds itself unfit to enter into the struggle, society with its systems, law, and custom, have made right, forces upon him. He must unlearn some of his lessons, and learn another code of morals before he succeeds. Alas for the noble godlike child of the "holy family," in a world centuries behind its needs in societary arrangements! Another martyr, a new crucifixion—and that is all.

Where on the face of this earth will you place your properly-born children? In the factories, the brickyards, the alleys picking up refuse, or on the streets? Perhaps the Moral Educational Society is only directing its work toward wealthy fathers and mothers. Then the prisons, jails, etc., will not empty very fast. A thousand children come into the world finding it pre-empted, and they with no right here, to one who finds his every want supplied. With no right to the soil by which alone he can subsist, forced to beg for the privilege of toiling, robbed of the results of his labor on every hand, with no leisure, no opportunities for gratifying a love for the "good, the

beautiful, the true,” what matters it how perfect, how holy the parentage of the child? He can only suffer more deeply—that is all. How can the beautiful teachings of the Moral Education Society benefit the thousands of toiling fathers and mothers? The miners of Pennsylvania and the weavers of Massachusetts might be thoroughly conversant with the principles of noble parentage, yet in their lives of constant toil, darkness, dirt, scanty food, have they any opportunities of carrying out these teachings? Are these conditions of the masses of the people conducive to the forming of forming of “holy families,” know they the laws ever so well? Imagine four “holy families” crowded into one room, and separated only by a “chalk line! The Society no doubt earnestly believe that after a few generations these terrible conditions would naturally disappear. No doubt better born children would be quicker to see what is wrong with the systems of society, and more ready to change them. But it is a long time to wait, and some are already so well born that they can see that the land must be free, and man must not own the labor of his brother any more than he must his flesh and blood, and these propose to work till they die or win, for better conditions for all the people.

Good conditions, the right to the soil, freedom, will make Moral Educational Societies unnecessary. Holy parentage, pure unions, noble men and women, will grow out of right conditions as surely as light comes from the sun—as surely as crime, disease, degradation, spring from wretchedness, want, slavery.

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