

AN ACHIEVEMENT FOR HUMANITY

EDITORIAL BY THEODORE ROOSEVELT

MR. ARTHUR LEE, a Member of the British Parliament, and incidentally a man who has always been a staunch friend of the United States, has recently rendered a striking service to the cause of humanity and decency throughout the civilized world. He has pushed through both houses of Parliament a bill dealing in drastic fashion with the "white slave" traffic, the most infamous and bestial, the most cruel and degrading, form of criminal iniquity known to our age.

This was not a public morality bill. Its object was not to reform the underworld, or even to cope with vice. It was simply a bill to deal with a peculiarly atrocious crime, to punish the most infamous of criminals, and to save young girls from misery so heart-breaking, misery of a kind so hideous, that it is hard to speak or to think of it without a shudder. Briefly, the measure permits the arrest on sight, or on suspicion, of all persons, male and female, who make their living out of the prostitution of others, and provides for meting out to them swift and severe punishment—including flogging for the male offenders, for the underworld is primarily a world of male criminals, and in this traffic it is the man who is by far the worst offender.

Mr. Lee is a Conservative, and in order to get this bill through he has for twelve months been working shoulder to shoulder with men of all parties, Conservatives, Radicals, Socialists, and Irish Nationalists alike. Americans, accustomed to the way in which the National Congress and the State Legislatures simply spawn bills by the gross, like female shad, can have little idea of the extraordinary difficulties which have to be surmounted in getting a non-party "Private Member" bill through the English Parliament. As far as I know, Mr. Lee's bill for the suppression of the white slave traffic is the only Private Member's bill of importance that has become law during the

last five years. It was possible to get such a bill through only by securing the co-operation and good will of all political parties and by preventing the House of Lords and the House of Commons from coming to loggerheads. To pilot such a bill under such circumstances to a successful conclusion means a literally astounding display of energy, of judgment, of good-natured tact, and of sheer downright capacity for hard work.

One of the best features of the bill, in my judgment, is that providing for the flogging of male offenders. The Outlook has very properly protested against the whipping-post as an ordinary instrument of justice. But there are certain kinds of cruel and brutal offenses which are committed by creatures so beast-like that they can be reached only by being themselves made actually and physically to suffer. Wife-beaters come under this class, and so do the loathsome beings who engage in the white slave traffic. The immediate effect of Mr. Lee's law on this portion of the underworld was quite dramatic. According to the reports both of the police and of the vigilance workers, its passage was the signal for the beginning of a general exodus of the professional white-slavers from England, so that both trains and boats for the Continent of Europe were crowded with them for several days. It is generally admitted that the decisive feature in shifting them was the threat of the lash, the one thing they cannot stand. As the London "Times" phrased it, "By a happy provision of nature it appears that the skin becomes more tender as the moral sense becomes more atrophied."

Mr. Lee may live long and spend all his life in power and accomplish much, and yet never accomplish anything that will rightly give him greater satisfaction or that will represent a greater gain for humanity. He has made all good men and women his debtors; in whatever part of the world they dwell.