

(November 2nd, 1915.)

The Moral Conditions of Toronto.

BY MR. G. A. WARBURTON.*

AT a luncheon of the Canadian Club held on the 2nd November, Mr. Warburton said:

Mr. Chairman and Gentlemen,—I am very grateful to Mr. Deacon for the numerous appellations which he has applied to me and to the Secretary, who was kind enough to dub me "Doctor." I congratulate him upon his prophetic gifts, it shows he is not wanting in imagination,—who knows but that he may be a poet as well on the side? (Laughter.)

I have been asked to speak to you to-day upon the moral conditions of Toronto, I suppose because I have been acting for nearly two years as Chairman of the Social Survey Commission, that has met to study these conditions, and have helped to frame, with the other members of the Commission, a report which is intended to be constructive and helpful, rather than merely critical, and which certainly is not intended to be in any way sensational. (Hear, hear.)

I have had printed a card upon which is the date when the Commission was founded, and the date of the presentation of its report to the City Council, together with the names of the members of the Commission. That Commission was appointed through the active interest in the moral conditions of the city that was taken by the Local Council of Women, and, as is so often the case, the women deserve the credit for inaugurating a work which it has been a pleasure to so many of us to carry on. I want to pay this tribute to them, for it is their due. It is of course well understood that anybody who is willing to study the moral conditions of the city, to find out what they are, and seek to improve them, deserves the approval of all good people. But it is equally certain that they will be misunderstood. (Applause.)

We live in a great city, one which in a great many ways can be regarded as one of the very best in which to live, but we should be foolish if we were to content ourselves with condi-

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tions as they now exist. We have discovered wrongs, and I am going to put before you, not the report of the Commission, but to make some running comments upon that report and the conditions we know from our investigations do actually exist in Toronto.

Let me say that we regard it as altogether creditable to us, to be criticized by certain classes in the community and we welcome such criticism. Nobody will ever undertake to take a step forward but the baser, lower elements will find occasion to talk; and I congratulate myself and felicitate my fellow members of the Commission that some people are assuming that rôle now. (Hear, hear.) And may I say this, that so far from not having any proof of the statements in the report is concerned we made careful investigation, and never accepted the statement of any one person without confirmation of that statement by an investigation made by another; so you may accept it, upon the reliability of the persons whose names are on that report, that the conditions we state exist we believe actually exist, from information that has come to us at first hand,—we took nobody's say-so for it.

May I speak first on conditions in the city as to the question of prostitution. Prostitution is not by any means as prevalent in this city as in many cities of this size. I think we may congratulate ourselves that the city is as pure as it is. At the same time, there is enough prostitution in the city, enough houses of ill fame, to make it desirable that better methods of dealing with infractions of the law should be adopted. And we insist upon the right to criticize the Police Department, but only for its responsibility for enforcement of the law. As citizens we ought to do it, with good feeling, and without anyone criticizing our motives. There are a large number of houses of prostitution scattered throughout the city, in almost all parts of it, in sections not supposed to be open to such things. We found some houses in such sections. We found also houses of assignation common,—large numbers of houses where men and women went for immoral purposes, and where a more or less systematic attempt is made to induce people to go to these houses, taxicabs and other means of conveyance being used freely, in some cases several times in the same night by different people who found out from drivers where these houses were to be found. Also there is street soliciting, sufficiently common to make us blush; in certain sections of the city young men are freely solicited by prostitutes. Some hotels are used for immoral purposes, some which have a very good name, and those in charge must be

blind or they must know the places are being used for such purposes. There is no sense in ignoring that.

A most alarming and socially dangerous thing is what we have called occasional prostitution. This is common among working women and girls, who earn their living in another way, not as professional prostitutes, but have other means besides the practice of immorality. This, to our minds, is a most alarming condition, because where large numbers of women gather together it is quite likely some of those who practise this occasional prostitution will be members of that company, exposing the innocent to contamination and thus adding constantly to the number of social outcasts.

