

Contagious Diseases Acts : speech by Mr. Littleton of Devonport (one of the subjected districts), at the meeting in Edinburgh in favour of their total repeal, on 1st February 1875 / [Mr. Littleton].

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CONTAGIOUS DISEASES ACTS.

SPEECH by Mr LITTLETON, of Devonport (one of the Subjected Districts), at the Meeting in Edinburgh in favour of their Total Repeal, on 1st February 1875.

MR LITTLETON, from Devonport—You have waited so patiently, and listened so attentively to the various speakers, that I will not occupy your time above a few minutes. There are facts in connection with the operation of these Acts in the district in which I reside, which I have carefully investigated during the last five years, and would like to state to you. The Royal Albert Hospital is situate in the district, and that hospital is referred to by the supporters of the Act as being the model hospital in which these Acts are carried out to perfection. If we take the very best examples they put before us, and examine them carefully, we can come to a conclusion as to the facts, which any one can easily ascertain for themselves, and not do any wrong or injustice to those who support these immoral laws. I may tell you, in the first instance, that the Royal Albert Hospital was founded ostensibly as a civil hospital, but at the time it was not known that the gentleman who was the founder had made a secret arrangement with the Government to connect with it a large establishment as a lock hospital. The building is situated on Government ground, and after the civil portion of it was built an enormous erection was made at the Government expense, out of the public taxation, and, including the land, really comprised two-thirds of that building, for which the country has paid, I believe, a sum exceeding £100,000. In addition to that, the chairman of the hospital told the Royal Commission that in these lock wards there are one hundred and sixty-two beds, which cost £143 per bed. In the Report of the Royal Albert Hospital which I hold in my hand, for the year 1870, it appears that, in addition to this enormous expenditure out of the public taxation, that hospital received, as income arising from these persons immured in the lock wards, the sum of £4,412, making a profit out of it of £2000. I saw in a local newspaper last week, that there has been jealousy existing between the hospital at Portsmouth and the hospital at Devonport, because the latter obtained more remuneration from the Government than did the former. Taking the thing into consideration, the Accountant-General has agreed to increase the sum given to Portsmouth by £153 a-year, to make up their total income to £4,400 odd a-year. So you see for that sort of traffic, after the Acts have been in existence for so many years, they

require more out of the public taxation, shewing beyond all doubt that the cases of disease are increasing, and they must therefore have increased remuneration. Some of the reports of the Royal Albert Hospital are very interesting. It is stated by the promoters of these Acts, and asserted by the Government officials—that is, the State-paid doctors and the spy police—that when these Acts first came into operation at Devonport, there were over two thousand known prostitutes in the district, and among them were two hundred and twelve children under fifteen years of age. That is a self-evident falsehood, because in the entire population between fifteen and thirty-five years of age, which are the usual ages to which the prostitute class belong, it would follow that one of every twelve women, married and single, in whatever station, was a prostitute. That would be the case if this statement were true. When the Royal Commission examined the Inspector of the Spy Police, he repeated this untruth. Further, in regard to the young—those under fifteen years of age—the same argument applies. There would be one prostitute out of every eight children of fifteen years of age, if his assertion was true. When this question was put to the late house-surgeon of the Royal Albert Hospital, he said such a thing was impossible. Had there been two hundred and twelve prostitutes under fifteen years of age, there must have been more of them in the hospital, whereas “there were only two cases in the lock wards during the first six months the lock was opened.” It was stated by the officials, that when the Acts first came into operation, there were two thousand prostitutes in Devonport, whereas they were now reduced to five hundred and fifty-seven. The advocates of these Acts pointed to that as a matter of fact, and as being an overwhelming argument in support of the system. They said, further, that not only had the numbers been greatly reduced, but also the diseases were greatly modified, and now existed only in the mildest form. If this be true, it must follow that after the Acts have been in operation for six years, they would have a less number of patients in the lock wards. You can judge of this from a table I have in my hand, in a Report for the year 1868-9 of the Royal Albert Hospital, signed by the chairman, and thus reliable. This table shews that when the Acts first came into operation—it was for the last half of the year 1865—the number of cases received into the lock wards during that period was one hundred and thirty-nine. From 1st October 1865 to 30th September 1866 the number of cases was three hundred and fifteen. At this date it was alleged there were upwards of two thousand registered prostitutes. Now, if that statement be correct, that when the Acts first came into operation there were over two thousand registered prostitutes, and the diseases were of the most virulent form, it should follow that when the number was reduced to five hundred and fifty-seven, and the cases were very much modified in their character, they would have a very much smaller number of cases; but, instead of that, this table shews that the

