

July 1942

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Recommended Citation

Mears, J. Gerard (1942) "In Fear and in Secret They Do Damnable Deeds," *The Linacre Quarterly*: Vol. 10: No. 3, Article 8.
Available at: <http://epublications.marquette.edu/lnq/vol10/iss3/8>

IN FEAR AND IN SECRET THEY DO DAMNABLE DEEDS*

By J. GERARD MEARS

ASSOCIATE EDITOR OF "AMERICA"

Grimmest of epitaphs is the laconic entry in hospital files, when a body is assigned to the morgue: Unknown White; D.O.A. (dead on arrival). They have loved and been loved, known joy and sorrow but now, at the end, they are disposed of with a cold impersonality. It is a sad and lonely way to get out of the world. It is even a more cruel way to come into the world. And yet, to an extent that shocks even a pagan conscience, uncounted thousands of human beings, created by God but unwanted by their parents, are being murdered as they are wrenched into this world by criminal abortionists. The innocent victims are the saddest of all the legions of the "unknown; dead on arrival."

Some time ago there were violent reactions of public opinion at the revelations concerning a group of thugs known as Murder, Inc. The callousness of these killers, who made a business out of murder and who would brutally slay a man for a fee, shocked the nation. Relentless investigation and efficient prosecution soon broke up Murder, Inc., and quickly sent its board of directors and working force to the electric chair or behind bars. Compared to the abortionists now at work destroying countless innocent unborn children

throughout the nation, Murder, Inc. were small fry!

But there is hardly any popular clamor for the hunting down, exposure and punishment of doctors who ply this fiendish practice with impunity and amass fabulous fortunes. Sporadic raids on abortion mills seem to satisfy the public that the situation is well in hand and that everything possible is being done to stamp out the evil. Few people bother to follow up the cases and find out if those arrested were ever convicted. And yet out of one hundred cases reported in a year to the police of one city, fifty were thrown out for lack of sufficient evidence to make a *prima facie* case. Of the cases that reached the courts, only three convictions were obtained.

In order to stir up public indignation toward more vigorous prosecution of these so-called doctors, it is necessary to stress the unsavory facts about this ghastly commerce and bring to light the many difficulties in stamping it out.

Most of the material for this survey was obtained from *A Presentation on the Suppression of Criminal Abortions* from the office of the Attorney General of the State of New York. It presents the findings of a Special Grand Jury which investigated the matter for three years. The staff of the Attorney General's office were

* Reprinted from *America*, May 2, 1942, with kind permission of Editor.

most helpful in supplying additional information.

While the Grand Jury's factual investigation was confined to Greater New York City, it is easy to draw from their findings a picture of what is going on in other large cities and throughout the country. The situation is obviously not a local one and, while figures of various authorities for New York City are astonishingly large, the estimated figures for the whole country indicate that conditions are more or less the same all over the country, especially in the large cities.

Those who venture estimates on the number of abortions annually in various sections of the country and in the nation as a whole, state frankly that it is almost impossible to have anything approaching scientific accuracy in their statistics.

Due to the fact that patient, doctor and in some cases, public officials, are in conspiracy to conceal the truth, any agency attempting to make a report on the abortion practice is confronted with a dearth of official statistics on the subject. Estimates are based on personal statistics acquired by legitimate practitioners, by abortionists, by laymen and, in part, by the researches of governmental agencies. But even if the numbers given by authorities be looked upon as "guesses", based on their findings, they indicate a terrible situation.

"Many authorities," says the Grand Jury report, "regard the

figure of 100,000 abortions annually in the City of New York as approximately accurate." That is 273+ per day. Doctor A. J. Rongy, in his book, *Abortion: Legal and Illegal*, estimates that 250,000 abortions are performed per year in the City of New York. That would be about 685 a day. Frederick J. Taussig, in a learned study on the medical and social aspects of abortion, sets his own figures for the United States:

"The figures arrived at, by the best means at our disposal, were 681,600 abortions (or 1,867 a day). . . . These figures are believed to be minimum, and are based not upon direct observation but upon inferences from the only data available."

Doctor William Bickers, writing in the *Catholic Virginian*, puts the annual national total at 550,000 (or 1,534+ a day). These figures, he says, have been confirmed by the most careful scrutiny of hospital records and vital statistics.

"Eight thousand potential mothers," he adds, "pay with their lives each year for their participation in this most gruesome of all crimes. Countless others are rendered physically unfit and incapable of normal reproduction."

