

THE ABOLITION OF CHILD SLAVERY IN HONGKONG.

The "International Woman Suffrage News" for April contains some particulars with regard to the system of "mui tsai," as practised in the British colony of Hongkong, whereby the children of the poor are sold at a very tender age by their parents, and become practically the property of their owners. This system has been called by the British Government of Hongkong "adoption," but is in fact nothing less than slavery, seeing that the unfortunate child is treated in all respects like a slave, being deprived of all individual rights and liberties, sold and re-sold, exploited without reserve, made to work without pay, and is absolutely in the power of her owner, who can do exactly what he or she likes with her, the only difference being that whereas a slave is one whose servitude is life-long, that of a "mui tsai" is supposed, theoretically at least, to cease when she attains womanhood. The inclusion in the document of sale of such clauses as "to be disposed of as the payer thinks fit," and "no enquiry of her whereabouts, or in the event of her death, is permitted," clearly shows that the question of her life or death is absolutely in the hands of her owner, and it is an undeniable fact that she is liable to all kinds of ill-treatment. It is also frequently heard that a "mui tsai," after being ravished by her master or members of his household, may be discarded with or without provision.

There has been much agitation for several years, and especially during the last eighteen months or more, for the abolition of this system, the only way of removing the evil being by the cancelling of these documents of sale by the Government and the refusal to recognise their validity. The "Vote" of March 31st tells us that "In regard to the system of child slavery prevailing in Hongkong, the Colonial Office, on more than one occasion, pleaded that the system was a Chinese system, and in the best interests of the Chinese population of that colony. But people in England knew that it was entirely against the traditions of this country to bolster up child slavery anywhere on British soil, because under no conditions could we tolerate child slavery in Great Britain itself. Continuous pressure has been brought to bear upon the Colonial Office for the prevention of this cruel practice. In February last

a meeting was held in London, under the chairmanship of the Viscountess Gladstone, when a resolution was passed asking that a representative Commission of men and women should visit Hongkong and confer with the Chinese and European communities 'in order to devise some practical scheme for preventing the buying and selling of human beings as slaves.'

We learn from the last number of the "International Woman Suffrage News" that this agitation has at last produced some effect. In reply to questions asked in the House of Commons, Mr Churchill states: "I have received a telegram from the Governor of Hongkong stating that his Government, in consultation with the societies for the protection and abolition of 'mui tsai,' will draw up a scheme for the abolition of the system as soon as possible. Both the Government and the Societies point out that this process must take some little time. I have directed the issue, without delay, of a proclamation making it clear to employers and employed that the status of 'mui tsai,' as understood in China, will not in future be recognised in Hongkong, and in particular, that no compulsion of any kind to prevent girls over the age of 12 leaving their adopted parents at any time will be allowed." After dwelling on the difficulties and dangers of making this change too suddenly, he concludes: "Although it is obvious that an old-established custom cannot be altered at a moment's notice, I desire to make it clear that both the Governor and I are determined to effect the abolition of the system at the earliest practicable date, and I have indicated to the Governor that I expect the change to be carried out within the year."

All right-minded men and women will rejoice that this long-standing system of cruelty is to be put an end to. It is unthinkable that slavery of any kind should be tolerated in any country under British rule, and we sincerely hope that Mr Churchill's promise will be speedily fulfilled, and that this year will see the liberation of these unfortunate little slave girls.

Commissioner Haynes says: "It has not been proven that there is any connection between the dope habit and alcohol; neither has the 18th Amendment caused an increase of addicts.

WITH OUR ORGANISERS.

Dear White Ribboners,—

We had a good meeting at Leigh, although we were all disappointed that Mrs Grigg, the President, was unable to be with us, owing to illness. Mrs Grigg is much loved by the members of her Union, and it was good to hear the frequent words of appreciation of her ability and tact, the two essentials of a good leader.

From Leigh I went to Warkworth and am glad to be able to report that a strong branch of the Union was organised. We had a particularly well-attended inaugural meeting, when the Revs. Poole, Richards, and myself spoke.

From Warkworth I went to Papanui, but although a number of members were secured here, I was unable to organise, owing to the fact that office-bearers could not be found. A well-attended meeting was held. Pukekohe was next visited, and a strong branch of the Union organised. Mrs Neal and Mrs Pirrett, President and Treasurer of Auckland Union, were present, and I was glad to have their help. Mrs Neal and myself addressed the meeting. Opotiki was next visited. I had little idea of the treat in store for me when the car left Rotorua for Opotiki on Tuesday morning. The scenery was magnificent, with the beautiful lakes, mountains, and bush. We motored through the most beautiful bush I have ever seen, and could see Mt. Tarawera and White Island in the distance.

I was very appreciative of the good roads of Opotiki for cycling, after the roads in the Northern districts.

Mrs Thompson, President of the Union, with whom I stayed, very kindly entertained the members of the Executive and a few friends at her home to give us the opportunity of meeting and chatting about the work. Another meeting of the Union was held yesterday, when about 40 were present, and I was asked to speak particularly about the Revenue and other phases of the drink question. Most of my time in Opotiki was spent in trying to influence the woman's vote and in interesting people in the work of the Union. A number of women who had previously voted Continuance promised to vote Prohibition at the coming poll, and several joined the Union. A goodly number of new members linked up. Mrs Thompson is a member of the School Committee. For several weeks