

Now remember that the Night Court is open to the public and is *always* solidly filled on one side with men, usually the lowest of their kind. The other night I was there when a girl was so sentenced, and, not able to endure in silence, I stood up and called out in loud tones: "Where is the man who has infected this girl with a contagious and communicable disease; for if she has gonorrhoea it is because some man has infected her."

I was led before the judge and ordered out of the court, but not before I had said to him again in a loud tone, "*Is what I ask not just?*" Oh, what women have had to endure since the world began!

A woman lawyer is in charge of the legal fight to prove the clause unconstitutional (it really is so; a good many of the magistrates admit confidentially that it is). She wants a man with a big reputation to make the argument. *Four* have crawled away when she has asked them to do so. Is not our boasted chivalry a lovely thing? That is the reason of the delay in the legal fight; but when the Legislation opens in January there will be a big fight for repeal of that clause.

The whole Night Court is an abomination and ought not to exist. It only *does* exist to give jobs to political retainers and "climbers." That may sound like a reckless statement on my part, but I have knowledge of facts at the back of it. The affiliated organisations of women have passed the Resolutions, as you see, about the Health Department.

I know that abroad there is a good deal of fear that what is called there "notification" would also bring compulsory "detention" in its train, and the French Extra-Parliamentary Commission fought very shy of making venereal diseases reportable to Health Boards, but in our country we are all convinced that it will be the only real protection against such class legislation as we have in the Payn Bill.

In the first place, our Health Department in New York City already has almost unlimited autocratic power. It has at present the power, if it chose to exercise it, of making venereal disease reportable, like other contagion. It has never exercised this power through doubt of public support. If it began exercising it, as it has begun to do with tuberculosis, without distinction of class or sex, there would be no *compulsory* hospital treatment, except, it might be, in some very exceptionally bad case. Even scarlet fever, diphtheria, measles, are not compelled to go to hospital unless they wish to go, but they are kept under observation. No tuberculosis cases are forced into hospital, yet the Health Department has the absolute power of entering any home and carrying off any individual who is a menace to the public health. What they do in tuberculosis is exactly what should be, and would be, done for venereal diseases—namely, they know where the cases are and how many; they declare the necessity for larger facilities for treatment; they open special dispensaries and new sanatoria and insist on more hospital room; they issue continuous leaflets of instruction and information on preventability and avoidability, showing that there is

no danger in the *presence* of such patients, but only in careless or ignorant disregard of contagious material; and in every way carry on an educational campaign.

The French express unwillingness to have even tuberculosis made a reportable disease, but here it has had *only* good effects, to do so and has established a large, truly *preventive* movement. We can trust our Health Department, but not our legislatures and courts, and this experience has shown that we cannot trust our professional philanthropists and reformers, all of whom are upholding this horrible legislation.

But in one way it is doing good: it is arousing a wide agitation and will make people think.

L. L. DOCK.

Women's Prison Association.

The Women's Prison Association, U.S.A., called a conference of all the organisations of women in Greater New York on Friday, October 14th, to consider Clause 79 of the Inferior Courts Bill. At this meeting reports were read, from which we hope to give some extracts next week, and the Resolutions here shown were adopted.

RESOLUTIONS PASSED AT THE CONFERENCE.

"Whereas, the germs causing the venereal diseases are no longer matters of uncertainty, but have been perfectly and conclusively demonstrated by medical science, and

"Whereas, the favourable breeding conditions and modes of transmission of these germs are also thoroughly understood by the medical profession, and

"Whereas, the method of attempting to check the spread of venereal diseases by systematically hunting down certain classes of women only, has survived from a period when the specific germs were yet undiscovered and their modes of transmission therefore not certainly demonstrable, and

"Whereas, a legislative mandate to continue so crude and barbarous a method of attacking any infectious or contagious disease is an offence against scientific truth and an indignity to the medical profession, an insult to women, and a slur upon the intelligence of the public; therefore be it

"*Resolved*, that Health Boards should place the venereal diseases upon the same status as all other contagious, infectious, or communicable diseases; should take the same measures against them, irrespective of class or sex, as are applied in the prevention of all other contagious, infectious, or communicable diseases, and should conduct in respect to them the same policy of instruction of the public as to the preventability of these diseases as is now conducted in respect to others. And be it further

"*Resolved*, that public authorities should make ample provision for the full and sufficient free, voluntary treatment of patients suffering from venereal diseases.

All these resolutions are capable of general application.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)