

THE CATHOLIC SUFFRAGIST

Organ of the Catholic Women's Suffrage Society, 55, Berners Street, London, W.1.

VOL. III., No. 9.

September 15th, 1917.

PRICE ONE PENNY.

Daughter of the ancient Eve,
We know the gifts ye gave and give;
Who knows the gifts which *you* shall give,
Daughter of the newer Eve?

—*Francis Thompson.*

MOTHERS' PENSIONS.

BY VIRGINIA M. CRAWFORD.

Rarely does a social reform spring into a front place in public interest with the swiftness that has been the good fortune of what we all now know as Mothers' Pensions. But a few weeks ago few of us had any very definite views on the subject. To-day every one is aware that the godfather of the movement is Judge Neil, who has come over from the United States on a propaganda mission on behalf of his proved panacea for the relief of fatherless children. In Baby-Week, happily, he found a spacious platform ready for the ventilation of his views. And since that national event we women have been asking ourselves anxiously how this admirable American scheme can be best adapted to English local government administration.

Let us be quite clear on one point. Hitherto, in this country, we have failed lamentably to provide adequately for women left, by the death or desertion of their husbands, as the sole support of the family. True, something has been done for the children, though often on wrong lines, but nothing whatever, save by casual charity, has been done for the woman as widow. The Poor Law has usually been inhumanly harsh. At best, Out-door re-

lief is only given for the children, nothing for the mother, and on a scale utterly inadequate as a permanent basis for housekeeping. No one suggests to-day that soldiers' wives—or even the wives of interned Germans—could maintain their children on the 1/6 a week each that has been a very usual sum to be allotted by Guardians. At worst the Poor Law has refused Out-door relief to widows altogether, and has only offered the workhouse schools for a specified number of the children. If this offer is refused, as it frequently is, and the lately-bereaved widow tearfully declines to be parted from her children, or urges her dying husband's wish that "the kids shall never be put away," she is left to struggle as best she can at the hopeless task of rearing half a dozen boys and girls on, maybe, the casual earnings of a charwoman. It has never been held to be the duty of a Board of Guardians to acquaint itself with the effect on the infant mortality of the parish of its policy of no Out-door relief. Some Boards in their blind zeal for municipal economy have habitually declined to give any assistance of any kind save Indoor relief to both mother and children: in other words they have forced destitute widows to break up their little homes

and land themselves more or less permanently in the hated "house," if they were unequal to the struggle of maintaining their families unassisted. Truly the way of the widow in our midst has been hard indeed!

And now Judge Neil comes to us from across the Atlantic with his bold and simple scheme of Mothers' Pensions, i.e., a grant of money to all impoverished mothers to enable them to keep their children at home, and keep them in health and sufficiency. The homes and orphanages for fatherless children, the boarding-out, the expensive barrack-schools and all the other methods invented by society for having the children of the poor looked after by officials, are rendered unnecessary where the mother is alive by the brilliant expedient of paying her to look after her own children. Quite clearly she will do so, and gladly, much more cheaply than anyone else. In the thirty States in America in which the system is at work the cost is about one-third of what it was in the past, and three-quarters of the children who used to be provided for in institutions are now living at home with their own mothers.

Moreover, the reform has proved—what we are only just learning to appreciate properly—that the root cause of many of the evils we deplore—drink, dirt, slatternly homes, neglected childhood—is simply poverty. Remove the grinding poverty and the resultant evils largely disappear. Give an average woman a sure and adequate income on which to maintain herself and her children, and it is marvellous the improvement that will take place in her home and even in her character. Thus Mothers' Pensions may prove the moral salvation of countless despondent and harassed mothers of families.

How best to adapt this merciful system to our English needs is surely a problem to which the woman voter should forthwith devote some attention. The principle is clear, but its actual working out in our complicated

social system is by no means simple. Our local government is confessedly cumbersome in method and antiquated in form, and it will not be easy to fit in such a new departure with all the necessary safeguards. Let me say at once that the allocating and distribution of Mothers' Pensions should not be entrusted to the Poor Law. It would be impossible to eliminate the pauper taint: the new pension would simply be the old Out-relief under another name.

