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## VENEREAL DISEASES IN THE DOMINION.

SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH (THE HON. G. W. RUSSELL) IN SUPPORT OF THE SECOND READING OF THE WAR REGULATIONS BILL IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, ON WEDNESDAY, 19TH JULY, 1916.

*Laid on the Table of the House of Representatives by Leave.*

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THE HON. MR. RUSSELL (Minister of Public Health).—Sir, I understand the member for Christchurch East has desired that I should speak, following the Hon. Mr. Herdman, so that the House may hear my proposals regarding the treatment of venereal diseases at once. If it is the wish of the House I am prepared to proceed.

Hon. MEMBERS.—Hear, hear.

The Hon. Mr. RUSSELL.—Sir, one of the proposals in clause 3 is that power shall be given to the Governor in Council to make regulations for the suppression of prostitution and the prevention of venereal disease. Sir, the importance of this subject as affecting (1) men enlisting for military service, (2) the civilian population, (3) the women of the country, and (4) the children of the future is so great that I make no apology for placing before the House a fully considered proposal with regard to the treatment of it, this being a portion of my responsibility as Minister of Public Health of the Dominion. That venereal disease is rampant in this country may be proved by the following facts: During the six months ended April, 1916, eighty-eight soldiers were admitted to Featherston Camp and 191 soldiers to Trentham Camp suffering from gonorrhœa, a total of 279. During the same period three were admitted at Featherston and four at Trentham suffering from the more severe disease of syphilis. Other forms of venereal disease at Trentham accounted for six other patients, making a total of ninety-one at Featherston and 201 at Trentham, a grand total for six months of 292. Of those treated at Trentham eleven were returned soldiers. A return recently furnished to me showed that at a certain quarantine station in one of our harbours there were then segregated ninety soldiers, who, having caught venereal disease, mostly at the camps, had been segregated for treatment there, and were being held until they were cured of this disease and could safely be returned among the civilian population.

An Hon. MEMBER.—Did not most of them come from Egypt?

Hon. Mr. RUSSELL.—Certainly not. I am sorry to say nearly the whole of them were from the camps. I hope honourable members will allow me to continue, and subsequently I will endeavour to deal with any new points at a later stage of the debate. Of the soldiers who had been segregated in quarantine practically a few only were returned soldiers. The whole of the others had been sent from the camps. The question I put to the House and to the country is this: whether these men who are suffering should be segregated, and the women who have communicated venereal disease to them should be allowed to remain at large pursuing their nefarious traffic, and communicating disease to other foolish men who may come within their meshes. I do not for one moment suppose that our soldiers are any more susceptible to the evils caused by diseased prostitutes than are the civilian population. The certainty is that what is going on amongst our soldiers is also going on amongst civilians. Whereas the men in camp are medically examined from time to time and brought under the control of medical officers, the civilians who have become diseased are free to pursue their evil course, and may proceed in turn to communicate disease to women with whom they may come into sexual contact. Therefore in stating what has happened to the soldier population I have merely lifted one corner of the veil which covers the hideous cancer which is eating into the body politic of this country. Nor is New Zealand worse than any other country. Probably on account of the general healthiness of this country it is a great deal better than the average of civilized countries. Let me say it is interesting to note that venereal disease was unknown in Europe until the time when Christopher Columbus returned to Spain from America in the year 1493. It is generally believed that some of those with him brought this form of disease back from the New World. At any rate, it began in Spain and swept over