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NATIONAL  
ENDOWMENT  
OF MOTHERHOOD

BY

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## NATIONAL ENDOWMENT OF MOTHERHOOD.

THE war, with its terrible toll of young life, has taught us the value of babies. They used to be called "encumbrances"; now we are beginning to reckon them up as jewels. But while we dwell on the need for more young citizens to build up the new world, scold their mothers for not bearing and rearing a larger number, and hold "Baby Weeks" in order to give louder expression to our changed views as to the value of babies, we have as yet done little to lighten the burden of those who have families to support, or to create the conditions in which mothers can give the best service they are capable of, to work which is truly "of national importance."

*Value of  
Babies*

Something is being done by the provision of schools for mothers, baby centres, district nurses, the registration of midwives, and other reforms. But the fact remains that the heads of families are still heavily penalized compared with those who have no such responsibilities; the burden on the shoulders of the working-class mother remains as heavy as ever; and the children suffer as a result.

This state of affairs ought not to be allowed to go on. The changes made in our social organization to meet the needs of a nation at war have accustomed our minds to the idea of reform and readjustment on a large scale. Some of these vast changes, at least, have been justified by reason and have proved themselves sound. We ought to be ready in this case to make them permanent if they are seen to meet, not the needs of war only, but a permanent need, which war has perhaps brought sharply into notice but not created.

Such a reform has undoubtedly been the recognition of the nation's debt to the mother and of the first-class importance of her work and her children. Provision has been made for those whose husbands have joined His Majesty's Forces, and this provision has not been adjusted to the earnings of the husband and father, but to the needs of his wife and

*Separation  
allowances*

family. Separation allowances have been made on a scale varying with the number of non-wage-earning children, just as rations have been distributed, not equally to all households—as though each household were the same size!—but in accordance with the number of persons in the household. No one has been foolish enough to suggest that the Food Controller should apportion to a woman living alone the rations which must suffice for her neighbour with ten children; nor has it occurred to anyone that separation allowances should be fixed in the same way. And on the whole the schemes have worked well, in spite of all the difficulties created by war-time conditions. Homes have been kept together and mothers enabled to stay with their children, instead of “boarding them out” with someone else.

It is worth while to ask whether a scheme which has on the whole worked so well that no one, however they may criticize it in detail, would have thought of abandoning it so long as the war lasted, might not advantageously be retained, and even expanded, in time of peace. For the work of the mother is just as important in peace-time as in war, and the need for assuring good conditions for young children just as great. We could not afford to disregard these claims during the war, but perhaps we can afford it still less now that other problems, which for the moment were thrust into the background, press upon us for solution. There is the vexed question of “equal pay for equal work,” the peculiarly helpless position of the widow with young children—always the prey of the exploiter—and the fact that there will no longer be a shortage of labour, but perhaps a shortage of employment.

To these vexed questions there can be no single solution. The one that comes nearest to an answer to them all is the National Endowment of Motherhood.

What exactly does this answer mean? It means that the State shall make a grant to every mother of children, *plus* an allowance for each child up to the age when it goes to school.\*

\* With the very inadequate and out-of-date statistics which are all that are available at present, the cost of such a scheme is estimated at between £100,000,000 and £150,000,000 per annum. If the children's allowances were carried on till they left school, another £100,000,000 would be required. Their needs, however, might be met by other measures—the provision of meals at school, maintenance grants, and so on. The “endowment of motherhood” would then apply, as suggested in the text, only to mothers and their infant children up to school age.

In such a scheme there is no taint of pauperism or philanthropy. It is a recognition of the inestimable services rendered to the State by mothers, and so long ignored. It should therefore be given not to “necessitous” mothers only, as though it were a kind of charity, but to *all*. It should be paid by some authority other than the Poor-law Guardians and the relieving officer. It should be wholly outside the Poor Law, for it would be in no sense “relief”; it would be well earned, we know, and those who earn should not be treated as though they were objects of charity or paupers.

