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PERNICIOUS LEGISLATION.

THE Dominion House of Commons has passed an amendment to the criminal law introduced by Sir John Thompson, Minister of Justice, which provides for the infliction of severe exemplary punishment for the seduction of or criminal intercourse with any female employe under the age of thirty years in any workshop, mill or factory, by any employer, or by any foreman or other person who may have any direction or control over such female.

When the Minister of Justice moved the third reading of his Bill, a motion was moved in amendment striking out this objectionable provision; but in contending against this amendment the Minister declared that the legislation was one of the measures which had been promised in the Speech from the Throne in relation to labor, and that it had been pressed upon the attention of the Government by the Knights of Labor, who, speaking for their own class, had, he said, a better knowledge as to the necessity of the legislation asked for than the Minister himself or his colleagues. He said: "When persons having such knowledge ask for legislation of this kind, I think it would be very hard for Parliament to turn a deaf ear to them." The Minister then quoted the statement which the Knights of Labor had made in their report as follows:—

"Although your Committee is glad to believe that so far in Canada the evil does not exist to any appreciable extent, yet by reports from other countries, and through their knowledge of the conditions which sometimes exist in workshops and factories where women and girls are employed, they are convinced that it would be the part of wisdom at the present time to throw around female employes special legal protection against seduction by employers, superintendents and foremen, who, by reason of their power over them, may be in a position to unduly coerce them. We have, therefore, urged upon the

Premier and the Minister of Justice the desirability of enacting legislation, making it a criminal offence, punishable by severe penalties, for any employer, superintendent, overseer, foreman or other person exercising authority over a female employe to have illicit intercourse with such female employe, either with or without consent."

Mr. Mitchell declared that if the Minister founded his argument in favor of the Bill upon this report, then the Bill did not go far enough—that, in order to be consistent, the words "factory, mill or workshop" should be stricken out and the scope enlarged. If such protection was necessary for females associated in labor where they are grouped together in buildings, it should also be extended to all classes of female labor, because we know that if they require protection in factories, mills or workshops, they require it equally in wholesale and retail stores where they are grouped together by the dozen, throughout the mercantile centres of the land. They require it equally in the offices where lady type-writers are brought into close proximity with the people who employ them and who control them; they require it equally in telegraph offices where thirty or forty of them are grouped together under one or two gentlemen; they require it equally in telephone offices where the same conditions exist, and in the offices of the Civil Service, where females are employed, and who are under the control of the heads of Departments. Is not this protection also required in Public schools? There are many female servants employed in hotels—indeed, in every occupation where females are employed they require protection equally as much as they do in factories.

The proposed amendment was voted down, whereupon Mr. Mitchell moved another amendment, striking out such parts of the Bill as confined the operation of it to factories, mills and workshops, and changing the age of consent to twenty-one years instead of thirty. This amendment, said Mr. Mitchell, will include all classes of female labor, whether they are type-writers, shop-girls, telegraph-girls, telephone-girls, female clerks in the Civil Service, clerks in general employment and school-girls. If protection is needed for girls in workshops it is also needed for all these others. He did not approve of such legislation, but the House having adopted the principle—now that it had decided that protection to female employes is absolutely necessary—it should be made general, and give all working girls and school girls that protection. He declared that literary women are ten times as dependent upon their employers as women in factories—that the masses of these latter can find employment anywhere, while literary women and shop-women cannot. Mr. Blake showed that it has been established by statistics, carefully obtained in England, that the ranks of prostitution are recruited, not mainly, or even to any large extent, from factory girls, but out of all proportion from the ranks of domestic servants seduced by their employers. Mr. Tisdale, discussing the age of consent, said that according to our law, if a man or woman ever comes to the age of discretion, it is at twenty one years of age; and he strongly objected to anything being placed on the statute books which will have the effect of saying that the age of discretion for all purposes is not twenty-one years.

After considerable discussion all the proposed amendments were voted down, and the original Bill was read the third time and passed.