

THE MEDDLESOME SOCIETY *(Originally published August 1969)*

A James Kilpatrick column not long ago protesting the "do-gooders" crystallized some thoughts of our own on the subject. There is no doubt that we've become a nation of bleeding hearts and meddling busybodies. Swarms of crusading zealots buffet and attack us from all sides. Through the mail, by phone, newspaper, magazine, radio and television, we are urged daily to join a Cause. In almost every phase of activity, someone or some group has organized a Society or Committee for the prevention or promotion of something. The ghost of Carrie Nation stalks the country. We have spawned a generation of hot-eyed Ralph Naders, determined to set all things right.

Nothing wilt be right, and life can never be beautiful until we all agree to: abolish the tobacco industry, eliminate poverty, achieve truth in lending, throw out oil depletion, control air pollution, impeach Ronald Reagan, get out of Viet Nam, stop urban decay, fasten all seat belts, boycott California grapes, crack down on food packaging, legalize marijuana, burn out slum ghettos, retire Everett Dirksen, make universities relevant, guarantee the income, pay reparations to black militants, reform the electorate, fire J. Edgar Hoover, advance the Negro, make our streams pure, bring back Joe Namath, expose Medicare fraud, make Fulbright Secretary of State, do away with grizzlies, elect Ted Kennedy and reinstate Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

Gone are the days of laissez-faire. The old fashioned live-and-let-live philosophy is no more. No one is content to leave well enough alone, and we have developed a society of meddling Nellie's bent on communicating barbershop wisdom to all who will listen. The clear-eyed tight-lipped Gary Cooper heroes of the past who spoke seldom and in monosyllables have been replaced by a host of gabbing Cronkites and Hugh Downs who spout cheap talk and sociologic homilies. We are smothered by puritanical reformers who cannot accept the inherent imperfections of humanity. All evil must go. All sinners must repent. Now! The new breed of social preachers recognizes no virtue in patience, and tolerates no questioning of the righteous paths on which they point us toward Utopia.

The field of medicine has not escaped this modern blight. We have our own crop of impatient do-gooders whose anger and frustration over the fact that death awaits us all leads them to ignore its inevitability. Join hands with the anti-cigarette-smoke crusaders and you can ensure your comfort in the cabin of an airliner, smug in the knowledge that you'll never die of lung cancer. Feed your wife hormones and she will never grow humpbacked, her skin will keep the bloom of youth, her bosoms never sag—feminine forever. Support the fluoridations and your teeth will never rot, support the anti-fluoridations and avoid mottling, brittle bones and toxic death. Give to the March of

Dimes and do away with birth defects. Don't abuse those mitochondria and protect your microcellular fluids from alcohol and all those ingested protein toxins, and health is yours eternally.

Encourage sex education in the schools so that your children will never know illegitimacy or stumble through life with all of your own disgraceful sex habits. Eliminate cholesterol, preserve your arterial tree and never succumb to stroke. And along the way, to insure a tranquil life, back up your Mental Health Association so that the community will be free of juvenile delinquency, homosexuality, drug addiction, crime in the streets and breakdowns in social adjustment. There is a Crusade for every disease, an impertinent Foundation for every ailment. According to the free medical newspapers that flood our desks every day, breakthroughs are imminent, solutions around the next corner and salvation lies ahead.

In our zeal to plug all loopholes and cover all contingencies, we have kowtowed to organizers, ferrets and reformers who paralyze us with proliferating committees. There is AMPAC and GAMPAC. There is the Joint Commission of Accreditation of Hospitals, Tissue Committee, Records Committee, Grievance Committee, Utilization Committee, Area Health Planning Committee, Inter-Hospital Liaison Committee, Blue Shield Peer Committee, and (heaven help us) an Advisory Committee to United Ostomy. Kilpatrick concluded his column with the plea "Leave us alone, dammit! Leave us alone," which echoes our feelings exactly.

Nevertheless, there is one organization that deserves your support—The UCEBH (United Commission for the Extermination of Bleeding Hearts). We urge you to join.