

WOMEN'S ...
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THE

Catholic Citizen

Organ of St. Joan's Social and Political Alliance, (formerly Catholic Women's Suffrage Society), 55 Berners Street, London, W. 1.

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Price Twopence.

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.

The Position of Women in the Cameroons and in Equatorial Africa.

BY HIS EXCELLENCY, ALEXANDRE LE ROY, Archbishop of Carie,
Formerly Vicar Apostolic of Gabon

The Minutes of the 22nd Session of the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations record Mlle. Dannevig's courageous intervention on the subject of the deplorable position of women in the Cameroons, and the reply of M. Marchand, former Commissioner of the Republic.

The reply shows that M. Marchand has inadequate knowledge of the question: *De minimis non curat praetor*. . . .

It is necessary to state the exact truth, which is: the question deals especially with polygamy, and the general position of women, and of widows.

1. POLYGAMY. Everyone agrees that polygamy, in Africa, cannot be suppressed by an order or decree. The adoption of this desired reform must be left to time and especially to the work of the Christian Missions. But in the name of morality and of justice and of the material interests of the colonies where it exists, one has the right to demand that Colonial Administrations shall not favour it.

Yet to confide public schools to polygamous teachers is surely to favour and encourage it. Young school masters use their good salaries to buy wives. The master at Nanja Ebojo has five. The Catholic monogamous master of Akok, in a Catholic district, was sent to a Musulman district, and replaced by a young polygamous master enriched by four wives, and that in a Catholic village.

The hospital at Nanja Ebojo was recently governed by a male nurse who had 48 wives;

he kept six or seven with him, and the other forty were in his own district, three hundred kilometres distant, where they worked on his plantations. Under such conditions are not these women common slaves?

But these old polygamists have doubtless many children? Well, no, the majority of these men are worn out, ill, or syphilitic. Consequently many young men being unable to marry for want of means, the population is decreasing in a disquieting manner, to the detriment of the material welfare of the country, and also of justice and morality.

2. THE GENERAL POSITION OF WOMEN. In the Cameroons, as indeed in all Equatorial and Western Africa, the woman does not belong to herself. She is, in the strict sense of the term, the *property* of her family, represented by a maternal uncle, her father or eldest brother. If then the head of the family gives a woman to a suitor he exacts in return a definite sum, improperly called a "dowry," or else another woman to replace her. If, as often happens, there are several suitors the woman becomes the object of a kind of auction and is given to the highest bidder, without being consulted, without her knowledge, or against her will. And sometimes in her childhood, before she has even come to the age of reason.

It hardly seems possible at the present moment to liberate these women and suppress this custom of "dowry," but could not, nay should not, the Administration permit a woman thus bought the liberty to have herself re-bought

by a monogamous suitor, who should re-fund the dowry paid for her.

As to the minimum age of marriage for girls, M. Marchand states that it is fixed by the Administration at fourteen. Yes, this decree, of which the majority of the natives are ignorant, may be strictly observed by those who reside in the vicinity of a chief or sub-chief of a district, but how are those, who live two or three days' journey from any official, to be compelled to observe it. At least every responsible European should be empowered to perform the civil ceremony of marriage under certain defined conditions.

As to wives of multi-polygamists, above all with regard to those, acquired without their knowledge, against their will or before the age of puberty, would it not be just to allow them, if they wish, to be bought back by a monogamist suitor, who would refund the dowry paid for them?

M. Marchand replies that if they wish they can redeem themselves by the sale of produce gathered by them in the forest. Here M. Marchand forgets: (1) that married women are not free to work for themselves, for their own profit; (2) that palm groves are by no means common property, they have their owners, and if there are any free ones, a woman could not climb a tree and gather the necessary quantity of palm nuts, several tons, to redeem herself, especially at the low price to which palm nuts have fallen.

The redemption of a wife by *her own* labour is practically impossible.

3. There remains the question of WIDOWS. The custom in the Cameroons, a custom which has the force of law, demands that a widow and her children shall pass into the hands of the deceased's heir, with his furniture, his fowls and his goats. The heir disposes of them, he keeps the widow for himself, or hands her over to a suitor, for a dowry. But in no case is the widow free: she remains what she was, a *piece of property, an object of value*.

Contrary to what M. Marchand states she cannot work for herself, or obtain freedom by gathering and selling the palm nuts, nor yet return to her family, or wed some suitor of her choice.

