

The White Ribbon

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

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A NATIONAL PERIL.

(A Paper read at the Canterbury Provincial Convention held at Timaru, September 8th, 1915.)

In attempting to bring the subject of venereal diseases and the vice of immorality before you, one is bewildered as to where to begin, for both go back to furthest antiquity. State regulation and recognition of vice is a product of pagan depravity. It was established in Rome 180 B.C., and from thence the system spread through the different countries conquered by Rome. It was established by the Romans in England, and continued there until 1545, when it was suppressed, and from thence forward, until the year of grace 1864, England only noticed prostitution when discouraging or repressing it.

On June 20th, 1864, Lord Clarence Paget, the Secretary to the Admiralty, introduced into Parliament a "Bill for the Prevention of Contagious Diseases at certain Naval and Military Stations." Just at that time the public mind was in a state of alarm at the ravages of disease among cattle, and Parliament had passed various Acts of a stringent character, under the title of "Contagious Diseases (Animal) Acts." The short title of this Act, which came to be the famous, or rather infamous, C.D. Act, was "Contagious Diseases Prevention Act, 1864." There were very few people outside Parliament who did not suppose it had reference to animals, and in all probability the members gener-



Miss Woodhead (late Maori Organiser) mounted, and ready for her trip of 460 miles round East Cape.

ally were ignorant of its tendencies, or misled, as so many are, by the plausible sophistries of those promoting it. Be that as it may, the Bill met with practically no opposition, passed all its stages rapidly, and received the Royal Assent on July 29th. Like the medical proposals that have exercised our own minds lately, it was not designed to apply to the whole country, but to certain areas, and provided for the compulsory examination, upon suspicion, of prostitutes, and for their compulsory detention, if affected with venereal disease, until considered safe to minister again

to the lust of men. It was the military and naval authorities that were behind this Act. It was to operate for three years only, but was followed in 1866 and 1869 by further enactments, increasing the area of the operations of these Acts, and tightening their provisions. The passage of these later Bills met some faint opposition in the House of Commons. The Right Hon. J. W. Henley said it was "an endeavour to give the opportunity of sin without its consequences," a very good definition of what regulation tries to do, and tries in vain. Mr Ayrton said: "No useful or moral end was intended, the end in view being vice, unmitigated vice."

There is no need to go at length into the horrors created by these Acts, but there were many cases in which it was proved that the police, on the receipt of anonymous letters about respectable women and girls, attempted to compel them to submit to examination, and in some cases did, women of absolutely virtuous character, and they had no redress. Examination on suspicion made such cases possible, and would do so again. The hardships and indignities inflicted upon women under these Acts were unspeakable, while the annual reports to Government show that disease increased among the women subject to examination during the years these Acts were in operation, and clearly demonstrate that such Acts are worse than useless for safeguarding men from disease who consort with prostitutes.

The first note of opposition came in 1868, when the promoters of these