It will be said, “But you cannot *pay* mothers for what they do for their children.” Of course you cannot. You cannot buy with all the money in the world love and devotion and the willingness to risk life itself to bring life into the world. The mother is perhaps, in one sense, like the soldier. You cannot *pay* a soldier for what he does. You cannot pay a man to be patriotic; you cannot pay him to die; you cannot pay him to give what no money can ever restore or make good to him.

But you do not, therefore, argue that he should have nothing at all. You do not say to him, “Your service is so sacred and noble that we do not dream of offering you *any* money. If you should happen to want any, no doubt your commanding officer will give you what he thinks proper.” No; the soldier does not get much, but at least we do not leave him without *anything* in return for all he does for us.

Why, then, should mothers be treated so? Why should we say to them, “Your work is so honourable and sacred that you cannot possibly want any money, and if you should wish to give your husband a Christmas present, you will have to ask him to give you the money for it!” That, surely, is putting those whom we claim to reverence more than any other persons in the community—our mothers—in a worse position than any other member of it; for all others, if they work, secure some sort of economic independence; but the mother, who works hardest of all, is by that very fact deprived of all possibility of economic freedom. A working-class mother—and the working class is from three-quarters to four-fifths of the community—is committed, while her children are young, to a life of great arduousness. In a book written with studious moderation and ripe knowledge, “At the Works,”\* Lady Bell describes the lives of the women

\* “At the Works,” by Lady Bell.

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*Burden on mother*

who are the wives of her husband's employees, and her verdict is that, for the average woman, the burden she must carry while her children are quite young, is too heavy. Those who have exceptional ability or exceptional physical strength can lift and bear it; the average woman cannot. Something must go: health, vitality, nerves, or the order and beauty of the home. And this verdict is passed upon women who are of the aristocracy of the workers, women whose husbands are highly skilled workmen, whose work is regular and whose wages are comparatively high. How much more true is it, then, of the wives of unskilled or semi-skilled workers, in casual or seasonal employment, with low rates of pay? Such women, when they become mothers, must toil day and night, and yet their work is never done. Health and strength fail in the struggle,\* vitality is drained away; yet the mother remains absolutely dependent on the earnings of another. She may be an ideal mother, leaving no duty undone, but if her husband loses his work she is left without resources. Her family, and with it her work, may increase, but she must housekeep on the same income, for, though her work is more, her husband's work and wages remain the same. If he is a good husband he gives her all he can spare; but then where is she to look for extra provision for extra children? If he is a bad husband he may give her very little. She has no remedy except, in cases of actual starvation, the Poor Law. What worker, doing her duty to the utmost of her ability, do we threaten first with starvation and afterwards with pauperism? No one is so treated except those about whom there is most sentimental talk, the mothers.

*Practical*

It is surely time to be less sentimental and more practical, for the sake both of the mothers and the children.

*Practical*

Let us admit that the desire to have a little money of one's own, well earned, is not a wicked, but a perfectly legitimate and just one. Let us admit that, if mothers were to be endowed by the State, the money they received would be earned, and not lightly earned. In honesty, we must admit the economic value of the mother's work, for if she does not do it someone else must be paid to take her place. Many a mother is nurse, cook, governess, general servant, and housekeeper all in one. In any one of these capacities she could go out and earn money if she chose. Why, because she chooses to stay at home and look after her own children, is she to be treated

\* The operation of the Insurance Act has revealed a mass of suffering and sickness among working-class mothers hitherto unknown and unsuspected except by those who lived and worked amongst them.

as if she did nothing? Every member of her household gains in importance and feels himself of value in the world as he (or she) begins to earn even a little money. Only the mother's work receives from the world no recognition but a flood of empty talk. And if her husband dies she is left absolutely unprovided for, and expected to put her children into some charitable institution and go out to work. Someone, of course, must be paid to run the institutions and look after the children—to make, in fact, an artificial home for them. Would it not be better in every way to leave them in their real home and hand over the money they cost to the real mother to keep it up with? Enable her to do her work as she would like to do it, free from the intolerable strain of anxiety about ways and means. Let her know that, whether her husband is out of work for a while or not, incapacitated by illness or not, even if he deserts her or death bereaves her, she will still be able to keep her children with her and her home together—not indeed in such comfort as when her husband's earnings were in partnership with hers, but at least without the fear of destitution before her eyes.

