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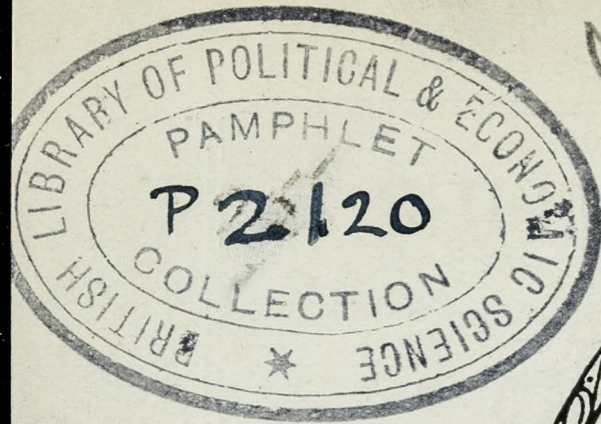


PENSIONS *for* MOTHERS

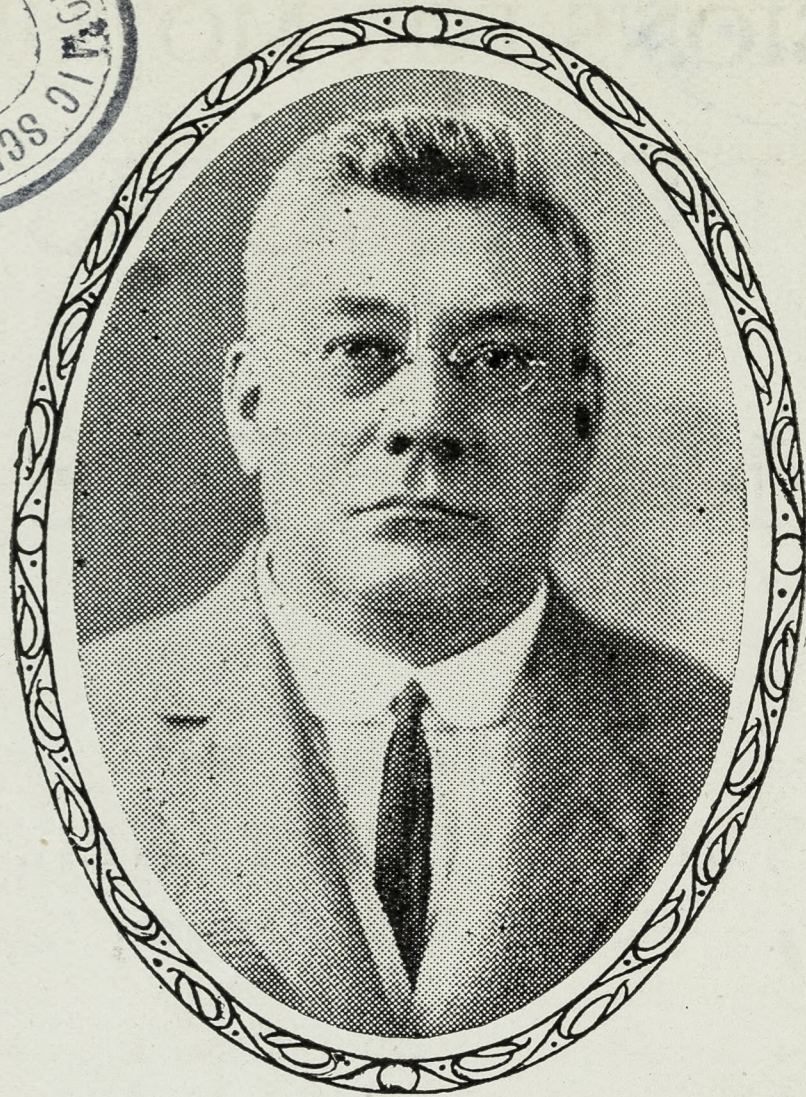
An Interview with
JUDGE HENRY NEIL
Father of Mothers' Pensions

By
HELEN R. MACDONALD

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Mother's pensions



Judge Henry Neil, who comes of Scottish parentage, was born in America, and is known as "The Father of Mothers' Pensions."

Who said Hitch your wagon to a star?
Who needs Inspiration from afar?
God hitched my wagon to my star,
MY MOTHER.
Afar or near, long day or year,
I need no other.—*Judge Henry Neil.*

PENSIONS FOR MOTHERS

An Interview with JUDGE HENRY NEIL

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What "Pensions for Mothers" Means

Instead of helping the mothers in the old way, by means of Poor Law Relief, by boarding the children out, or putting them into institutions or orphanages, Judge Neil advocates paying the mothers to maintain the children in their own homes. He claims that it is simpler, better—and much more economical.

