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WOMEN'S SERVICE
PAMPHLET
NOT TO BE TAKEN AWAY

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Pamphlet Women as Estate Managers

Large numbers of people in this country are uneasily conscious of the evils of overcrowding in slum districts, without being themselves in touch with any of the various existing schemes of housing reform or the social work that often goes hand in hand with it. By such as these, and perhaps by some who are actively engaged in it, the movement is apt to be looked on as a brand-new modern enterprise, to the need for which little or no attention was paid by previous generations. That, of course, is a mistaken idea. The nineteenth century was by no means so barren in works of social service as is sometimes imagined in the twentieth. Far back in the Victorian era, just ten years after the pioneer efforts of FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE set the standard for modern nursing, yet another woman, MISS OCTAVIA HILL, began with the help of JOHN RUSKIN her great work of housing reform. Like FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE, she being dead yet speaketh. Not only in London, but in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Manchester, and several other big towns, the Octavia Hill tradition and the Octavia Hill system still survive and flourish. From the tumble-down cottages in Marylebone, where she first put it into practice, the system spread to many parts of the country during her lifetime, and since her death in 1912, when she had nearly 1,900 houses and flats under her direct control, has been still further developed. Not from financial motives but because of her abhorrence of the conditions in which the poorest classes were condemned to live, and her determination to expose the slums as bad business, she decided from the first that her ventures must be made to pay their way; and at the same time she had the wisdom to see that in dealing with tenants of the kind of house property with which she was concerned

sound and sympathetic social service was as essential as good business management, and was indeed an integral part of it. That was the main secret of her success and of the fidelity with which her system has since been copied by other reformers.

It had, however, another source of strength and vitality, the importance of which is well shown by the Correspondent who writes in another column on the subject of Women as Estate Managers. But for her conviction that women were by far the best agents for carrying out the work to which she had set her hand, it could never have succeeded and developed as it has. The main business of these workers, the collection of rents and the supervision of repairs, can of course be adequately and effectively handled by men. But it is not so easy for a man as for a woman to get at the heart of things—to be shown every part of a house at any hour of the day, or, in cases when rents are in arrear, to find out the true state of the family fortunes—nor is he as likely to possess the personal touch and other psychological qualities by virtue of which the whole business of rent-collecting may be elevated into a form of social service. Under the Octavia Hill system the estate managers and their assistants are all women, and it is a solid tribute to the success with which it has been found to work in other places that the Westminster City Council, now engaged in clearing a large area of property to make room for several hundred new flats, have placed the management of the whole estate in the hands of two women, both of whom were trained by MISS M. M. JEFFERY, Agent for the Commissioners of Crown Lands and formerly in close touch with MISS OCTAVIA HILL as her secretary and housing assistant. There are at

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present two systems of training for the work, one given by the Crown Estate Agent's scheme (the Octavia Hill Club), the other by the Association of Women House Property Managers. The Octavia Hill system has been adopted by most of the public utility societies formed to provide houses for the very poor, and women trained under both systems have been appointed as managers of many important municipal housing schemes in different parts of the country. To women of good education and practical experience in social work the management of estate and house property offers a career of absorbing interest, for which, if they are endowed with patience, tact, judgment,

understanding, sympathy, and the ability to advise and help the tenants among whom they work in the doubts and difficulties of their everyday life, they are eminently fitted. According to the principles of MISS OCTAVIA HILL, their main objects must be to see that the homes of the tenants are decent and fit to live in, and to encourage those that are dirty and destructive to rise to the dignity of their new surroundings. It is not enough—as MR. PARKER MORRIS, the Town Clerk of Westminster, has said, in referring to the value of women for this kind of work—to demolish the slum property; the slum dweller must be reformed and prevented from drifting backwards.

WOMEN AS ESTATE MANAGERS

A WESTMINSTER SCHEME

FROM A CORRESPONDENT

The Westminster City Council, who are engaged in clearing an area of 17 acres of property to make room for more than 600 new flats, decided some time ago to apply to this extensive housing scheme what is known as the Octavia Hill system. They appointed as the manager of the estate a woman trained through the Crown Estate Agent's Scheme (Octavia Hill Club), and she has now an assistant who has also studied under Miss M. M. Jeffery, the former secretary and housing assistant to Miss Hill and an agent for the Commissioners of Crown Lands.

It has been said of Miss Octavia Hill that her contribution to the business life of the country was to adjust the balance of all the economic factors which enter into house property management and to expose the slum as bad business. Her work as a housing reformer began in 1864 with the purchase by Ruskin of three dilapidated houses—"full of tenants"—in a court in Marylebone. Miss Hill adopted Ruskin's advice that if the work could be placed upon a business footing, paying 5 per cent. on the capital invested in it, it would be taken up and extended by other people.

At the time of her death in 1912 she directly controlled between 1,800 and 1,900 houses and flats, exclusive of rooms in tenement houses. The work had also spread to Edinburgh, Manchester, Glasgow, and other cities, and had attracted attention abroad. Since 1912 there have been developments which have led to the appointment of numerous women estate managers, who maintain the Octavia Hill tradition and apply, in the light of present conditions, the system she inaugurated.

In 1916 the Commissioners of Crown Lands (then Woods and Forests) decided to place houses coming to them at the termination of leases in the Cumberland Market area under the control of Miss Jeffery and the agency is now responsible for 850 houses, involving about 2,000 tenancies and a population of nearly 8,000. The property consists of old middle-class houses and the chief problem has been that of dealing with overcrowding. Many of the houses when taken over had a tenant established in each room. In one case 11 tenants lived in the 11 rooms of a house. The property is gradually to be rebuilt and a beginning has been made with the work.

The training of women estate managers may be said to have grown out of the Octavia Hill management of this and other estates. At present the training is given by the Crown Estate Agent's Scheme and by the Association of Women House Property Managers. A committee is sitting to consider whether there can be an amalgamation of the two branches of the work. Nearly all the public utility societies that have been formed to provide houses for the poorest people have adopted the Octavia Hill system, and managers and workers in recent years have provided for important municipal housing schemes.

The idea underlying the Octavia Hill system is that social service and business are closely united; that business is itself a service to the community. The personal collection of rents is the pivot on which the work of the trained woman house property manager turns and by means of which she establishes contact with her tenants and their houses. She seeks to bring home in a practical way to the occupiers of the dwellings in her charge the advantages of regularity, system, and order.

This course under the Crown Estate Agent's Scheme falls into two parts. The first includes collecting and its accounting; difficulties arising

out of tenants' records; applications for tenancies and moves; the ordering and supervision of repairs, repair records; and general office organization. The second consists of general accounts; court work, involving the law of landlord and tenant; rates and taxes; specifications and estimates; and pricing. The course leads up to the examinations of the Surveyors' Institution through the College of Estate Management, and both parts are considered to be essential to an appointment as manager. Associated training centres to those in London have been established in Birmingham and Rotherham.

Breadth of outlook, a sense of humour, judgment, tact, firmness, and adaptability are put forward as some of the attributes of value in the work of the women managers, and under the Octavia Hill system a personal link is provided between the manager and tenant. This is established during the selection of tenants and is kept up by the regular personal visits required for the collection of rent and the supervision of repairs. Tenants are encouraged to cooperate with a sympathetic manager, and it is claimed that wherever the Octavia Hill system has been properly administered it has been found that both landlord and tenant derive lasting benefit.

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