*Lancashire*

Such an arrangement would make of the home a real partnership, the mother bringing her share both of work and wages, the father his, to the support and care of the children. It is sometimes said that, in such a partnership, the father would do nothing, but would proceed to give up work and live on his wife's endowment. This is a deplorable view of human nature, and one which seems to be based on a good deal of class prejudice. There are, no doubt, some men in the richer classes who are content to live on their wives, but they are exceedingly few. Most men are rather morbidly afraid of owing everything to a rich wife. And doubtless, among the poorer classes, there are some who would do anything rather than work—even live on their wives. There are some men who do it now, without waiting for the endowment of motherhood. But the vast majority are quite as reluctant as their richer brothers to do anything of the sort. In Lancashire and Yorkshire great numbers of married women go out to work and, in Lancashire especially, earn exceedingly good wages. But Lancashire men are not more prone than others to live on their wives; indeed, many people (not only in Lancashire!) think them among the best workmen in the country. We ought not to deprive all women of the justly earned reward of their labour because here and there one has married a lazy husband, any more than we should refuse the 30s. maternity benefit, given under the Insurance

Act, because here and there a man is found brutal enough to take the money from his wife and spend it. Very few husbands would do that, and very few wives are so lacking in spirit as to let them. Most men who are bad husbands, like most mothers who are bad mothers, are so because they have had bad conditions to live in. Mr. Judge Neil, whose devoted labours in America have won for widows with young children dependent on them pensions such as those advocated here for all mothers of children, tells us that many a "bad" mother has developed into a "good" one when, for perhaps the first time in her life, she was set free from overstrain, overwork, and continual anxiety, to do her work and bring up her children, not in riches indeed, but in security. Very few are those mothers who do not respond to the better environment, the new opportunity. And men are just as good as women! If a working woman's health and strength are overtaxed in the years of child-bearing and child-rearing, it is not only she who suffers. Toil as she may, she cannot make her home all she would wish it, and her own nerves are apt to get frayed in the struggle. A husband sometimes becomes a "bad" husband because he finds no peace or order in a home where the mother is always overdriven, For one here and there who would "live on his wife," there are many who would like their homes all the better for the added income which meant a little relaxation of the strain on the wife; and everything the husband earned would go to make the home a better home and give the children a better start in life than he and his wife had. It is much too readily supposed by the rich that they are the only people who cannot be demoralized by having a little more money; and so we hear a great deal of the wicked munitioners who spend their high wages on fur coats and pianos, but very little of those who use them to give their children a better education than their parents had.\*

The Chief Medical Officer to the Board of Health says also: "In 1916 the children were on the whole better fed and better clothed than at any time since medical inspection was introduced." This shows what mothers are doing with their allowances on the whole.

It is therefore proposed that the system now in existence, of giving to the wives of soldiers a regular weekly allowance

\* "It is a matter of no little significance that one of the first desires, and one of the immediate results of the increased prosperity of the working classes during the war, has been an increase in the number of pupils entering our secondary schools and the length of their stay in these schools."—Mr. Fisher, in the House of Commons, April 19, 1917.

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Children  
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1916

for themselves and each child—12s. 6d. for the wife, 7s. for the first child, 5s. for the second, 3s. 6d. for the third, and 3s. for subsequent children†—should be continued after the war and extended to all mothers of young children. It should not be given as a reward for special virtues, nor as a relief to the destitute, nor as a philanthropic dole; but as a recognition of a great, sacred, and essential service rendered by mothers to the race. As such it should be paid neither by the relieving officer nor by any philanthropic society, but by some agency such (e.g.) as the Ministry of Pensions, at present responsible for the payment of separation allowances.

