

MISCELLANIES,
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POLITICAL AND SOCIAL.

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WHAT IS PROSTITUTION ?

A Leaflet, of Jan. 1871 perhaps.

PARLIAMENT in 1866 refused to make Prostitution a legal offence, yet proceeded to enact measures which virtually made prostitutes, or women accused of prostitution, outlaws ; measures wholly depriving them of the rights accounted vital for men accused of crime. This despotic enactment is enforced by the police, who interpret the word "prostitute" for themselves, uncontrolled by judges or magistrates, or even by military officers.

There are four classes of women to whom the police apply this very coarse word : *first*, to the mistresses of the soldiers, however faithful each may be to one man ; *secondly*, to young women who have an honest trade, but either under stress of want, or from vanity and the seduction of a false lover, have deviated, whether once or more than once, from entire chastity ; *thirdly*, to women whose right appellation is either "courtezan" or "harlot ;" that is, such women as have no other trade but of their persons, yet try to retain power over themselves, and make selection as to visitors. Such women live in a house or apartment hired by themselves ; prefer to be sought by men, rather than to seek them ; study privacy, and so far as possible, or as long as possible, confine their intimacy to one man. In this class there must be vast diversity ; a few resting so long on one man's purse, as to be undistinguishable from "mistresses ;" others so ill-remunerated, as scarcely to escape the necessity of promiscuous *plying in the street*. To this *fourth* class alone does the appellation prostitute rightly belong, either by etymology, or by ordinary use. It means a woman who *stands in public for sale*. It essentially implies, that she accepts *any* buyer, and in actual use is understood to mean that she frequents *public* places, as the street, the theatres, or certain coffee-houses, drink shops, or dancing rooms, where she can offer herself indiscriminately. The word is the coarsest appellation current for designating a degraded woman.

It is a terrible fact, that a vast number, perhaps a majority, of those to whom this horrid word really applies, are either girls, or were brought into the trade while girls, by no fault of their own ;

and being unacquainted with any means of earning their livelihood, are at the mercy of the brothel-keeper, who houses, feeds, and clothes them, and can turn them half naked into the street, without rebuke from the law. Even so, they struggle out of the trade in great numbers, when they attain womanly age and greater knowledge of the world. Surely they deserve our deepest pity, rather than our contempt. All legal severity ought to fall on the base men and women who make gain of selling them, and in many cases bought them when children of wicked parents or kinsfolk. The proper description of this fourth class is, in numerous cases, *slave-girls*. Righteous law, such as we were used to expect from an English Parliament, would indignantly rescue them from the slave-holder, instead of putting its officers into alliance with him, and winking at his unholy and illegal trade.

On the contrary, Parliament has enacted, that while no *male* citizen can fall under martial law without his own solemn consent, *female* citizens (women or minor girls) are brought under martial law without their own consent, upon the affidavit of a police inspector, who accuses them of that which is *no legal offence* (the being a prostitute), which accusation he is *not* required to substantiate by *proof*; and if the thing come before a magistrate, the magistrate is bound (as a magistrate *professed* after hearing the arguments of a Government advocate) to accept the policeman's affidavit that he believes her to be a prostitute, and further is *bound to summon* her, without judging for himself whether it is reasonable and true. For *men* the Mutiny Act is renewed every year, and, unless renewed, falls to the ground: for *women* a lifelong slavery is enacted. This slavery subjects women to be imprisoned in hospitals, to be poisoned by mercury and caustics, against their will, and to be ruined irreparably by shameful operations, if a surgeon is stupid or his instrument too large. They may declare that he tortures them, but the law rules that that is no concern of theirs, and their protest goes for nothing. The surgeon has only to tell superior authorities that the women are great liars, and that he certainly does not hurt them,—and all is smoothly received. But the public and private report is, that women who go into hospital healthy, come out with ruined health. The law gives the surgeon a pecuniary *interest* in filling the hospitals, and a *power* to force healthy women into them, if only a policeman has fixed the word prostitute on them. Hence faithful mistresses of soldiers, when pregnant or after childbirth, are legally liable to be violated, nay, and are violated, by the

steel tube of the surgeon, *not* because they have any illness, *not* because the shameful process is imagined to be remedial, *but* in order to ascertain whether they are in a fit condition for promiscuous intercourse ! Did ever the wickedest or stupidest of Pagan barbarians make such an enactment ?

These execrable laws a Cabinet which calls itself LIBERAL has in hot haste extended to the Cape of Good Hope, and even to India by a high-handed act of power, as if anxious to excite loathing against the English name, and secure bitter retribution : and now forsooth, abdicating its own responsibility,—as if destitute of common judgment—it appoints a Royal Commission to inquire into *details*, when the *principles* are obviously an outrage on English freedom and right, and primary morality. We denounce the idea of martial law for women under any circumstances whatever. To discard a civil judge and jury is cardinal to these laws, which even on that account only, must be simply repealed.

According to the interpretation of the police, Miss Knollis, mistress to the Duke of Kent, the Queen's father, and mother of Francis Knollis, whom the Duke publicly recognized as his son, was a prostitute, and would have been liable to medical violation. The police pronounce *married* women to be prostitutes, in which case the husband cannot save his wife from these atrocities. Their misinterpretation of the word has been sanctioned by surgeons and magistrates, and has passed without censure by Committees of Parliament, by the War Office and Admiralty, finally by THE QUEEN'S MINISTRY. It probably would not be approved by the Judges, but the law has withdrawn from them all cognizance, and accounts all women over vast areas of the country to be a *Military Population* ! Women who have the comparative merit of seeking privacy and making selections, are persecuted expressly because their trade is *clandestine*, are ferreted out by spies, and are in fact outlawed. A military surgeon is now their sufficient *judge* and *jury*, and may at pleasure make himself their *executioner*, claiming their living carcase for his anatomy and for his arbitrary drugging, exactly as though it were dead. If they resist, they are punishable by solitary imprisonment, with or without hard labour. Thus, the women who try to cover their shame and retain a hope of emerging from this base life, are made criminal for having some modesty, and are pressed down into the deepest depths, into a prostitution more shameless than anything hitherto known in England.

All this mass of hideous impurity, lawlessness, and military tyranny has been copied from the police practice of Paris, where it never received legislative sanction ; a city to which, in consequence, our medical students go to see venereal disease in its worst intensity and widest diffusion ; a city whose moral and physical condition ought to have warned men of common sense against its characteristic practices. Will an English Parliament continue to sanction this unbearable system, now that awful events display the political corruption and national ruin that the profligacy of *men* induces ? If it does, let it prepare for a new Indian war, and for the total overthrow of aristocratic rule.

1889.—It continued at home till 1888, after which the Queen's Ministry, in spite of Parliament, do not as yet show any alacrity to suppress the system in India. Stealthily enacted at midnight by fraud, and for years not understood by many M.P.'s, this base and pernicious system was forcibly kept on our necks for twenty-two years, as if to desecrate English Law. Nor can we have any security that Law shall be just, while midnight legislation is permitted.