

CONFERENCE ON RECOMMENDATIONS OF ROYAL COMMISSION ON VENEREAL DISEASE.

There is no more important subject before the public to-day than that on which the Royal Commission has lately made Recommendations—namely, Venereal Disease. Certainly, there cannot be one which bristles with more difficulties.

A Conference of the Women's Local Government Society was held at the house of Lord Meath, on July 10th, to discuss this burning question. The basis for discussion was presented to the Conference in the form of resolutions which affirmed the necessity of the presence of women on Boards of Management which undertake, with the assistance of grants from the Exchequer, the diagnosis or treatment of venereal disease. Further, that the public should be enlightened as to the need for women on the Boards of Management of voluntary hospitals, and to the ever-increasing need for the co-operation of women with men as members of County and County Borough Councils.

Dr. Helen Wilson pointed out that at present there was no suggestion that new bodies or buildings should be created, but rather that existing organisations should carry out the work. She pleaded that the patients should be treated as real hospital cases and not as criminals. There were two main lines: 1. Dealing with infected persons; 2. Remedying the conditions which brought about the disease. The first of these only was dealt with by the Royal Commission. Complete isolation was not practicable, as the treatment lasted too long a time. Expert opinion was against compulsory notification. The only suggestion of compulsion in the Report was that Poor Law Guardians should have the power to detain known prostitutes. Dr. Wilson pointed out that if that were carried out, women would not put themselves in the position to be detained. Much better results could be obtained by persuasion. It was also a mistake to imagine that known prostitutes were the most dangerous. Young girls just beginning the life were as much and more a source of danger. This was a work in which men and women must co-operate.

Mr. Maurice Gregory, whose experience of the work is very great, began by saying that it needed a great many women of good will and sound common sense. He spoke in glowing terms of the excellent nursing at the London Lock Hospital, and of the good results obtained. They were skilled, kind and patient women, who worked there, with such careful attention. It was a mistake to lay too much stress on specifics, and much more was due to the enormous value of good nursing. He and many other speakers deprecated the miserable aspect of many lock wards, and said, under no circumstances, should disease be punished.

Miss A. C. Gibson was also of opinion that these cases should be given different surroundings;

they should be happy and pleasant. There were still some old-fashioned nurses who worked from a different motive than that of earning a living, who would undertake this work, who would help and encourage these patients and nurse them with skill and tenderness.

Dr. Gertrude Keith said these women should be treated sympathetically; it was not to be expected that, after a bright, gay life of supper parties, theatres and fine clothes, they would remain where their surroundings were so unattractive, their clothes so coarse, laundry work for occupation, and singing of hymns their only recreation.

Councillor Edith Sutton spoke of the unwillingness of men at this time to co-opt women on to their Councils; but the women could, at any rate, be rousing their fellow women and see to it that when the work is ready the women are ready too.

Miss Kilgour, M.A., speaking of the need of women on voluntary hospital boards, said a good deal might be done in this direction by women subscribers.

The Chairman, Mr. W. Alexander Coote, in his closing remarks, asked the women to realise that men did not want them either on Boards of Guardians or Borough Councils; they did not mean to lose any chance of a position on public bodies. He asked whether the organisation was quite ready for the work in hand. He spoke of the marvellous change in public opinion, and said that some years back medical opinion was a great drawback to the work, but that now the consensus of opinion was convinced of the necessity of purity.

The Local Government Board will issue instructions this week to all local authorities instituting a new campaign against venereal disease. These order local authorities to arrange with existing hospitals and clinics for free treatment for those suffering from this terrible scourge. Towards the cost the Local Government Board will contribute 75 per cent. and the local authorities the remainder.

A reader in India writes: "Bombay is a great centre just now, and a most interesting place. At St. George's Hospital sick and wounded officers have been taken in from the Gulf for more than a year now. Parts of the Byculla Club and the Taj Mahal Hotel also receive wounded officers, and there are three large war hospitals open. Hospital ships are continually going and coming between this and Mesopotamia and Bombay and Suez *en route* for England. Nurses have been lately arriving from England, but just at present the work is light here. The heat in Bombay has been very great, and at Basra, where some of the nurses from Egypt have gone, it will be much worse. But the most trying work of all is ambulance train duty; the heat when going across India in May is appalling. One wonders if the war will ever end. Cholera has broken out in the Gulf now, so that makes it the more sad."

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