The rate should be the same for all, and should be paid to all. Class feeling should no more be allowed to enter into this great reform than at present it enters into the payments made to soldiers. Every man who enlists receives the same pay, whether he be a duke's son or a dock labourer, and no one is snobbish enough to refuse his pay because he "does not need it." The amount spent on the rich would be a minute proportion of the whole, and much less than they would be called on to pay in taxation. It would be well spent in establishing the principle that every mother renders the same great service and every child's life is of a value which is not affected by class. Moreover, the inclusion of *all* mothers would tend to reduce the danger of compulsion and inspection to a minimum, for no one is in a hurry to inflict these things on the rich. The working classes already have only too much to suffer from inspection. The demands made on the overtaxed time and patience of the mother, who is the only available person to answer the door, receive instructions, and do her best to carry them out, are already irritating beyond speech. One hopes that the Ministry of Health may at least concentrate the work done by these visitors—much of it valuable—into fewer hands. In any case, no scheme that is likely to let loose upon the homes of working people a fresh army of inspectors will receive their enthusiastic support. The Endowment of Motherhood must rest here (as the Mothers' Pension scheme does in America) on the assumption that the average mother does care for her children and do her best for them. The State's intervention should be made only where there is evidence of cruelty

† These are the general rates at the time of publication; there is a special scale for the London district. It is probable that the rise of prices will lead to an all-round increase in the rates.

at v.  
husbanding

or neglect. Its concern is that the children should be fit and well. If they are *not*, action must be taken, as at present it is taken, to correct neglect or ill-usage. In extreme cases the children would have to be removed, as now, when, for instance, the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children proved a case of real cruelty; but that has sometimes to be done already, and cases would not be increased—they would surely be lessened by the endowment of motherhood. As we have said, "bad" mothers generally develop into "good" ones when they are given a chance.

Endowment should be accompanied by no compulsion—another reason why it should be given to rich as well as poor. The rich woman decides what is best for her child and for herself, without interference from without. She may give her whole time to looking after it (though I never met one who did), or she may exercise her responsibility through, and with the help of, nurses, servants, governesses, kindergartens, schools. There is probably not a wealthy woman in the country who does not delegate some part of the care of her children in this way. There must be the same liberty of choice for the working woman, as far as her means allow, as for the rich woman as *her* means allow. There must be no arbitrary decision from outside as to the manner in which her work is to be done. The State is concerned only with results: it wants the children to be fit and well: if they are so, the mother must be held to have discharged that part of her duty with which the State concerns itself, satisfactorily. We all, of course, have our own views as to how children should be brought up, but we do not imagine that we have a right to impose those views on rich people. We must abandon the idea that we have a right to impose them on the workers.

The question arises at this point—should illegitimate children be treated on the same terms as legitimate ones? This is, of course, an exceedingly controversial question, on which supporters of the endowment of motherhood will hold very different views. My own opinion is that all children should be treated alike by the State, and in saying this I do not for a moment waver in the opinion that it is an infinitely better thing for a child to be born into a stable and permanent home, where there are two parents and all that family life means at its best. Compared with such a home, the illegitimate child has, generally, but a miserable start in life, and is so little able to cope with its conditions that the

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death-rate among the illegitimate is double that among legitimate children. But the fact that nothing can give to an unwanted baby all that all babies ought to have is a poor reason for handicapping it by the deliberate action of the State and leaving it without a home and without a mother. It is appallingly difficult for a girl to earn enough to keep herself and a baby, even "farmed out" to a foster-mother; and doubly hard—indeed, impossible—to create a real home for it out of her earnings. The child will suffer in any case. It takes its tragic revenge in after years, for a high proportion of the women who live on the streets, and of the occupants of our workhouses and prisons, were illegitimate children who "never had a chance."

The danger that must, of course, occur to everyone is that of *increasing* the number of illegitimate births by the endowment of motherhood, and so doing far more harm than good. It is known that the grants made for such children under the Poor Law before its reform in 1834 did actually in some cases tempt girls to reckless immorality, and were even regarded as a valuable marriage-dowry by men! Against this, however, the following considerations should be set.

