

SECTION 7. MARRIAGE CERTIFICATE OF HEALTH.

The Royal Commission on Venereal Disease reported that there was a vast amount of ignorance as to the dangers arising from the sexual intercourse of married persons one of whom had previously to the marriage contracted syphilis or gonorrhœa. The effect upon the birth-rate, and the misery caused during married life, and in many cases to the offspring who survive, as they pointed out, are most serious, and the fact that the actual cause of the trouble often remains unknown and unrecognized prevents the calamity from serving the purpose of example or warning.

Some of the witnesses heard before the present Committee have urged that a certificate of good health, or at least a certificate of freedom from communicable disease, should be required from each party to a proposed marriage before the Registrar issued a license to marry. The Royal Commission considered that "it would not be possible at present to organize a satisfactory method of certification of fitness for marriage." The National Birth-rate Commission, however, reported that in their opinion the question should be reconsidered with a view to legislation.

There is much to be said in favour of such a proposal from the point of view of national health. If the system were adopted the certificate should, in the opinion of the present Committee, include freedom from mental disease as well as freedom from communicable disease. But there are manifest difficulties in the way, chiefly in regard to the delicate and searching examination which would be required in the case of women before a doctor could certify positively to the absence of communicable disease.

The Committee recommend that instead of a medical certificate each party to a proposed marriage should be required to answer appropriate questions in regard to the presence or absence of communicable and mental disease, and to make a sworn statement before the Registrar as to the truth of the answers. It should be the duty of the Registrar to communicate the contents of the statements to the other party in the event of any admission of the presence of communicable disease.

In addition to the penalty for making a false statement it might be provided, as in the Queensland Act, that venereal disease shall be a ground for annulling a marriage contract when one party is suffering at the time of marriage from such disease in an infectious state, provided the other party was not informed of the fact prior to marriage.

The Committee would also recommend the adoption of a further provision that it should be the duty of a medical practitioner attending a case of venereal disease which is or is likely to become infective, if he has reason to believe that the patient intends to marry, to warn him or her against doing so, and if he or she persists it should be the duty of the doctor forthwith to notify the case by name to the Director-General of Health, whose duty it should be to inform the other party. It should also be provided that *bonâ fide* communications made in such a case, either by the Director-General of Health or the doctor, to the other party to the marriage, or to the parents or guardian of such party, shall be privileged.

SECTION 8. TREATMENT BY UNQUALIFIED PERSONS.

The evidence given before the Committee shows that while reputable chemists refer to a medical man patients coming to them for treatment for venereal disease, and while these constitute the great majority of the profession, there are still far too many cases of venereal disease treated by chemists, herbalists, chiropractors, and other unqualified persons. The treatment of venereal disease has become a specialized branch of medicine, and many general practitioners prefer to refer such cases to experts. The result of trusting to unqualified persons for the treatment of such serious and difficult diseases is that the patient usually drifts on uncured, and serious complications may occur. One specialist in venereal disease informed the Committee that of 200 of his cases whose cards showed particulars, 104 consulted chemists in the first place and received more or less treatment from them. He was able to give details of twenty-three cases showing the type of treatment given. In several cases there were severe complications which could have been avoided by proper treatment. There were also cases in which the patient, after taking medicine for a time, had communicated the infection to others. This witness further stated that some chemists charged consultation fees in addition to charges for drugs applied, and in certain cases charges for drugs were made which were little short of blackmail.

The Committee recommend that, in place of section 7 of the Social Hygiene Act, a more comprehensive clause from the West Australian Act be adopted. This is to the following effect: "No person [other than a registered medical practitioner] should attend or prescribe for any person for the purpose of curing, alleviating, or treating venereal disease, whether such person is in fact suffering from such disease or not."

The Committee would suggest that if the Pharmaceutical Society were to do all in its power to discourage its members from treating these diseases it would have a good effect.

SECTION 9. MENTALLY DEFECTIVE ADOLESCENTS.

Mr. J. Caughley, Director of Education, stated in evidence: "From a general inquiry made by the Department a few years ago it was ascertained that there were at least six hundred or seven hundred mental defectives in New Zealand under the age of twenty-one. I need scarcely point out the moral danger to the community of so many of these defectives being at large. In particular, the girls are a source of danger to themselves and to the community, since they have little or no will-power or sense of restraint. I am of opinion that all such cases should be registered, and that, unless it can be shown that the mental defective is under thoroughly safe and proper care at home, he should be taken charge of by the State. I am certain that by this means the increasing number of mental defectives would be reduced to a minimum, since mental defectiveness is almost entirely hereditary."

Mr. Beck, Officer in Charge of the Special Schools under the Education Department, cited illustrative cases, one of which may be thus stated: "Two feeble-minded parents in New Zealand