

MAKING VICE EASY.

THE WAR OFFICE AND MAISONS
TOLERES.

(By Miss Maude Royden.)

I have been astonished to find how many people there are who do not understand what the system we are protesting against really implies both for men and women, and exactly what is our objection to it. Dr Helen Wilson has told us that by all who know it is admitted to be a sanitary failure, to be in practice of no use. I want to make clear what is this system of regulated vice, the kind of house against whose existence within bounds for British soldiers we are now protesting, and what induces people to adopt these futile methods. Let us remind you that they are said to be adopted on behalf of us women. We are continually told that it is on behalf of the innocent that these measures are resorted to; that venereal disease always goes up during or immediately after a war, and that it is for the sake, especially of innocent women and children, that it is necessary to try these measures in order to keep soldiers from infection. I should like every woman in this country to understand on whose behalf these measures are being urged, and at what cost that protection, if it were a protection—which it is not—is given to her. I know many women in this country are willing to accept this protection, but I think they hardly realise what is the fate of the women who are sacrificed for them.

The system we protest against is what is known as regulated vice. The assumption is that unmarried men and men away from their wives cannot be expected to be continent, and that therefore they will go to other women. Those women in the nature of things very often become diseased. I say become diseased, because every woman suffering from venereal disease has been infected by some man. Some of the women, then, a terribly large number, become infected. If a man who is not diseased goes to them, he becomes infected, and he may return home and infect his wife, and pass on the disease to his children. Mr Macpherson, Under Secretary of State for War, in the House of Commons recently said: "He was not at all sure, human nature being what it is, that it was such a bad thing to have certain houses in which

women were registered by the police—and kept clean"; that is to say, are examined at frequent intervals by the doctors, removed if they are found to be diseased, and guaranteed healthy if the disease is not discovered. In a tolerated house, such as that in Layeux-sur-Mer, the women are all kept under strict medical supervision, and if disease is discovered in them they are removed and treated, and other women take their places. This house at Layeux is within bounds for British soldiers; in it are fifteen women, some of whom appear to be quite young, and it is visited by 360 men every day. Therefore each of the fifteen women receives between twenty and twenty-five men every day. The sort of lives these girls lead does not require any description from me; but the effect it has upon them—to be not only prostituted, which is horrible, but registered as prostitutes and medically examined at intervals in order to be guaranteed fit for prostitution, I should like to describe in the words, not of those who criticise, but of those who defend the system. Here is a description by a French doctor, who was officially employed in administering the system, and defended it:—"The obligation of these medical examinations is prodigiously degrading, debasing, and terrible. The system regularises and legitimates the sorrowful industry of the prostitute. It is, in fact, the sinister stroke by which the woman is cut off from Society, after which she ceases to belong to herself, and becomes the chattel (or thing) of the administration." Another writes like this: "The inscription of the woman's name is purely an administrative act. . . . None the less does it inflict on the woman a patent of infamy and degradation, and exercises a disastrous and fatal influence on her future life." Dr. Mireur says: "The girl of the brothel is the type par excellence of the public woman. She is the modern slave who, having sacrificed her personality, has become the tool of the brothel-keeper and the property of the public."

Again I remind you that this gentleman was defending the system. Another doctor says: "The authorities have here, as in other business transactions, the right to see that the merchandise delivered is of a quality demanded by the customer." I do not know if it is necessary to point

out how inevitable it becomes that a woman who is treated as the "chattel or thing of administration" is in a paragraph or two described as the merchandise which must be supplied according to the demands of the customer." "When once the woman has entered the brothel," says another, "she bids adieu to heaven, to liberty, to honour, and to the world." These are the descriptions of the people who for the most part know the administration through having themselves taken part in it, and who believe it to be necessary. That is the price at which our supposed protection is bought for us—the price of women like themselves.

Dr. Helen Wilson, who is not given to exaggerated statements, has analysed the figures of prostitution, and she points out that the large majority of women on the streets come from bad houses, and are between sixteen and eighteen, sometimes younger, when they take to this life. A girl under eighteen, brought up in a bad house, does not, because she has become a prostitute, deserve to be treated as though she were no longer a human being. The result of regulation on her is described very vividly by the chaplain to the Lock Hospital, Westbourne Park, London, who some time ago, when a Commission on the subject was sitting, wrote: "It is obvious to anyone almost at first sight that the Government patients, that is, the women in tolerated houses, are horribly alike, at one dead, dull, level. The ordinary patients, that is, the women of the streets, are very mixed, some of more and some of less refined appearance; but the Government patients are brutalised beyond description in manner and in appearance." It is not difficult to see why. If you treat a woman worse than you would dare treat an animal, no wonder she becomes horribly brutalised in manner and appearance. A woman who becomes like this soon ceases to be attractive to the men who are induced in one way or another only to visit the regulated houses. If the women there are "brutalised beyond description," they will prefer to go to other houses, where the women are at least a grade higher; and since the whole object of the system is to get men to go to the regulated houses, very quickly the places of these women have to be supplied by others. At this moment there are 15 women—