Under these conditions, should not the Administration give a widow liberty to dispose of herself and her children? M. Marchand adds (p. 213 of the English Report) that as divorce exists throughout the territory, wives discontented with their lot have every freedom to contract a new union.

Yes, but (1) as the wife *belongs* to the man who has bought her by paying the dowry, the Tribunal, composed of a European official and two native assessors, can only return her to her proprietor. (2) In order to plead she must leave her village and come before the Tribunal, which the woman is not free to do. (3) A certain sum must be paid and the woman has not got it. (4) In fact, in practice, the woman is always in the wrong.

Another anomaly, not to say injustice. In the Cameroons there are two statutes on which all judgments are based: the Musulman and the fetishtic; there is no Christian statute, monogamous, or French, although in some districts Christians form the majority of the population or an imposing minority. Consequently Christians are judged by fetishtic customs, which they have formally rejected.

M. Marchand concludes: "according to the spirit if not the letter of the mandate, a mandatory Power must endeavour to preserve native customs, where these are not contrary to good morals."

Exactly, but is not the position of women, as detailed above contrary to good morals and should not the Administration take an interest in it?

In conclusion we ask:

(1) That every wife of a polygamist who wishes to contract a union with a monogamist shall be authorised to redeem herself (through the intervention of her suitor).

(2) That every widow shall be set free with her children, or at least be free to obtain redemption.

(3) That monogamists, generally Christian, shall be judged according to their own customs, as fetishtic polygamists and Musulmans are judged according to theirs.

(4) That the assessors of judges shall not be chosen solely among fetishtic and Musulmans.

NEW ZEALAND

"The Vote" reports that Mrs. Elizabeth McCombe, widow of the former member, has been returned for the constituency of Lyttelton, New Zealand, by a majority of two thousand votes. We offer our congratulations and good wishes to New Zealand's first woman M.P.

It is reported in the Press that legislation is being introduced to permit New Zealand women to retain their British Nationality on marrying foreigners. If this be correct New Zealand leads where Great Britain must follow.

It was New Zealand which led the way in enfranchising its women some forty years ago.

Notes and Comments

We are privileged this month to publish Archbishop Le Roy's article on the position of women, more especially of widows, in the Cameroons and Equatorial Africa. St. Joan's S.P.A., with other societies, is deeply interested in the position of native women in various parts of the world. We do not think that any fair-minded person can read the description given by Archbishop Le Roy without realising that these women are clearly slaves. It is hoped by means of this article to focus attention upon this question at Geneva. We cannot conclude this note without offering our sincere thanks to Mlle. Dannevig for raising the question at the Session of the Mandates Commission of the League of Nations.

* * * *

We are happy to record that St. Joan's Alliance is now affiliated to the Liaison Committee of International Women's Organisations.

Miss Barry represented the Alliance at the meetings of this committee while in Geneva for the opening of the Assembly of the League of Nations. She was also able to attend the Conferences and Committees dealing with questions which bear on the work of the Alliance.

* * * *

Miss Horburgh, M.P., British Delegate to the 14th Assembly of the League of Nations, met representatives of Women's Organisations on September 21st, and gave her views on a number of subjects raised by the Women's Societies. Three subjects, namely, Slavery, Traffic in Women and the Draft Protocol, and the Nationality of Married Women were put forward by St. Joan's Alliance, whose representatives on this occasion were Mrs. Laughton Mathews and Miss Barry.

Miss Horsburgh, in her reply, showed herself to be entirely in sympathy with our views on these subjects; what is more, she showed herself to be a whole-hearted feminist who believes in women sharing in the control of policy, not as women but as human beings. We shall hope for great things from Miss Horsburgh, for she gives the impression of being a worker, and a fearless one.

TO OUR READERS

We wonder whether those who read "The Catholic Citizen" every month are aware that it should be self-supporting. At the present

moment we have a debt on the paper, and that this valuable organ of our Society should be thus hampered is serious indeed.

We get letters in praise of "The Catholic Citizen" from many parts of the world, and we would suggest various ways in which admirers could help to increase its circulation.