WHEN Judge Henry Neil, of Chicago, first came to this country to plead the cause of the orphan child, I sought him out. I did so for two reasons. One was that as a journalist it was my duty to hear what the prophet of any new movement had to say in his own defence. And the other reason was that, as a woman, I wanted to see for myself what sort of a man this was who, believing passionately in the rightness of Mothers' Pensions, had in a record space of time achieved one of the finest reforms ever introduced in the world's legislative history.

A Boon to One Hundred Thousand

This isn't fancy writing. It is fact. The scheme that has given back to thousands of mothers their courage and self-respect, that has given to one hundred thousand little American children the infinitely tender joys of home-life and mother-love, is a great thing. I wanted to see this man who had planted the seed which in so short a season has reaped such a rich harvest of national wealth and happiness.

For happy, well-cared-for children are a source of far greater national wealth for the future than all the richest mines of the West.

And I found as one always finds behind a great thing, a great man. Had Judge Neil not taken up the cudgels on behalf of poor mothers he must have interested himself in some other big reform. For he is in the zenith of his powers as a thinking man and as a constructing, organising force. Such a force could not have been crushed; it must have found an outlet. And thousands of mothers born under the banner of the Stars and Stripes are blessing that memorable day when Judge Neil sat in the Juvenile Court in Chicago and heard sentence pronounced upon the woman who, accused of the crime of poverty, had her five children torn from her arms and sent away to institutions where she would never again see, touch, or handle the children she had borne. That day was a turning point in the history

of the United States. The law which could enforce such inhuman orders was wrong. Henry Neil took it upon himself to set that wrong law right, with what success all America, and especially every fatherless child in those enlightened States which have adopted his Mothers' Pensions scheme, knows.

The scheme, in itself, is a simple one. When, by death or desertion, the support of the father is taken away, the half-orphans become, mechanically, the children of the state. A sum, posted by cheque every month, is paid to the mother to maintain the home and support the children. The mother is made trustee for her little ones and an immense amount of public money is thus saved, as it has been found that the mother can provide for her children more economically than anyone else can.

When I went to see Judge Neil one sunny morning at his hotel in Glasgow I found him full of determination that this great, simple scheme of his should be introduced into Britain; for by the strongest ties of blood and affection the children's Judge is bound to the Old Country.

On the Edge of Starvation

"You need Mothers' Pensions here," he said. "You have thousands of children living upon the very edge of starvation in Glasgow. Sixty years ago you had child poverty, a soul-destroying poverty

from which there was no escape. This is true, for I have heard my mother talk of it. And my mother *knew*."

The Judge rose abruptly from the table and walked over to the window, where he stood for a moment looking down upon the busy humming square below. Then he came back, and in a voice choked with emotion he told me this strange little romance of his mother's early days.

"My mother grew up here," he said; "born to poverty and hunger. She was an orphan child, and sixty years ago she peddled milk through the Glasgow streets. She struggled along with no one to help, no one to care for her—and so she grew up. At the age of eighteen she emigrated to America to try her luck in the New World. In Lawrence, Massachusetts, she met a young Glasgow man named Neil. They fell in love, married, and later I was born. Now fifty years afterwards, I have come back to Glasgow, to the very streets where my mother suffered in her poverty and loneliness, and my mission is to plead the cause of the orphan child.

"Strange, isn't it? These streets hold old memories for me. And by those very memories of my mother in her bitter girlhood, I want to make the lot of every little fatherless girl or boy less bitter. I want to rouse Britain to the realisation of what a wonderful dispenser of happiness this scheme of Mothers' Pensions is.

Eliminate Child Poverty

"For wherever you have Pensions for Mothers you eliminate child poverty. I shall always thank my good friend Bernard Shaw for that wonderful epigram of his. I asked him to write an article on this scheme of mine, and he did it gladly, for he is a firm believer in the virtues of Mothers' Pensions for healing many of the great social sores from which the world is suffering, the sores of juvenile crime, sundered homes, and broken mother hearts, or the sore of unnatural, institution-raised children. Well, Shaw wrote an article. And this was the first sentence: 'Child poverty is the only kind of poverty that matters.' That, I think, is one of the truest things ever written. A man or a woman can get over a season of lack of wealth. But child poverty!—it stunts their physical growth; it sears their souls; they never get over it. The child cradled in hunger and reared in want carries some of that early bitterness to the grave."

The Mother's Divine Right

Judge Neil has a firm belief in the divine right of the mother. He thinks that a mother at the head of her little household, bringing them up, looking after their comfort and happiness, with enough money coming in to keep care from carving wrinkles on her face and enabling her to enjoy life, can surely instil into those children of hers something that no other person can; she can fire them with ambition, set

their hearts aflame with love and devotion, make them long to grow up so that they can fight her battles and give her a grand time.