Experience shows that most of the women who seem to be utterly immoral in their conduct, and reckless in the production of babies by any father, are feeble-minded, and not so much *immoral* as *non-moral*. Prostitutes rarely bear children: they can make more money by other means. And a woman who is *really* mentally deficient is not now a proper guardian of young children, nor should they be left to so hapless a fate. When there is gross neglect or cruelty, another guardian must be found in any case, and surely an actually deficient mother should not be left in the sole control of babies. The same applies to a grossly immoral woman. The bogey conjured up by alarmists, of a woman who deliberately bears children by promiscuous fathers in order to earn money, would not satisfy even the most elementary conditions laid down as the proper guardianship exercised by the mother. It might be a good plan to limit the endowment of the mother to the case of the first or second illegitimate child, and, if there were more, to demand some such evidence of a permanent relation with the father as is now asked for by the Ministry of Pensions in the case of "unmarried wives." If the proof was not forthcoming, and the evidence showed the promiscuous character of the woman's sexual connexions, her children, with their endow-

ment and hers, should be given to a more trustworthy and competent guardian.

On the other hand, the endowment of a first or second illegitimate child might be counted upon to *lower* the illegitimate birth-rate, for experience shows that there is no incentive to a moral life greater than the love of a mother for her child. The baby, the very thought of whom is a terror and an agony before it is born, quickly establishes its hold on the mother, *if they can only be kept together for a little while*. The trouble is that, for economic reasons, they so rarely can, and so affection has no time to grow; the child is put away with a foster-mother, the mother herself often "goes wrong" again, and the child, if it is a girl, grows up to join the ranks of unmarried mothers herself. To give the mother the responsibility of her own child is often to give her character the needed strength which will lift her quite out of that borderland of "feeble-mindedness" on which she seemed to hover, if she is really not deficient in the medical sense, but only weak-willed. To give the child a mother and a home will often be to break the vicious entail by which at present illegitimacy tends to produce illegitimacy.

The same reasoning applies to those recruits of the ranks of vice who come from bad homes. Endowment will, sometimes at least, relieve the strain on the parents and make a bad into a better home. Here, again, the moral standard will benefit and not deteriorate. It will not, as some suppose, "encourage breeding from the worst classes of the community," for it will not operate among them. The classes one least desires to breed from are, I take it, the idle and dissipated rich and the idle and dissipated poor. Among the former an allowance of 3s. a week for a child cannot conceivably make the smallest difference; among the latter there is already a maximum birth-rate, and no payment can make it a physical possibility for more than a certain number of children to be born to those who are already bearing all they can. Economic and prudential motives for restraint fail, with all others, when a certain level of hopeless squalor and misery is reached. There is *no* restriction among such people now.

On the other hand, endowment will make possible in many cases both earlier marriage and more children. The former consideration must weigh with those who see with anxiety and sympathy the many obstacles in the path of young citizens who desire to marry and are perfectly fit to

do so. The latter will weigh also with those who would gladly see the rising generations recruited largely from the artizan and working classes. Knowledge concerning the means of restricting the birth-rate is now almost universal, and people use such means in every class. Very often the motive is not selfishness at all, but reluctance to bring into the world more children than can be properly provided for. Among such parents the help given by endowment would often make a real difference to the number of children they were able to do justice to, and thus recruit the nation from the best sources.

Finally, the endowment of motherhood would help to eliminate from the vexed question of wages the eternal dilemma of the under-payment of women. At present this is continually justified on the ground that men have, or will have, families to support, while women have not. This factor is only one of many which, together, decide the rate of pay in any industry. Supply and demand, skill, organization, custom, and so on, all help in the decision. But the different rates paid to men and women are, without doubt, one of the sorest of sore points in the labour market, and, so far as it is created by a different estimate of the responsibility of men and women as citizens, the endowment of motherhood would go far to remove it. For the home would become a real partnership for which both husband and wife were responsible, while the unmarried man and woman would also be on equal terms as regards the future.