I should like to see the Authority that is entrusted with the fixing and allocating of the pensions at least semi-judicial in character as it clearly is in the States. The amiable amateur, even the experienced social worker, whether male or female, is often lamentably lacking in any judicial sense. And though the Mothers' Pensions must obviously be worked through local authorities, it is essential that there should be none of that bewildering variety of methods and treatment which exists under Poor Law administration. Possibly the Old Age Pensions' Committees, which have not much to do, might form the nucleus of a general Pensions' Board. But I would urge strongly that such supervision of the homes as may be deemed needful, should be entrusted to the local Health Departments, which under the new Ministry of Health will become important branches of all our civic Councils. It is in the main in the interests of the race that Mothers' Pensions will be accepted, and it is through the skilled advice and material help of Schools for Mothers and kindred organisations that this primary purpose can be served, not by a system of inquisitorial inspection. For older children the medical side of the elementary school, where properly worked, should supply all that is needful.

One further point requires much thought. Is it intended to extend the scheme to the unmarried mother? I frankly hope it may be. From the national and racial point of view the matter should not even be in question,

(Continued on page 75)

NOTES AND COMMENTS.

The Representation of the People Bill is to be taken the first week of the Autumn Session. Meanwhile in anticipation, we presume, of the coming of the new electors, we record with satisfaction the removal of the Ladies' Grille. Some of us who have scorned to sit behind bars will be able to hear for the first time the eloquence of our legislators, but all galleries to which strangers are admitted should be thrown open to women. A little band of forlorn Canutes, impotently watching the rising tide, opposed the abolition of the grille—poor survivals of a pre-historic age, almost we find it in our hearts to pity them.

* * * *

Another long overdue reform has been brought about by the war—the granting of honours to women for their services to the State. In the long list of those honoured we miss many names we should have wished to see there, but suffragists will be particularly pleased that the services of Dr. L. Garrett Anderson and Dr. Flora Murray have been recognised, and it is surely a matter for rejoicing that the social work of Mrs. Barnett and Miss Margaret Macmillan should have been considered a signal service to the State. That is a bright omen for the future. Among the Catholics honoured we note with pleasure the name of our associate, Mr. George Milligan.

* * * *

Mrs. Ringrose writes to us from America: "May I, a woman from California and a worker (at present) for Woman's Suffrage in State of New York, congratulate you in England on your recent victory in Parliament; with regard to the movement we in America are as sisters deeply interested. You have suffered with us, may we now rejoice with you and thank God the end is in sight. New York's election will be November 7th. Pray for our success." Our American sisters may be assured of our prayers and good wishes.

* * * *

Members will be interested to hear that the producers of "Damaged Goods" are reprinting for the purposes of advertisement in the provinces, Mrs. More Nisbett's (Iveigh Clyde)

criticism of the play which appeared in our June number under the title of "Whitewash."

(Continued from page 74).

for it is notorious that infant mortality is at its highest and infant mal-nutrition at its gravest among illegitimate babies. Poverty, once again, is the root cause of this. Many of us have felt that although in the interests alike of morality and of the child itself, the tie between the girl-mother and her baby should be strengthened in every way, it yet does not follow that the whole burden of parenthood should be allowed to fall on the mother alone. It may be argued with much force that if the State fails—as in practice it does largely fail—to compel a father to contribute his fair share to the maintenance of his children born out of wedlock, it should in equity take this share of the burden on itself and not merely allow it to fall with crushing weight on the shoulders of the mother. The difficulty has been that we have hitherto been content to allow the widowed mother also to assume unassisted the double burden, and the State could not have rightly differentiated in favour of the unmarried mother. When, however, Mothers' Pensions become part of the law of the land, this difficulty will disappear.

There can be no question here of Catholic principles being at stake. The Church has always been more merciful in her official judgment than the Puritanic and anti-feminist sentiment which has often imposed itself as public opinion. The "encouragement to vice" with which we are threatened whenever more humane treatment of sinners is proposed, may exist indeed whenever illegitimate babies are taken wholly off their mothers' hands. I do not think the accusation can rightly be brought against any system which compels a mother to support her child out of her earnings, wholly or in part, for fifteen years. And the ground principle of Mothers' Pensions is just that mothers are held responsible for the welfare of their own off-spring.

Taken in its entirety, Judge Neil's scheme should mean such a building up of family life and of maternal authority that I do not see how Catholics can fail to welcome a measure so in consonance with Christian principle.

THE CATHOLIC WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE SOCIETY.

Office: 55, BERNERS STREET, LONDON, W., 1.

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THE NATION'S HEALTH.

Much as knowledge concerning venereal disease and its ravages is necessary, it is essential that such knowledge should be disseminated in a proper fashion, and by experienced persons. We rejoice, therefore, that Sir Malcolm Morris has been persuaded to give this book, "The Nation's Health" (Cassell), to the public. So much depends on the manner and the spirit in which knowledge is imparted, that we cannot afford to risk the blunders of amateurs, however well meaning. We are told in the preface that the book has been written in pursuance of the policy of candid but not unrestrained discussion recommended by the Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases, of which the writer was a member, and is especially intended for County and Borough Councils, of Urban and Rural District Councils, of Boards of Guardians and Sanitary Authorities, for the lay members of the Boards of Management of Hospitals, and for Headmasters and Headmistresses.