Find out the ambition of every poor child in the country ; it is, in nine cases out of ten, to give that overworked mother a silk dress and see her sitting with folded hands, like a lady. The mother has the power of quickening the impulses of her child ; she stirs his ambitions. And if at first these ambitions are directed towards giving the mother a more care-free life, later they swell outwards and onwards ; they swerve from love and devotion of mother and home to love and devotion of State and of country. The dreams visioned at a mother's knee may help through time to emancipate a nation. As an instance of this, Judge Neil told a story of the Prime Minister and of Pharaoh's daughter, who found Moses in the bulrushes.

No Prime Ministers Here

"One day," Judge Neil said, "I was going over one of the large Poor Law schools in London where over three hundred boys were being cared for at the ratepayers' expense. The superintendent was explaining all the advantages which the orphan boys enjoyed: I asked him, 'What do you teach the boys here?'

"Maybe he was annoyed at my interruption of his regular speech to visitors, for he said shortly, 'Well we don't teach them to be Prime Ministers.'

"I said, 'You don't teach them to be Prime Ministers. What do you teach them?'

"And he said, 'Well, we teach them to earn an honest living.'

"I wondered as I looked at that group of three hundred boys if there might not be one there who, if left at home with his own mother, would not only have been taught to earn an honest living, but also to be Prime Minister.

"The first Mothers' Pension ever granted is mentioned in the Bible. You remember the story of how Pharaoh's daughter found the little child Moses in the bulrushes in a basket, how she sent for the child's own mother and said, 'Take this child and care for it, and I will pay thee thy wages.' And Moses' mother took care of her own child, and received a Mothers' Pension. She inspired the boy with hope and ambition and a desire to fight for the right as only a mother can ; and Moses became the Prime Minister, and led his people out of slavery into freedom.

The Example of Pharaoh's Daughter

"She was a wise woman, was Pharaoh's daughter," Judge Neil went on ; "and it has taken us all these thousands of years to copy her grand example and let the mothers have a pension which will enable

them to bring up their children in the best way in the world—the mother's way."

In this country we are much more slow to move than in America. Our methods are older; we think in a more conservative manner. We are inclined to argue that because a thing has been so for a hundred years or so, it should go on being so until the end of time. We pride ourselves on how we take care of the fatherless children. We put them into orphanages or poorhouses and promptly forget all about them, or we board them out with anyone but their own mothers, the only persons in the world who would welcome them with open arms.

"Your system here," Judge Neil said, "reminds me of the methods we employed in New York for caring for dependent children. It was shown that the private charity organisations, of which there are 6,000 in New York, collecting some six million dollars a year, had a system like this: They would take Mrs. A's children from her and board them with Mrs. B; then they would take Mrs. B's children away from her, because she was too poor to support them, and board them with Mrs. C; and they would take Mrs. C's children away from her and board them with Mrs. A.

"The theory was that poverty should be severely punished, and that no mother should be allowed to have the companionship of her own children when she was too poor to support them.

"All this is changed now," he went on; "in the United States we used the Mothers' Pension plan of hiring mothers to take care of their own children. Why does not Britain do the same?"

Mother and Child Tragedies

"In Britain your papers are full of mother and child tragedies. Only the other day in Glasgow a woman was brought up in court for stealing some crockery from the place where she worked. She was a widow with five children, and was employed as a waitress in a fashionable city restaurant. Her wages were thirteen shillings per week, with breakfast, dinner, and tea, a sum that, with prices so high as they are at present, could not keep one woman decently, far less a family of five. So to help to still the pangs of hunger of her starving little family that poor distracted mother had been compelled to steal some of the food from the restaurant kitchen and to carry it home, concealed under her jacket, at night. The dishes in which the food was contained were missed, and traced to the unfortunate waitress. She pleaded guilty, and when her pathetic history was known the Judge admonished, not the mother, but the firm who employed her for paying such starvation wages. If that Judge had added a remark to the effect that the only way to deal with the case was to pay a Mothers' Pension to the prisoner he would have gone a great step in the right direction.

Turned the Gas On

“There was another case a few days ago in which a poor mother, driven to desperation by the unequal fight, had shut the doors and the windows of her little home, and after turning the gas full on lay down on the bed with her little thirteen-year-old boy, a ‘grand little lad,’ as she called him in her last pathetic letter. They were discovered the following day, both dead—the grand little lad, who one day might have done good work in the world, and his mother. *There was neither food nor coal in the house.* ‘I am tired out,’ she wrote; ‘I have tried to get work and failed. Everything seems to be against me, and I could not battle against the tide any longer.’ God only knows the agony of that mother’s mind before she did that awful deed.

