

The White Ribbon

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

VOL. 24.—No. 288.

WELLINGTON, N.Z., JUNE 18, 1919.

2s 6d Per Annum, Post Free.
Single Copy, 3d.

AN OUTSPOKEN CORONER.

The following letter appeared in the "Stratford Evening Post":—

A SOCIAL QUESTION.

"As an outcome of a recent inquest at which he was Acting-Coroner, Mr C. D. Sole has forwarded a letter to the Minister of Internal Affairs, of which the following is a copy: 'The Hon. Minister of Internal Affairs, Wellington. Dear Sir,—At a recent enquiry into the death of an illegitimate child, the jury passed a rider that I should communicate with you in regard to the share of the stigma the father should bear. First: Would it be possible to raise the age of consent to 18 years? Second: Would it be possible to revise the Criminal Code so that "mental defective females" could be classed as under the age of consent? From many years' experience on the Hospital Board, we find feeble-minded females become a victim to the lust of a class of "man," and they bring children into the State that are a constant care and burden to all concerned, and will perpetuate their species unless the law is amended. The "man," as a rule, is received into society, attends social gatherings, and is looked on by some as a fairly decent man—probably a more contemptible blackguard is not in existence—he destroys the moral life of the girl, brings untold sorrow on the parents and relatives, and finally marries some girl, who, in his eyes, must be like Caesar's wife—clean and above suspicion. Would you be prepared in all cases of proved parentage to amend the law so that the child shall be registered in the name of the father and the registration Gazetted, so that the father shall bear his share as well as the

woman? The days are at hand when we want big men to deal with big events, and as a lesson of the War, we want the world made better for the coming generations. See that you men who hold the key to the moral legislation of this country give the women of this country a good chance, and make life better for them. Why should the woman pay every time, and become a social outcast, while the man goes scot free, and is still regarded as a respectable citizen. Trusting you will give this your favourable consideration. Yours obediently.—C. D. SALE, J. P., Acting-Coroner."

How refreshing to find a jury intelligent and courageous enough to add a rider to their verdict demanding that a father bear his share of responsibility for the death of his illegitimate child. The Coroner's letter does him much credit, and his plea for justice to the weaker sex is a brave protest against our dual standard of morals. Whenever an illegitimate child dies from neglect (either criminal or careless), then the fact that the father has made no provision for the birth and care of his child should be taken as evidence that he is an accessory to the neglect, and he should stand beside the mother in the dock.

Public opinion should scorn the coward who begets a child and leaves it to the charity of others, and the law should force such men to shoulder their responsibility as parents. The fact that parents are unwedded should not be allowed to lessen their responsibility to their child, and a man should be forced to train, educate, and provide **equally** for all his children, whether born in wedlock or not. It has been truly said "There are no illegitimate parents." There is no

reason why the father's name should not be registered as well as the mother's. It is only just that it should be so. When our M.P's. discussed this suggestion once it was turned down in the House. This was the style of argument used against it, viz., that it was well known the fathers of many of these children were married men, and it would not be advisable to place their names on registers where their wives might see them and discover their unfaithfulness. Not one word of protest was made about the mother being pilloried upon the register. Why should the woman pay every time, and the man go scot free? Well, men have made the laws to suit themselves. When women have seats in our Parliament, they will consider the rights of the child of the first importance, and our laws will not be framed to let evil men ruin girls of 16 and cast them and their children upon the mercy of a cold world.

Would it be possible to raise the age of consent to 18 years? Why not? The law protects the property of every boy and girl until the age of 21 years. Is person less valuable than property? Apparently the law thinks so. The W.C.T.U. has always maintained that the person of every youth and maiden should be protected as long as their property, viz., to 21 years. At the same time we would gladly welcome the raising the age of consent to 18 years as a step in the right direction, and believe this would do away with much evil.

Re mental defectives, these girls of weak intellect, the easy prey of any scoundrel, should be protected by the State. All mental and moral degenerates should be kept on farm colonies, where they can live in wholesome, healthy surroundings, and be