The question of the white slave traffic received a great deal of attention from the Commission. We were under the impression, from what had been stated in public, and I think the ladies who inaugurated this investigation were of that opinion, that the white slave traffic existed to a large extent in Toronto, and was linked up with other sections of that traffic in this country and in the United States. We did not discover evidence to justify that assumption to any extent that what might be called white slavery exists in this community. (Hear, hear.) We found one young girl kept in what was really confinement, and used for immoral purposes by a woman, but speaking generally, as an organized traffic in girls sent from one place to another, we did not find evidence to justify the statement that such traffic exists here.

The most loathsome discovery we made was in connection with massage parlors, where women are the practitioners and men the patients. I can't trust myself to describe the conditions, they were so indescribably horrible. The evidence put before us was nauseating, we could not sit and listen to or read it without feeling that effect. That was the only session of the Commission from which the ladies were excluded, and it is well they were. We are certain that there is no excuse for the public press of the city to publish advertisements inviting men to massage parlors; nor that any public massage parlors where women operate upon men, except in connection with hospitals or under strict medical supervision should be allowed. We think that should be stamped out, as it is just an invitation to immorality, and certainly not creditable to a city like this. (Applause.)

Now as to the medical aspects of the report—I am trying to put before you just a brief outline of the conditions, not to alarm you, but to show you there is something still to be done. (Hear, hear.) Might I read from the report of the Medical Committee—Dr. Hastings, Dr. Young and Dr. Amyot are the

members of that committee—a quotation from Sir Malcolm Morris regarding ignorance as to the prevalence of syphilitic diseases:

"There must no longer be silence. The nation has been asleep while the enemy has been sowing his tares. It is a monstrous anomaly that the State should enforce the notification of many infectious diseases, take charge of the insane, inspect workshops and factories and in a thousand other ways stretch out a long arm to safeguard the health of the community—and yet not lift a finger to protect the nation from such a devastating pestilence, which, more ruthless than the destroying angel who slew the firstborn, smites daily the babe unborn."

In regard to the prevalence of syphilis in the community, let me read from the report of the Medical Committee of the Commission, which is not the statement of the Commission simply as a whole but of experts who know what they are talking about:

"It must be apparent, then, that in point of prevalence these diseases vastly overshadow all other infectious diseases, both acute and chronic. It is a conservative estimate to say that fully one-eighth of all human disease and suffering comes from this source. Moreover, the incidence of these diseases falls most heavily upon the young, during the most active and productive period of life."

Regarding blindness, the committee says:

"It is further estimated that 80 per cent. of the ophthalmia which blots out the eyes of babies, and 20 to 25 per cent. of all blindness, is caused by gonorrhoeal infection, while syphilis is transmitted to the offspring in full virulence. Fortunately, 60 to 80 per cent. of all children infected with this disease die before being born; but unfortunately many come into the world with the marks of death upon them. Those that finally survive are the subjects of degenerating changes and organic defects which may be transmitted to the third generation."

In regard to conditions in Toronto, here is an indication of what those conditions really are:

"Of the total number of cases admitted to one of the Toronto hospitals from August 11th to December 1st, 1913, in all 412, it was proved by the Wasserman reaction that 180 had syphilis. According to occupation, the incidence was: professional class, 7 per cent.; business class, 23 per cent.; mechanical class, 17 per cent.; working class, made up of barbers, butchers, cigar-makers, chauffeurs, etc., 6 per cent.; servants and domestics, 6 per cent.;

laboring class, 24 per cent.; women and children living at home, 17 per cent.

The result of tests at another Toronto hospital during three months was: Of the 286 public ward cases, 158 men and 180 women—57.7 per cent. of the men gave a positive reaction, 37.25 per cent. a negative reaction, and 5.1 per cent. doubtful; of the women, 64.5 per cent. gave a positive reaction and 21.6 per cent. a negative.