“A Mothers’ Pension would have saved that woman, as it would have saved her grand little son.

The Double Job is Too Much

“No woman can undertake the double job of going out to work through the day to provide food for her children, and then coming home at night to look after them. Children need a lot of looking after; a mother has to be always on the job, cooking, washing, sewing, and mending, if her children are to have a chance to grow up to be strong and useful men and women. If in addition to all this, the tasks she willingly and lovingly

undertakes, she is called upon to take over the father’s job as well, then she is asked to do something superhuman. The double job is too much, and she breaks. In the United States we have Societies for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. The horse is guarded against breaking down, and when he breaks, if break he does, he must be cared for. It has made me sometimes call the things I have asked for in the Mothers’ Pensions plan ‘Horses’ Rights for Mothers.’

The Cheapest Way, after all

“More fathers are dying now than ever before, and therefore more mothers are suffering. If you help the mothers in the old way, by means of Poor Law Relief, of boarding the children out, or of putting them into institutions or orphanages, you thrust upon the taxpayer an immense burden. No matter how you help the mother it comes upon the taxpayer. But if you help the mother by the only sane method, by means of Mothers’ Pensions, you help her more economically. For it is cheaper to maintain the children in their own home, under the care of their own mother, than it is any other way. The natural mother is a born manager. She plans and cooks and sews for her own little brood, entirely happy. Her natural mother instinct pushes out in all directions, making much out of little, working in the present, dreaming of the future. And all this happiness is smashed, the sacred lamp of maternity,

which burned bravely through the darkest hours, is quenched whenever her children are taken away from her.

“Pensions for children are just as important as pensions for the aged. Perhaps they are more important. Old Age Pensions temper the winds of adversity to those who have battled with and survived the storms of life; Young Age Pensions throw a cloak round those poor young souls who are setting forth into the same storm.

“One of the immediate results of the war will be an attempt to raise great institutions and orphanages all over the country for the reception of the fatherless victims of the war. All organised charity will endorse the raising of these barrack-like buildings for the imprisonment of tender little ones, for organised charity is always on the side of the institution and against sane and humane ways of dealing with the destitute. Already in Germany children are being taken away from their mothers by the thousand, incarcerated in asylums, while their mothers are put to work as factory hands. This separation is a settled policy, but it is a blind and a bad policy, and if continued, Germany, or any other country which adopts it, will be defeated, not by its enemies on the battle line, but by the assassination of mother love at home, by the transformation of the soft woman with the home instinct into the hard, coarse farm or factory hand. Any national life must rest on

motherhood and the home. Loyalty and love of the Homeland cannot be cultivated among children raised where mother-care and mother-love are displaced by machine-like discipline and routine.

Keep Faith with Fallen Fathers

“I cannot,” Judge Neil said earnestly, “insist too strongly upon this point. Great efforts will be made to convince people that it is better to take dependent fatherless children away from their mothers and raise them in institutions, on the plea that a stronger parental control than the mothers’ is necessary. This plea in the first place is wrong, for many fathers do more harm than good to their children; and it has been proved again and again that widows, even where there has been a struggle for existence, rear splendid families unaided by the fathers’ influence. Apart from this, however, in sending little ones to institutions we are destroying all that is finest in these children, and we are breaking faith with the fathers who gave their lives in defence of their little homes. Orphanages and institutions, no matter how cleverly managed or how scientifically organised, will not repair the evils of war; they will intensify them, for the children reared in these places are not normal.

The Home-Reared are the Best

“Children reared in orphanages will never become of the same value to the State as home-reared

children. For whereas the home encourages freedom of thought and initiative, the institution represses these qualities. Individuality gives too much trouble in an institution, and therefore it is crushed; the children turned out are all of one pattern, and the sensitive, highly-strung child suffers intensely. But all nations at all times have owed all that was highest and best in their legislative edifice and national life to those great souls with freedom of thought and expression and individuality and courage. Nations cannot continue without men of these characteristics at the helm. And by putting children into asylums you are damming the fount from which is to flow the future hope and inspiration of the race.

“No one can foster these beautiful and necessary qualities like the natural mother. It is inborn in her to draw out all that is finest in her child. Therefore make her economically independent. Give her a Mothers’ Pension and save the race from ruin. It is the only way, the best way, the sane way, and the way of humanity.”

A letter now in the possession of Lord Blyth, written in 1851 by the author of “Home, Sweet Home,” says:—

“It affords me great pleasure to comply with your request for the words of ‘Home, Sweet Home.’ Surely there is something strange in the fact that it should have been my lot to cause so many people in the world to boast of the delights of home, when I never had a home of my own, and never expect to have one.”

JOHN HOWARD PAYNE.