It is true that the rate paid, if it were a flat rate, would not have the same effect in the case of professional women. It would bear a much smaller proportion to professional than to industrial earnings, and would neither give the married woman real economic independence nor enable her to make a contribution to the home in proportion to her husband's. Some, therefore, are inclined to urge the payment of a graded rate, in order that the principle of "equal pay for equal work" might be established throughout. But such a proposal, though made in the interests of equal pay for equal work, surely violates the very principle it seeks to establish, when it offers different rates to mothers for the *same* work. Every mother renders the same service to the race, and one cannot therefore claim to receive a better rate than another. It is surely farcical to establish equality between men and women of one class by perpetuating—indeed, creating—an inequality of pay between women themselves, doing the same work, because

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born

they belong to different classes! If other benefits are desired than those provided by State endowment, it should be by some form of voluntary insurance. It is not possible to ask the State itself to establish differential rates, on a class basis, for the same work.

Nor does this difficulty really affect the professional worker to anything like the same extent as the industrial worker. The man's responsibility for his family is never more than *one* among many factors in deciding the wage-rate. It is a smaller factor, in proportion to the others concerned, as the skill of the worker increases. Organization, the power to hold out for better terms, the element of monopoly introduced by skill, all play a larger and larger part in the decision of rates of pay as the worker rises in the social scale; sheer economic pressure and the rate of subsistence play a smaller and smaller part. The professional woman therefore is in a much better position (though never in an easy one) to fight the battle of equal pay on its merits than her sister doing less highly skilled, or even wholly unskilled, work.

In another way endowment of motherhood would contribute not, as some fear, to lower, but to keep up the rate of wages in the industrial world, for it would withdraw from the labour market a very large number of married women who are now compelled to seek paid work outside the home, either because their husbands do not earn enough to support the home in anything like comfort; or because they have lost their husbands; or because they desire some economic independence and have none in their own homes. The women in the first, and still more in the second of these classes, are notoriously dangerous to the wage standard, as they are inclined, perforce, to accept very low rates. The women in the third class are sometimes held up to us as examples of extraordinary perversity: as a matter of fact, the desire for economic independence is neither wicked nor perverse, but absolutely legitimate and very widespread. At present it cannot be satisfied in the home, and there are no doubt many women who would in any case prefer to earn outside and who should be as free to do so as their wealthier sisters. But I believe that a much larger number would prefer to stay at home and make their children the first claim on their time—at least, while they are quite young—if only economic pressure and the desire for economic freedom did not send them out to work. The endowment of motherhood would withdraw many thousands of such women from the

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labour market altogether. And in their homes there would be an element of stability which would be of enormous economic value. At present, when wages are in dispute, the sharpest weapon used against the workman is the dread of physical privation—even of starvation—for his wife and children. The employer has much to lose, but he has hardly so grim a spectre to face as this. If therefore the wife and children of the worker are at least secure from actual starvation, the industrial battles of the future will be fought on something more like equal terms than in the past.

Nor will labour itself be so tied and bound as at present. The dread of transferring the home to some new and untried place, in quest of work, makes workmen who cannot possibly make provision against a long period of "looking for work," often endure conditions that they ought to fight. Set free from such *immediate* necessity as they now labour under, they will have more freedom of choice and labour more "fluidity."

The endowment of motherhood seems therefore to have all the qualities of a really great constructive reform. The idea is as yet in its infancy: it will have to be discussed and modified by criticism and by experience till the best possible scheme is found to embody it. But we have already, in our system of separation allowances, made a beginning, and found it work well. When the army is demobilized, will the devotion and labour of mothers be worth less to the nation than now? Or the life of a child born the day after the terms of peace are signed be of less value than that of the child born to-day? If the answer to these questions is "No," let us begin at once to work for a system under which the devotion of all mothers, the lives of all little children, shall at least be safeguarded from the worst kind of privation.

*Perversity*