For all cases taken by routine, in three months the reaction was: Of 76 men admitted, 47.3 per cent. gave a positive reaction, 48.7 per cent. a negative, and 3.19 per cent. doubtful; of the women admitted, there was a still larger percentage—73 per cent. positive, 21 per cent. negative and 5.4 per cent. doubtful.

Toronto is, therefore, not escaping the ravages of these scourges."

So that you can say, from 40 to 50 per cent. of the people who go into the hospitals of this city for other treatment have this awful disease attached to them. So we need not hug to ourselves the fond delusion that there is no need to improve the moral conditions of this city, which boasts of its being "Good."

With regard to the law and its enforcement, we found absolutely no indication anywhere of collusion between the police as a body and immorality in the city of Toronto. (Applause.) Those who practise immorality are afraid of the policemen; they know they intend to enforce the law. At the same time, we have some comments to make which we should like the police department to consider, and which we think the public should know.

First, according to the law, prostitution is a crime in Canada, not according to the by-laws of any city, or the law of any province, but according to the fundamental criminal law of the land; so any question of toleration or segregation is out of the question on a matter of law. (Hear, hear.) Because of that, it is not legal to segregate, but only to suppress—absolute, unquestioned, continued suppression is just as obligatory as in the case of any other crime. (Hear, hear.) The policy of toleration is being generally given up where it has been tried. I know of no city, where it has been investigated by a reputable committee of citizens, where segregation has been approved. The policy of toleration is not only illegal, but does not represent Canadian public sentiment, and should not be practised.

Let me just call your attention to what we found out as to the attitude of the Police Department. We asked the Chief

Constable to make a statement respecting the attitude of the Police Commissioners. We were always treated politely, but never with extreme cordiality—the enthusiasm of the Chief Constable was always under good control respecting the Commission (Laughter)—and he referred us to reports of the Police Department from time to time during these proceedings. To quote from these reports is therefore to do him or the Department no injustice. In the report of 1907, it is stated:

“The number of these places vary from time to time, but is not allowed to multiply to an undue extent, nor are they tolerated, in localities where their presence is obnoxious.”

I would like the Chief Constable to tell me what sort of places he means where they are not “obnoxious!” It is just as obnoxious to have houses of prostitution among the poor as among the rich! That is what we stand for. (Hear, hear.). For the year 1908:

“Houses of ill fame and disorderly houses have been visited and prosecuted whenever the circumstances justified such action, the effect being to break them up for the time and scatter the inmates.”

For the years 1909, 1910 and 1911 similar statements are made; in the report for the latter year it is stated:

“Solicitation on the streets is not noticeable to any extent, and the instances that do occur are not in the residential districts.” And so on down to the year 1914, in the report for which year it is stated:

“The social evil, in so far as the law can be applied, has received the energetic attention of the police, and the prosecutions show a marked increase.”

This is the position which the Commission takes, in the language of the Commission itself:

“The position that this Commission takes, as already indicated, is that prostitution being, under the laws of this country, a crime, should be treated precisely as any other crime, and that criminals of this class should be dealt with by the police just as should the criminals of any other class. Now, it would be difficult to imagine of the head of the Police Force reporting that pickpockets were not allowed to multiply “to any undue extent,” or that assaults to the person were not “tolerated in localities where their occurrence was obnoxious,” or that good judgment had been exercised to prevent thieves from increasing in numbers or becoming unduly obnoxious.”

I think you can see the point of this. (Laughter.)