In the first chapter on the Public Health Service the writer shows how the State follows the citizen through life to protect his health; indeed is concerned with his welfare even before birth, how it protects him from infectious diseases, helps to provide him with professional skill and medicine, when he falls ill, and so on. But there has been one great omission, by which perhaps the most devastating of all diseases has been left to pursue its baleful course unchecked. Sir Malcolm Morris thinks that the omission has been mainly due to the conspiracy of silence for which no section of

the community can claim to be free of responsibility. He is surprised at the manner in which the public grasped the policy of frank discussion, which he attributes in part to the war. But, as we know, the Woman's Movement had broken down the conspiracy of silence long before the war, speakers and writers had proclaimed emphatically, sometimes maybe with more zeal than discretion, that ignorance was not innocence, knowledge was not vice. A cry had gone up on all sides, demanding that the young should be better equipped for their journey through life, in order to steer clear of the rocks. The way had been well prepared for the work of the Royal Commission.

Sir Malcolm Morris lucidly exposes the fallacy of supposing that it is possible to place venereal disease on the same footing as other diseases, by making it notifiable, and his chapter on "regulation" should save us from any further trouble on the point. "This country," he says, "has finally decided against regulation, and I do not apprehend that there will be any organised demand for its revival in days when the influence of women in public affairs is becoming more and more powerful, but knowing that the policy has not lost its speciousness for some minds, I have thought it well to expose its fallaciousness."

The country has decided against it, but there can be no doubt that, but for the organised opposition of women's societies, the military authorities would have re-established regulation in military areas. Indeed, the danger is not wholly past, it crops up now in one form,

now in another, and it is only by the final defeat of the supporters of the iniquitous system that the crusade against venereal disease can have the triumphant issue which Sir Malcolm Morris predicts.

L. DE ALBERTI.

LONDON AND BRANCH NOTES.

The Office, 55, Berners Street, re-opens Monday, September 24th. Hours, 3-30 to 5-30. Saturdays, 10-30 to 1-30. Other times by appointment. Library books 2d. a volume. Holy Mass will be offered for the intentions of the C.W.S.S. (that is for peace, and for all who have been killed in the war) at St. Patrick's, Soho, on Sunday, October 7th, at 10-30.

LIVERPOOL AND DISTRICT BRANCH.

—Hon. Sec. (pro tem), Miss E. M. O'Callaghan, 4, Onslow Road, Fairfield, Liverpool. Our best thanks are accorded Miss Cooper, M.A., our late secretary, for her valuable service and untiring devotion to the work of the Liverpool branch.

We regret very much her leaving us, but our loss is Newcastle's gain, where Miss Cooper has gone to take up a distinguished appointment.

Our hearty congratulations and best wishes for her success in her new surroundings.

The office has been closed for the summer vacation, but we hope to announce a meeting shortly.

The paper can now be obtained from Mrs. Keating, Catholic Repository, Salisbury St.

IRISH SUFFRAGISTS AND THE CONVENTION.

A deputation of the Joint Standing Committee of Irish Suffrage Societies waited on Sir Horace Plunkett, Chairman of the Irish Convention, at Trinity College, on August 16th. The members of the Deputation were Miss Chenevix (Irishwomen's Reform League), Mrs. Kingston (Irishwomen's Suffrage Federation), Mrs. Stephen Gwynn (Irish Catholic W.S. Association), Miss Alice Stack (Church League for W.S.), and Miss Mellone (Belfast

Suffrage Society). Their object was to urge the importance of the recognition of the citizenship of women, by the co-option of a woman on the Convention, and to press for the inclusion of the enfranchisement of women in any scheme for the government of Ireland which may be recommended by the Convention. The proceedings were confidential.

M. GWYNN, Hon. Sec.

TO THE IRISH CONVENTION.

The following letter was addressed to the members of the Convention.