Much more accurate than the estimates of the number of abortions are the figures on the average income of the abortionist since they are based on actual individual confessions. The following paragraphs from the Grand Jury report furnishes an astound-

ing revelation as to the princely wages of crime:

"Although there is evidence that fees are as low as \$10, including the anesthetic, they have been known to go as high as \$2,500. \$500 for an abortion would not be uncommon. \$250 is a frequent price. A considerable percentage of abortion patients are charged \$100 but the bulk of the fees run from about \$50 to \$60.

"Yearly incomes of abortion specialists would be in the same numerical brackets with earnings of heads of large corporations had they ever been publicized. There is testimony that the abortion specialist with a normal business averages about \$25,000 a year, and that doctors whose clientele came from larger income groups earned from \$150,000 to \$250,000 a year.

"An abortionist who charges \$50 to \$60 for an operation, after he has split the fee with the feeder and deducted running expenses, receives about \$15 profit. As has been stated before, there are abortion specialists who perform about four thousand operations a year. Such a specialist would net about \$60,000 a year, even on a modest scale of fees.

"One abortionist who had been financially successful in the business, built a house costing \$165,000, referred to in the profession as 'the house that abortions built.' Another doctor, one of the earliest in the business, amassed approximately

\$1,000,000 up until 1921.

"One of the best known induction specialists (*induction* means the extremely dangerous removal of the fetus after a gestatory period of three months) of New York was reputed to have earned over \$1,000,000. When questioned as to the truth of this report, he made no denial . . . another was charged with owing the Federal Government \$850,000 in back taxes."

These fortunes are left after fifty per cent of the fee is shared with the "feeder" (usually a druggist or fellow doctor), and, in many cases, protection money paid. The abortionist's secretary is frequently paid as high as \$100, plus a share in the profits, as her shrewdness and loyalty are essential. She meets the prospective patients and arranges the fee, after careful appraisal. In addition, the business agent for the doctor abortionist runs the office, handles bills and salaries, splits fees and bribe money and is contact man between the abortionist and the sources from which business can be obtained. He works for a percentage of the net profits.

Although convicted abortionists have attempted to explain their lapse from medical ethical standards by stating that they left medical school with high ideals which the world did not appreciate and were forced into illegal practice by sheer economic necessity—a glance at the above income statistics would indicate that the abortionist is lured by sheer ava-

rice. Why plod along saving life for a mere living when medical murder brings such handsome rewards? And such an antiseptic and refined type of murder! A white coat, a curette and a brightly lighted operating table instead of a mask, a dagger and a dark road; public indifference and social connivance instead of the hue and cry. At worst, the loss of a license and professional prestige, instead of the noose or the electric chair. And no outcry from the human victim!

It seems impossible that such a heinous commerce can thrive in a Christian—or even a civilized society. In many States there are penal statutes against criminal abortion and many State Boards of Education are entrusted with the responsibility of taking disciplinary action against doctors who are offenders, but still the abomination continues, almost uncurbed.

The factors which enable the business to flourish according to the report of the Grand Jury, published by Special Prosecutor John Harlan Amen, are:

1. Apathy on the part of the public to the problem of abortions;

2. Lack of co-operation with public officials on the part of the woman who seeks an abortion (she is also liable to prosecution under existing legislation);

3. Connivance on the part of certain public officials with abortionists for the purpose of circumventing the laws designed to con-

trol the practice; and

4. Ineffective use of enforcement machinery which is in itself partly defective.

To these reasons must definitely be added the laxity of the modern social conscience, regarding the tampering with life and death. God's dominion and His laws are not mentioned in discussing the problem. In fact, great pressure is brought to bear on legislative bodies to abolish all laws against abortion and thus "cheat the criminal abortionist." All abortions would then be "therapeutic" and hence legal and medically safer.

It has been impossible, in the space of one article, to give proper considerations to many important phases of this evil and its possible suppression. It has been necessary merely to hint at the great difficulty of exposing and prosecuting the illegal practitioner under present legislation and the profitable connivance of unscrupulous public officials which was brought to light by the Grand Jury investigation. But it is to be hoped that the startling conditions which are merely sketched here, will show the necessity of an awakened public conscience on this evil traffic which battens on human tragedy and frailty. For, as the presentment which has been quoted from so freely concludes: "It would be fatuous to deny or overlook the fact that the effectiveness with which penal laws are enforced varies directly with the public determination that they shall be."