The first and most obvious way is to obtain new subscribers. Subscribers need not necessarily become members nor even be Catholics, though since "The Catholic Citizen" is a splendid advertisement of the work done by our Society, Catholic subscribers very often end by joining us. Secondly, if our friends are unwilling to subscribe for themselves, they may know of a priest or nun or other person who would be interested in the paper, in which case they could subscribe for these instead. Later, certain of their protégés will take on their own subscriptions and sometimes they will like to join St. Joan's. Many valuable members have been gained to the Society in this manner. One member sent "The Catholic Citizen" regularly to a Bishop, and after a short time the Bishop paid for his own "Citizen" and joined the Alliance. Several other members have had the paper sent to individual priests or to Rev. Mothers of Convents and just lately a member subscribed for it to be sent to a missionary in Uganda. Lastly, we very much need a band of paper sellers who will sell "The Catholic Citizen" outside churches and meetings. There are always the faithful few who are ready to sell, but our returns would be much increased if we had more sellers upon whom we could depend. As an instance of good propaganda work done by our paper sellers, one of them, while selling outside Westminster Cathedral, met a lady from South Africa who there and then subscribed for the paper to be sent to eight convents in South Africa. This was ten years ago and the subscription is still renewed regularly.

We would beg all readers, first to make sure they have paid their own subscriptions (2s. 6d. yearly post free), and secondly to consider whether they could not possibly increase the circulation of "The Catholic Citizen" in one of the above mentioned ways. If everybody would realise their responsibility and do their bit, it might well be that in a very short time we should not only cover debt but be making profits.

C. S.

ST. JOAN'S SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ALLIANCE,

AND

Editorial Office of "Catholic Citizen":

55 BERNERS STREET, LONDON, W.1. Tel. Museum 4181

Signed articles do not necessarily represent the opinions of the Society.

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Unmarried Women.

Abbé Charles Grimaud, author of "Non-Mariées," (Pierre Téqui, Paris) is obsessed with the idea that generally speaking unmarried women suffer the refinement of torture because they have missed the joys of maternity. This strange obsession has led him into writing this book, in which he plays upon this theme throughout three hundred pages, dividing his book into three parts: Futures Célibataires; Le Calvaire de la Non-Mariée; Le Thabor de la Non-Mariée. He paints in sensational language the supposed martyrdom of a young woman who realises that she will never marry and have children. Her whole nature suffers martyrdom, her whole soul is thwarted on every point (contredite sur tous les points). None of the profound tendencies of her nature will be satisfied. Since to an aspirant for maternity to eat, drink, sleep, think, wish, pray, have for ultimate object the realisation of the great desire to have children. Therefore to be deprived of a family is to lose all.

The all is no small matter. To consider the reason why the woman suffers is to realise that the sorrow is of unfathomable depth. To form the body of a child in the maternal womb, then to fashion (façonner) a soul to the image of God, after the priesthood, is not this the highest mission to be accomplished here below? The role of mother is almost the highest in the social order. And yet the Abbé knows that the religious life ranks higher than maternity.

The Abbé then proceeds to demonstrate the way to consolation. He says rightly that there is a spiritual maternity as well as corporal, and reminds the unhappy spinster that the

Almighty is the cause both of celibacy and marriage, that He has not condemned the unmarried woman to a torment without appeal. She can be a mother to other people's children, perhaps in her own, perhaps in her neighbour's home, she will find her consolation. Some over burdened mother whom she can help.

But to be delivered from torment, she must find work that supplies the need of motherhood. But these perverse spinsters take up other kinds of work, in offices, in shops, etc., worse still, some enter upon masculine professions such as medicine and law, they seem to think that the consideration of well paid work authorises them to take up professions which do not satisfy the maternal instincts. All unmarried women resolved to bear courageously their unfortunate lot, should be counselled to devote themselves to work, which in some way recompenses them for the loss of motherhood. If some unmarried women by the need of earning a living are forced into neutral or masculine callings, they must devote their leisure to some womanly activity, or there is no happiness for them on earth. The Abbé here quotes, as example, a young woman working in an office in Paris, who asked the nuns in charge of an orphanage in her neighbourhood to allot a small boy to her, and every Sunday and holiday she took him out for a walk, and bestowed maternal affection on him. He proved to be her salvation.

We fear that not every young woman would be willing to follow in the footsteps of this heroic girl. Believing that girls marry mainly to have children, the Abbé finds it pos-

Continued on page 79.

Progress in the International Labour Office

BY HELEN A. ARCHDALE

To seek for causes is not always wise. To seek for the cause of the notable change of tone in the I.L.O. is perhaps unnecessary. Let us accept the change and gladly use it to advance our work. We can find, not only in the speeches of Delegates to the I.L.O. Conference, but, more valuable still, in their final decisions, an acceptance of the need and of the rightness of acknowledging equality between the sexes.