My Lords and Gentlemen,

I have been instructed by the Joint Standing Committee representing the Belfast Suffrage Society, the Conservative and Unionist Women's Suffrage Association, the Church League for Women's Suffrage, the Irish Catholic Women's Suffrage Association, the Irishwomen's Reform League, and the Irishwomen's suffrage Federation, to ask you to support the co-option of a woman on the Convention, should such a proposal be made. This recognition of the citizenship of Irishwomen, and of their right to be consulted as to the government of their country is especially just and fitting at the present time. The effective co-operation of women is necessary if urgent problems such as Public Health, Education and Poor Law are to receive adequate consideration in the near future, and my Committee trust you will do all in your power to further such co-operation by supporting the co-option of a woman. This would be a guarantee that the Parliamentary franchise will be extended to Irishwomen and that, should a Referendum be taken on the result of your deliberations, women as well as men will be included in it.

I have the honour to remain on behalf of the Joint Committee,

Yours faithfully,

MARY L. GWYNN,

Hon. Secretary.

37, Ailesbury Road, Dublin.

24th August, 1917.

It has since been decided that the Convention has no power to co-opt anyone, man or woman.

THE GIRL GUIDES.

A few years after the Boy Scouts were started, another movement began to grow up, and, like most new movements that have to do with girls or women, there was an outcry against it. The Girl Guides had to run the usual gamut of prejudice, ridicule, and in many cases of open disapproval and opposition. It was a splendid thing, people said, for boys to become Scouts and to have their powers of observation, of general intelligence trained, to be given the ideals of chivalry and helpfulness, to learn all manner of useful things, but for girls to be brought out in this way was utterly wrong and most "unwomanly." A girl's place was at home, "helping mother" to mend the clothes and mind the baby. These good people overlooked the fact that even "helping mother" and "minding baby" requires some training which a "mother" so often had no time to give, that as often as not when the girl did chose to go home she only got into "mother's" way.

Above all, these people overlooked the fact that these girls were going to grow into women, many of whom would have to make their own way in the world, and that without character training, a sense of responsibility, and a determination to become efficient in whatever they took up, it would be a very difficult way to make. Of course, one could hardly expect those nice old-fashioned people (many of them were quite nice in their own way!) to take into consideration the fact that a world-wide woman's movement was taking place, and that the Girl Guides were really only a branch, and an important branch, of the struggle to secure fair play and a fuller citizenship for women. Not that the founders of the Girl Guide movement troubled themselves over the future political status of women: their work was not with politics, nor with any particular political struggle, but with the training of girls, not only in such practical matters as nursing, first-aid, the care of children, cooking, needlework, housekeeping, general intelligence, etc., but in the ideals and duties of citizenship. What that citizenship would involve in the future was not the point; the point of the training was that the future women of the country should be ready and capable of shouldering their responsibilities whatever those responsibilities might be. But to those of us who have been watching for the day, now surely within sight, when the woman shall share with the man the

full responsibilities and privileges of citizenship, it is amply apparent that the Girl Guide movement had come to fulfil an urgent need. The opposition has broken down, and everywhere the movement is spreading. Is there any wonder that it spreads? For the first time we see a movement for girls which merely on its practical side offers them something more than just learning the elements of so-called "woman's work." A Guide finds that she may make herself proficient and earn badges for almost anything she chooses, even in things that have not hitherto been usually taught to girls. Cobbler, gymnast, electrician, entertainer, gardener, geologist, naturalist, farmer, signaller, motorist, are a few I pick out at random. Arts and crafts of many kinds may be taken up by the Guide who has a bent that way.

All this is useful in the training of future citizens, but what is undoubtedly the most useful of all is the Guide life. A Guide is a responsible person from the moment she is enrolled, that is from the moment she has passed the first simple tests and made her three promises, of loyalty to God and King; of service to others; and of faithfulness in keeping the Law of the Guides. She is then expected to "play up" for the sake of her patrol (a patrol consists of eight girls, and two or more patrols form a Company). Each Guide is responsible for the credit of her patrol. She is given as a rule no individual marks, but all the marks she has earned go to her patrol. The Patrol Leader has a great deal of responsibility which she can delegate to the girl she has chosen to be her helper or "second." It is the Patrol Leaders who settle the affairs of the Company in their "Court of Honour" meetings. When difficulties arise, it is they who decide what is to be done. If a new patrol is formed the Captain (who corresponds to the Scoutmaster of the Scouts) usually consults her patrol Leaders in choosing the new Leader, and as far as my experience goes their judgment may always be relied on. Each Patrol Leader is, of course, responsible for the progress of her patrol, seeing that new girls are properly trained in the elements of "guiding," and that the patrol keeps up a good average of attendances, etc.

Besides the sense of responsibility and self-reliance, which the Girl Guide movement undoubtedly inspires, there is that equally im-

portant sense of fellowship, that *esprit de corps*, which has been in great measure lacking in the women of the past, especially in the working women, who have never been trained to stand together for the general good. I believe that this loyalty to each other which is found in every true Guide Company will do a great deal in the future towards securing fairer conditions for women in the labour and industrial world.

