

ADDRESS GIVEN BY MRS KYNETON PARKES.

At a Public Meeting held in Timaru
during the W.C.T.U. Convention in
March, 1918.

The President, Mrs Don, was in the chair, and after opening the meeting with a hymn and prayer, she briefly introduced the speaker as one who was going to present her views on the question of Social Hygiene, with special reference to its position in England.

Mrs Parkes, in thanking the Executive for allowing her to be present at the deliberations of the Convention, said she was glad to find that the discussion was not confined to Temperance, but dealt also with the causes of intemperance and the evils arising from it.

She wished to say first that she was speaking not as an expert, but as an ordinary observant woman going about and forming her own opinion, and as a suffragist with the women's point of view always before her, and a strong conviction that the social evil cannot be removed until the double standard of morality is entirely eliminated. When she arrived in New Zealand, Lady Stout showed her Miss Ettie Rout's letter, and that was the main reason why she was on the platform that evening. She—a mother whose son had gone through Gallipoli and was now in Palestine—and all women who knew their sons to be as pure as themselves, felt righteous indignation against such a suggestion as Miss Rout's, which proved that she had only superficial knowledge of the subject. But they must have facts, and know and understand the very inside of this vital question.

As to what had been done at Home to wipe out the stigma of Venereal Disease, it might naturally be asked why, with so many workers, more had not been done against this and Intemperance and other evils? There was a vital reason which it was difficult for New Zealand women to appreciate; they did not know what a fight at Home was like, nor how impossible it was to "get a move on." It was like working with a penknife where New Zealand women could use a saw. Years ago many women engaged in all sorts of work, temperance, political, etc., but they never got any further; they were blocked because politicians did not care for anything except for votes. They

might work hard to put a man into Parliament who they thought would do something for some needed reform; they would go and see him about it, and he would be very wise and invite them to tea on the terrace, but nothing came of it, for they had no votes. Thus they saw that to do any good they must get the franchise. It seemed perfectly wonderful to her how quickly 6 o'clock closing was won. How long did it take English pioneer women to pass such a simple thing as the Married Women's Property Act? Thirty years—all for want of the right tools.

Social Hygiene was a burning question, and it became much worse in time of war. In every country there was the White Slave Traffic to be checked. One of the best bits of legislation had been that which endeavoured to alter the state of things under which the police might see young girls in the hands of men, yet could do nothing on mere suspicion without first getting a warrant. Thus the men were allowed to escape. Drastic measures would not be objected to, provided they were of value, but the Royal Commission on Venereal Disease had proved that the remedies suggested were futile. There were two groups of persons equally anxious for reform. The Abolitionists would abolish all regulation, arguing that statistics proved that in those European countries where regulation was best carried out, Venereal Disease was the worst. The Regulationists argued that it was a terrible thing that one woman with the disease should infect many men. Granted, but it must be remembered that before a woman could infect a man, she had herself been infected by a man, and also that 90 per cent. of the unfortunate girl prostitutes had in the first instance been betrayed by a man. One must look at both sides of the question before attempting to take action, for panic legislation was always a dangerous thing.

Compulsory notification was useless; regulation was useless. These methods only tended to make vice safe and easy, without being effective remedies at all. Flexner, in his book, "Prostitution in Europe," proved this. He sent everywhere to compile statistics alike in regulation and in unregulated countries. This book, the speaker said, she had begun to read with prejudice, for she feared he would come to a wrong conclusion, through getting only the man's point of view. But she found

that because he had gone to the bottom of the subject he had got the right point of view, and formed the right conclusion. The English people had tried legislation once by the hated C.D. Acts. All knew the work of Josephine Butler, and how at last the Acts were repealed, evidently recognised by Government to be futile, as indeed they always must be. If it could be ensured that all prostitutes were registered, there might perhaps be something to be said for the measure. But, asked the speaker, what happens to infected women? Lock them up, you say. Does that stop infection while the men go free? Or grant that all are locked up, what then? Where do others come from? From among the young girls, and so the evil grows.

Even if this were not so, there is another reason. Flexner proves that only about 42 per cent. are professed prostitutes, and registered; 50 per cent. are women engaged in other occupations. Suppose you make them register, at once you brand them. Many indeed do try to escape from the hateful bondage, but once branded, they have lost all hope. The same evasions and the same subterfuges are practised alike in Paris, where regulation exists, and in London, where there is none.

A determined effort has been made at Home to show the close connection between Prostitution and Drink. The music halls have done a great deal, for it is not merely a question of a man and a woman, but of some one in the background making a profit. Trying to introduce State regulation is working at the wrong end. It is a matter of supply and demand. The supply is endless through the White Slave Traffic, therefore the only solution is to deal with the demand. When you hear of the dancing halls on the Continent, where the supply is almost unlimited, you know that the demand is an artificial one. So we realise there is some hope, if we can get people to look at the matter from quite a different point of view. Hitherto society has not demanded that men shall be chaste, but the time is coming when society will demand it.

As in slavery, there are two factors, the slave and the slave-holder, so in prostitution. If it is a crime, both sides are guilty, the man equally with the woman, and the punishment of the latter stops none of the objections that society feels to prostitution. So the remedy that rests on maintaining