

Europe, and since then it has been endemic throughout Europe and in practically all other countries.

During the last twenty-five years public attention has been concentrated upon these diseases. For the purpose of regulating vice the Contagious Diseases Act was on our statute-book for a number of years. It was in operation in the City of Christchurch for some time, and women who were known to be prostitutes were required to submit themselves periodically for examination, when, if found to be diseased, they were held in the "Lock" hospital. I was personally assured many years ago by experienced men like the late Police-Inspector Pender that while that Act was in force a very great improvement took place in the health of the community. Public opinion, however, was against a law which was so liable to abuse, and its operation in Christchurch was suspended, while a few years ago it was finally wiped off the statute-book of the Dominion.

I wish to say at once I have no desire to bring again into force the obnoxious provisions of the Contagious Diseases Act. I think, however, that there is a duty cast upon Parliament to take some steps by which the evils arising from these diseases may be combated, and by which those who for commerce place themselves beyond the pale of pure and virtuous womanhood will, if found suffering from these diseases, be held by the State until they are free from danger to the community.

I see no reason why a person suffering from measles, or scarlet fever, or even smallpox, should be segregated while others who suffer from these most awful diseases should be allowed at their own sweet will to mix amongst the healthy members of the community and be able to go on communicating these diseases. And here let me say that, while I advocate the segregation of the diseased female prostitute, I equally hold that men who are in the habit of visiting houses of ill fame or who are known to be promiscuous in their relations with women should be treated on exactly the same line if found to be suffering from these diseases.

As honourable members are aware, the two principal venereal diseases are (1) gonorrhœa and (2) syphilis.

The figures I have already given indicate that gonorrhœa is much more the prevalent of the two. Although this is the minor disease, it has disastrous effects, especially in the cases of new-born children. It is a frequent cause of chronic suffering and sterility in women, as well as the chief source of blindness occurring as the result of ophthalmia in new-born infants. Its channel of communication is through the sexual organs.

The more severe form of disease, syphilis, is commonly transmitted from the parent to the unborn child, resulting frequently in abortion or miscarriage, in still-births, premature births, and the diseases which so frequently cause mortality in the first month after birth. Inherent syphilis in later years may cause blindness, deafness, and various bone, skin, and visceral lesions in the infected child. It is now recognized that the two diseases, locomotor ataxia and general paralysis of the insane, are directly of syphilitic origin, and that aneurism and other diseases of the heart are indirectly the result of it.

Looking at the figures for our own country for the year 1914, I find that in that year there were the following deaths: From syphilis, 16; gonococcus infection, 4; locomotor ataxia, 10; general paralysis of the insane, 44. The death figures, however, express only a very small portion of the misery, anguish, and sorrow brought about by these diseases. Were sexual contact the only means of disseminating syphilis the case might not be so bad nor the problem so difficult. I could tell honourable members of cases which have come under my notice in public institutions where pure and innocent women have had their lives shattered by becoming infected with this disease in carrying out their duties. I could tell also of cases of innocent little ones whose lives have been destroyed by servant women in the house infecting the children in their charge with this awful disease. It is known that the disease is communicated in lavatories, privies, and barbers' shops, by the use of towels, the kissing of children, the smoking of infected pipes, and in other ways. And probably there is not a man amongst us but knows of cases where innocent wives have had their lives made one long sorrow by having disease communicated to them by those who had at the altar promised to cherish and keep them for life. Surely it is a duty which this House owes to the country that some steps should be taken for the purpose of dealing with this awful red scourge. I have received communications from some of the women's associations in New Zealand, in which it has been stated that they protest against those diseases being dealt with by regulations. My answer is that the matter is too intricate for legislation, and in this I ask the country, and especially the women of New Zealand, to trust the combined wisdom of the Police and Health Departments, the experts, and, above all, the National Cabinet, who have as high a respect for the sacredness of womanhood, including their own wives and daughters, as can be looked for. Some of the women's associations have also informed me that they protest against any action being taken by Parliament which will create a sense of false security, enabling young men to sin with impunity. I cannot subscribe to any such doctrine as that—namely, that we should allow such a condition of things to remain as now exists in order that those who place themselves within the zone of danger in this matter may suffer penalties which do not end with them, but which they may transmit to the innocent and unborn children of whom they may be the parents. I am not the Minister of Morals, but the Minister of Health, and in that capacity I desire to face this question and tell the House exactly what I think should be done in connection with this matter. On this point I quote the following sentence from a report written by Dr. R. W. Johnstone for the London County Council. He said, "Without attempting to go into the subject at length, it may be said that even if venereal diseases were spread by sexual intercourse alone, which is not the case, a retribution which falls upon innocent women and children, and with equal force upon the raw youth or girl as upon the vicious and abandoned, is not remarkable for its justice." Sir, recently there has been published to the world the Final Report of the Royal Commission of Great Britain on Venereal Diseases, which