number of cases in the year, from 1st October 1868 to 30th September 1869, amounted to 1536, in which year the hospital received out of the taxation of the country so large a sum that it made a profit of £2000 by the transaction. Now compare the number of times patients were in the hospital during the before-named two years. In the year from 1st October 1865 to 30th September 1866, there were two hundred and six women admitted to the hospital for the first time, sixty-eight for the second, twenty-five for the third, twelve for the fourth, and three for the fifth—total, three hundred and fifteen. In the year from 1st October 1868 to 30th September 1869, there were two hundred and fifty-three admitted for the first time, three hundred and twenty-one for the second, three hundred and four for the third, two hundred and seventy-seven for the fourth, one hundred and seventy-two for the fifth, ninety-three for the sixth, fifty-eight for the seventh, twenty-eight for the eighth, eleven for the ninth, eight for the tenth, three for the eleventh, three for the twelfth, three for the thirteenth, and two for the fourteenth—fifteen hundred and thirty-six. Now, gentlemen who have been accustomed to look at this matter from a medical point of view, does it not entirely disprove the ground you take? This fact, as it refers to the women, added to the important facts put before you as it refers to the men, drives us to the conclusion that the Acts are an utter failure, even from a medical point of view. But not to occupy your time too much, I shall read you an extract from the Report of the hospital for the year 1872. Having exposed the fallacies of the medical men and other supporters of the system from this table I have read, a similar table was published the following year, but attention having been called to these facts, that table has been omitted from every subsequent Report of the Royal Albert Hospital. As the hospital authorities are obliged to make a return to the Government, in order to receive the pay—they now insert the number of cases in a different form. At page 15 of the Report for the year 1872-73 it proves this, that whereas the average number of daily residents—this is the best test that could be given as to the state of the morality of the women, and also of the men that associate with them—the average number of daily residents in the lock wards for the year 1871-72 was 52·82 women, and for the year 1872-73 the average number daily residents was 56·77, shewing an increase of nearly four per cent. over the previous year. Shewing this fact, that whilst some have asserted that the number of women has decreased, and the number in the hospital has decreased, the number of cases has actually been greater. And when I turn to the Report that has just been issued for the last year, I find there is an increase of one per cent. on the average daily residents in the Lock wards for the year, shewing that there is a gradual increase of this disease. I think these Reports prove beyond all doubt that, so far as the operation of these Acts take place in the pattern hospital—the Royal Albert Hospital in Devonport—they are an utter failure in every point of view. If you come to the constitutional part of the question,

an awful picture is presented. These Acts are carried out by an inspector of police and eight constables. It was asserted that only three men, specially selected for the purpose from the metropolitan police of London, were sent down to this district—men remarkable for their caution and high character. Instead of only three, there are nine. Instead of belonging to the metropolitan police sent from London, they simply belong to the former dockyard police, which is incorporated with the metropolitan police, and never did a day's duty in London. They are all of them natives of Cornwall or Devon. So much for the truth of the assertions put forward on that point. But, now, what are the duties of these men? They prowl about the streets night and day, watching young females of the classes described to you—servant girls, shop girls, and others of various descriptions, and in the event of a young girl being seen walking with a soldier, by one of these men she is followed. He demands her name and residence, calls upon her, insists upon her going to the Albert Hospital to sign a voluntary submission, and in the event of her refusal, she is often threatened with the prison. In a book I have here, in the evidence given by Dr Wolferston, late house surgeon, he makes this statement to the Royal Commission. When a woman is sent into this prison hospital, she was not permitted to go out of it until she had signed a voluntary submission to continue her upon the register as a prostitute. He said he expostulated with the authorities in regard to this procedure, but he was overruled. He had no power in the matter. He pointed out that such a proceeding was a violation of the Acts. He gives a list of six hundred and nine cases of women sent into the hospital as being diseased, whom the civil surgeons found free from disease and discharged. Such was the loose manner in which the system was carried out, which led to a quarrel between the chairman and the civil surgeons, who then conducted the medical treatment in the lock wards. And the result was, the chairman applied to the Admiralty to do away with the civil surgeons and appoint a Government surgeon, who would obey the directions of the Government, and be independent of public opinion and public influence. That has been carried out till this day. I might give you numerous instances of my own knowledge in regard to women sent into the hospital and charged with being unchaste and proved not to be so; of women charged with being prostitutes and sent into the hospital, who, when the cases were brought before a magistrate, dismissed them from the hospital and the Acts, and asserted they never ought to have been brought under them. I conclude by saying, I hope, in this great city, so celebrated for the moral character of its inhabitants, you will all join shoulder to shoulder, and not rest satisfied until these immoral and unjust laws are erased from the statute book. (Applause.)