As to the question of education. Sex education, as it is called, received a great deal of attention. We were not unani-

mous in regard to the introduction of distinctively sex education in the public schools. We found several places where they had tried it that had found it not altogether satisfactory. Yet we did feel there should be something done to put into the mind and thought of young people of every age the dangers which they would meet when they grew up and went out into the world. We don't believe that ignorance and virtue are necessarily associated. (Hear, hear.) Intelligent knowledge of the body and the laws of health should be given to every boy and girl in the community. The public school is the natural channel through which that information should be imparted, but it is a very large question. We are of the opinion that the Board of Education should consider the question whether it is not desirable to appoint one man and one woman, preferably medical people, competent, and pre-eminently people of high moral purpose and of sympathy with boys and girls, who know how to impart knowledge, to impart sex education and give such knowledge as may safeguard the young. We recognize that for very young children it is not desirable or necessary, but for boys and girls of high school and university age it is not only proper but obligatory that those in charge of education should see that these things are put before young people in such a way as we suggest. We think the clergy of the city should see that this question is put before the people. We found a low moral tone in the community: people doing things and speaking in a certain way, enjoying entertainments of a certain sort; which led us to believe, not as religious people,—we were of all religions. Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, all together,—but as interested in the moral welfare of the city we felt that there must be some way in which the great moral strength and leadership that is in the religious bodies of this city, in the different churches and synagogues, there must be some way in which that great influence could be brought to bear, some way possible to bring it to bear upon all the growing youth of the city. Therefore we referred it to the Board of Education and the ministers particularly to bridge over the chasm between the churches and the public school, and so work together to stamp out this evil at its very source. And we think the publication of pamphlets of a certain size and description by the Board of Health could be undertaken.

As to changes in the law: we think there should be some changes made. Take, for instance, the fining for prostitution: we found that the average fine imposed on prostitutes was \$8.50 for those in the professional business. Actually in some cases where the woman was unable to pay the fine, time was given her and she went out and earned the money

and came back and paid it! (A voice: "Shame!") Keepers of houses of ill fame have been fined on the average \$35; you know such a fine would be no deterrent to the keeper of a disorderly house in a great city like this. Prostitutes who are arrested are fined an average of \$8.50 each. Such a penalty is by no means adequate. As to frequenters, under the law a man who is only discovered in such a house may be punished, but the records show that such men are frequently let go scot free. We think that should be changed, and that not fines but imprisonment should be the penalty for keepers and frequenters. If an indeterminate sentence is imposed upon a woman who has practised as a keeper or an inmate of a disorderly house, she should be under proper medical supervision and inspection, so that if diseased she can be segregated until that disease is cured. We can imagine the horrible condition if a woman full of disease is turned loose in the community. There is nothing so dangerous. (Applause.) We think these suggestions should be followed up by the people, and that they will be when they know what the situation really is. (Applause.)

We think the Police Department should be more strict in law enforcement. I don't want you to think for one moment that we have taken an attitude that is hostile to the Police Department; we are sympathetic in our criticisms. We recognize the splendid character of the men who are at the head of that force, and of the members of the force. I don't know of any city where their equals could be found. At the same time, we think that they should do more. We want them to take up the question and see if they could not do more.

As to the inspection of plays. I see the Chairman of the Committee of "the Forty Thieves," as they were called (Laughter) who took up the question in general of the inspection of certain places of amusement in this city. We discovered, as a result of the work done by that Committee, that the moral conditions in the burlesque and vaudeville houses was very much better than it was a few years ago. I think we should say this, and I am glad to pay this tribute to the work of that Committee. But we do not think that the method is right which is followed in respect to plays. If a play is put on and then the censor finds it objectionable, the persons are forbidden to repeat it; we think the persons should be prosecuted the moment they put it on; otherwise it will not deter people from putting such plays on. They do cut out a great deal when they come to Canada from the United States, but not enough. The censor tells them what to cut out, but we think

the Police Department should take a stricter attitude on this matter.

I assure you the task we have had before us for the last two years have been very disagreeable indeed. We have met from week to week, every week; have had these reports before us; have tried to find out what the moral conditions of the city are. We congratulate you and the city of Toronto, which is far above many cities of its size with respect to its moral condition. Still we urge every man to work more vigorously, earnestly, and constantly, to apply remedies, until the conditions are far better than they are. (Applause.)