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FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

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A Woman's Question.

At the annual meeting of the Gisborne Women's Political Association, on Oct. 13th, the President, Mrs Seivwright (who is also Vice-President of the Women's National Council), gave the following address:—

"Ladies and Gentlemen,—I earnestly trust this is the last time I shall have to bring before the Association the un-savoury subject which has dragged the purest men and women of England through its odious details, and hung over them for more than a quarter of a century—in Sir James Stanfield's words—'a weight as much as any human being could bear.' I have read that Mrs John Stuart Mill's young daughter used sometimes to exclaim, when anything distressing was mentioned, 'Oh! mother, it is too dreadful to know of!' 'My child,' she would calmly reply, 'what others have to bear you can at least endure to know of!' It seems to me, further, that when we can endure to know, the pain such knowledge brings will usually drive us to do what in us lies to resist the evil. The great trouble is that so few people know—so few people want to know—the seamy side of life. And this is emphatically the case with the whole miserable story of the passing and repeal in England of a measure known as the C.D. Act. I have no hesitation in saying that did men and women in the least understand what this really

is, not a woman, no, nor righteous man, would be found in this land whose soul would not rise in open revolt at the awful cruelty and degradation involved. These laws, 'which were deemed to be unjust in their dealings towards women indistinction from men, a direct incentive to profligacy, and

A HYGIENIC FAILURE, were repealed at home in 1884. It was found, however, that in India matters were going on as usual, and the friends of purity secured the passing of a resolution in the House of Commons in 1888, and again in 1890, emphasising its former action. All this notwithstanding, it became known that *under another name* the C.D. Acts were being enforced there, and two well-known American missionaries were induced to go to India, personally to investigate, and report. On their return to London in June, 1893, these ladies reported that the worst fears of the Abolitionists had been realised. They had visited ten cantonments, every one of which contained a Lock Hospital, and they found them by simply directing their cabman to drive them to the Lock Hospital, and he knew exactly which they wanted. In five of these cantonments the women were all gathered under one roof, only a few living outside. In others they were scattered in different parts of the cantonment, or again all gathered into one bazaar—long street or lane, but under different roofs. Each house was numbered with huge

numbers 15 inches in diameter. *These numbers corresponded to their registered numbers on the Lock Hospital list.* The 'Chaklas,' as they are called, are closely guarded. The lady visitors asked some of the women 'Why do you submit to these regulations that you hate so much?' They said, 'What can we do? Where can we go? We cannot cut our throats.'

'OH! THAT WE COULD DIE.'

Having broken their caste by the life they had led, their friends would not receive them, and no one would give them work. I am informed on good authority that these women are for the most part recruited from the illegitimate daughters of our British officers, and that they have a horror of the life; hundreds of them committing suicide to be rid of it. From a London paper of June 22, I clipped the following:—'Pundita Ramabai, whose training-home for Indian girl widows is well known, writes a sad account of the temptations of want and loneliness by which the poor Indian girl children, deprived by the famine of their natural protectors, or driven from home by want of food, are being decoyed. Crowds of these unhappy orphans, or deserted children, are wandering about half-starved. They go to the relief camps for the means to sustain life, and on the road she says, wicked men and women entice them by offering sweetmeats and other kinds of food, clothing, and promises to take them to nice