But perhaps the special stroke of genius displayed by Sir Robert Baden-Powell, when he founded the Boy Scouts, and afterwards took over the organisation of the Girl Guides, was the spirit of Romance which he infused into both movements. It is this spirit of Romance which makes the Girl Guides different from any other society for girls, and it is this which attracts the type of girl who would be bored to extinction by other associations and clubs, however excellent.

I have seen factory girls of eighteen or nineteen come and ask to be admitted to a Company of Guides. They were girls whose appearance could be best described as "sluttish;" they came from a club whose members had the reputation of being noisy and somewhat unmanageable, so much so that on several occasions the ladies who ran the club had been pursued back to their Settlement by the young hooligans shouting and throwing tin cans. And yet some of these girls wanted to be Guides! They were not admitted at once, but back they came, again and again. I believe it was the Romance that attracted them, and the physical activity of the Guides. They saw that everyone was doing something, and all looked happy. In one or two cases they saw an enrolment ceremony, or they were taken apart and told what it really meant to be a Guide. And then it was that in spite of untidy appearance and general "sloppiness," an eager look came into their eyes and they said they still wanted to join. It was new to them to know that they might become like the Knights of King Arthur, going about with their eyes open, and doing "good turns" to other people. It had never occurred to them before that instead of living just as individuals, they might belong to a wide, splendid fellowship that was going to help the world forward.

These girls joined the Guides, and now they look as smart as any of the others in their blue uniforms, of which they are immensely proud. They have learnt to hold up their heads, to

speak without mumbling, and if you ask them whether after all they like being Guides, the eager look comes back into their eyes, and they answer, "Oh yes, it's lovely!"

To the younger children, the spirit of Romance is like a beautiful fairy tale in which they are actually taking part; to the older girls it brings a vision of something they had been unconsciously seeking, but never found. The very fact that the Law of the Guides is directly taken from the old Laws of Chivalry enhances the Romance. These ten laws, which a Guide on her enrolment promises on her honour to obey, lay down that a Guide is honourable, loyal, helpful, a friend to all, courteous, pure, kind to animals, obedient, cheerful and thrifty. They are precisely the same as the Scout Law. These boys and girls, in whose hands the future of our country will lie, are being trained in the same ideals of honour and morality. When it is remembered that the Guides and Scouts are not only children from eleven years old upwards, but that they also include companies and patrols of young people on the very threshold of manhood and womanhood, it will be realised how important it is that the same standard of living is expected equally of the boy as of the girl, the same standard put into the same words, not merely preached from a pulpit, but brought down as it were, and made their very own in their own fellowships of Scouts and Guides.

A short time ago, a boy Scout said to a friend of mine in the East End: "Don't you think, Miss, you could start Girl Guides down 'ere? It's so dull for the girls not 'avin' all wot we boys 'ave in the Scouts."

Is not that the spirit of comradeship we hope to see in the future men and women citizens of our country? And if the women are to be the right sort of comrades, if they are to take their share in the work of the Nation, whether that work be in the home, or in the spheres of labour, industry, or in any other walk in life, they must be trained to hold their own, both in efficiency and in character. They must be given a straight outlook on life; they must understand the laws of nature and of health; they must learn to stand loyally by each other, and to give a helping hand wherever it is needed.

To provide a training such as this is the aim of the Girl Guide Movement.

FFLORENS ROCH.

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September 19th—Mr. Laurence Housman, "Prison Reform in America."

Miss Nina Boyle.

Chair—Mrs. Mustard

September 26th—Miss Margaret Hodge, "Mr. W. T. Stead and his Work for the Woman's Cause."

Miss Nina Boyle.

October 3rd—Mrs. M. W. Nevinson, L.L.A., "Our Chances of Success."

Mrs. Mustard,

Chair—Mrs. Nourse.

THE CHAIR WILL BE TAKEN AT 3-30.

Saturday, September 15th, at 3 p.m. Political meeting. Speakers: Miss Nina Boyle and Miss Dorothy Evans. Chair: Mrs. Marion Holmes.

ADMISSION FREE. Tea can be obtained in the Cafe.

Sunday, Oct. 7th.—Lecture by Mr. W. L. George on "Will the Position of Married Women be enhanced or Diminished by the War?" Minerva Café. Tea at 4 o'clock. Lecture, 4-30. Discussion invited. Admission 1s. Tickets from W.F.L., above address.