

CHAPTER XIII

ATTEMPT TO REVIVE THE STATE REGULATION OF VICE—PAUL PRY

ARMY Commanders who had gained their military experience in the Crown Colonies, where the State regulation of vice still existed, regarded the supply of undiseased prostitutes for their troops as a part of military routine. They were demanding the power to control and license women for this purpose by the revival of the Contagious Diseases Acts, the repeal of which Josephine Butler and her co-workers had secured after a heroic struggle of seventeen years.¹ Already in October (1914) the Plymouth Watch Committee had made a similar demand. The old Army attitude towards prostitution was being spread among the soldiers of Kitchener's New Armies. Young recruits came home telling their mothers and sisters that prophylactics for use when consorting with prostitutes were handed out to them as they went on leave, protestations that they had no use for them being contemptuously dismissed. Men came home with stories of arrangements made for the soldiers to queue up to visit prostitutes in France. The *Manual of Military Hygiene*, issued for the instruction of the troops, observed that "having regard to the method of transmission, thorough washing after connection may lessen the chances of infection."

Venereal disease was alleged to be causing tremendous havoc among the new soldiers. Sir Ivor Herbert declared, in the Commons on November 16th, that this infection, termed "avoidable disease" in military parlance, had incapacitated from 30 to 40 per cent. of the men in some units. Asquith refused to supply any figures; and to this day, official statistics of venereal disease in the British Army during the War

¹ The C.D. Acts provided for the registration and police supervision of alleged prostitutes; their periodic compulsory surgical examination to detect venereal disease—imprisonment to follow refusal; their compulsory detention in "certified" hospitals if found diseased; the arrest and compulsory examination of any woman alleged to be in any place for prostitution unless she could produce a certificate showing she had been examined and was free from disease.

Such provisions have everywhere proved worse than useless. Men have never been controlled or examined. They experience a false sense of security when consorting with registered prostitutes who often become infected between the periods of the compulsory examination. Many prostitutes evade registration and diseased women, from whatever cause infected, fear to seek medical treatment in dread of being placed on the police register. Women who have never been prostitutes are occasionally arrested and placed under police control, which makes it impossible for them to retain employment, or to continue peacefully in ordinary walks of life. Such regulations facilitate the hideous traffic in "White Slaves" bought and sold by procurers.

have not been published, though the Army figures for other years are available.¹

Later came complaints of a great havoc from venereal disease amongst the Australian troops stationed in Egypt, and also amongst the Canadians. Though many reports were doubtless exaggerated, there was undoubtedly something behind all this rumour. I was surprised by a telephone call from Cheatle,² the surgeon, whom I had met once only, when he had come as consultant in the last vain efforts to save my brother's life. He was troubled; men, and it seemed they were often of the prosperous classes, were coming home with venereal disease and infecting their wives and children. He wanted me to put him in touch with whoever was working to combat this evil. I did so, and he did his part in it very earnestly I believe; but when I saw him in 1920, and asked him of his work in that direction, he said he was no longer concerned with it; his main interest now was cancer. People of settled habit were deflected from their accustomed pursuits by the urgent problems of the War. More profound was the influence upon the young, who learnt with the swiftness of revelation how diametrically naval and military standards conflicted with the precepts taught at the mother's knee. The result, on the whole, I think, has been a groping towards the creation of a new morality, broader and more sincere than that of the old dual code and perhaps a good deal of cynicism in some cases.

Lord Claude Hamilton demanded power to commit prostitutes to hospitals and reformatories; the Home Secretary replied that the existing law against soliciting must suffice; but as soon as Parliament adjourned in December, Colonel East, who commanded the troops in the West of England, banned all women from the public houses of Cardiff between the hours of 7 p.m. and 6 a.m., and issued notices under the Defence of the Realm Act to certain women in the city, prohibiting them from being out of doors between 7 p.m. and 8 a.m. Five women who declared the notice seemed to them "like a dream," were arrested and committed by a military court-martial to 62 days' imprisonment. The military authorities were obviously in train to establish a form of surveillance not sanctioned by the ordinary law.

In the words of the Women's Manifesto of 1869, the new military regulations removed, so far as women were concerned:

"every guarantee of personal security which the law had established and held sacred, and put their regulation, their freedom and their persons absolutely in the power of the police."

It was a parallel attack with that which had been made upon the soldiers' wives; less serious, in a sense, because in practice likely to affect only a small number of women, yet having peculiarly hideous

¹ These show a fall from 422 cases per 1,000 soldiers in 1859, to 19 per 1,000 in 1928. These figures relate to the Army in the United Kingdom. The venereal disease rate is higher in the Navy: 45.76 per 1,000 in 1928 in U.K. stations. In the Air Force it is lower: 13.5 per 1,000 at home and 31.3 abroad in 1928.

² Sir Lenthal Cheatle, K.C.B., C.V.O., F.R.C.S.