At the most recent I.L.O. Conference, held in June at Geneva, a Conference which resulted in no fewer than six Conventions and one Recommendation, dealing with widows, orphans, old age, invalidity insurance and pensions, the Report of the Committee to the Conference contained:

In the first place, with regard to the participation of women in the administration of unemployment insurance schemes: although you will not find any special point on this subject, the Committee was unanimously of the opinion that women should collaborate in the management of insurances schemes on the same footing as other members of such schemes.

and

We also held that it would be unjust to vary benefits according to the age and sex of the unemployed person. The old, the young, and women should be aided in the same way as their colleagues, due account being taken of their contributions, their family responsibilities, and the wages which they have lost through becoming unemployed.

A special category of "married workers" was rejected

"on the ground that the latter (including married women) should be treated exactly like unmarried workers."

Another Committee expressed, unasked, its belief in the principle of the equality of the sexes.

In actual achievement there is little, but that little of considerable value. In the six finished Conventions, which deal with widows, orphans, old age, invalidity insurance, the article defining "Administration" merely says that representatives of insured "persons" shall participate in the management. The Recommendation, which deals with the same subjects in combined form, says that:

National laws or regulations should provide

for an equitable representation of insured men and insured women on the administrative bodies of invalidity, old age, and orphans insurance.

There was a good attendance of women delegates and advisers, some of whom, like their men colleagues, are far from understanding the basic importance of equality between the sexes.

It was of considerable interest to hear the U.S.A. Observer, Mary Anderson, that redoubtable opponent of equality between the sexes, opening her speech thus:

It was with much gratification that I received the assignment from the Secretary of Labour in Washington to attend this extremely important Conference and take back to her what she would delight in obtaining at first hand, if that were possible, namely the action taken by the Delegates on the remedial measures that are to be discussed.

One may, apparently not believe in equality for some women, but one is glad to take it for oneself and work under one of its results. Progress, certainly, even if lopsided.

As a contrast, there was Julie Ahrenholt, Government Adviser from Denmark and redoubtable champion of equality, who, boldly and with the consent of her chief, spoke on the right of married women to work when she should have spoken to the Director's Report. J. Ahrenholt, explaining that her subject was not mentioned in the Director's Report, took as her text the two remarkable articles written by Madame Thibert of the Research Department of the I.L.O., called

"The Economic Depression and the Employment of Women."

I wish I had space to give the whole speech. Here are her concluding words:

One other fact may be mentioned. In these days millions of young women are from an early age dependent on their work for their livelihood: they appreciate their economic independence, and many of them want to maintain this independence when married, realising that marriage is not a safe harbour. To-day the husband is able to support her, to-morrow he himself, the supporter of the family, may be unemployed, disabled, dead. If she knows that she will be turned out of work, on account of marriage, she does not

marry—probably in agreement with the young man concerned, both realising that their financial situation is better if they are not legally married.

This, the result will be a penalisation of marriage, an attack on marriage.

The British Government Delegate, Mr. Leggett, in the discussion on the forty hour week, emphasised the fact that the most important factor in the worker's life is the money he takes home at the end of the week. This true fact should also be remembered when we are dealing with women's working conditions. In the valuable study by Madame Thibert this fact is emphasised that certainly any abolition of women's employment would lead to a fall in the purchasing power of the working classes—a result hardly to be desired just now. Far from being a remedy, the proposed measure would, on the contrary, produce disastrous effects, and I, therefore, invite the members of this Conference and the Labour Office to consider the question and its consequences.

The two articles which J. Ahrenholt used as her text should be read by all. Coming from the I.L.O. they are the most encouraging sign of change and of the progress which we desire which has yet appeared.

Working in the thick of the fight for equality, one may sometimes not see progress, one is too busy making it. Great progress is, all the time, being made, and the I.L.O. is moving with it. Let us be thankful—but continue to push.

N.B.—Me. Thibert's articles were reviewed in the "Catholic Citizen," July-August.—EDITOR.

Reviews

The Art of Living with God. By the Most Rev. Joseph F. Busch, D.D. (Price 3s. 6d., Washbourne and Bogan Ltd.)

This book is not addressed to theologians, but to the everyday Christian. With an economy of words, which detracts nothing from the lucidity of the exposition, his Excellency the Bishop of St. Cloud presents a treatise on the operation of divine grace on the soul. He writes in simple language, a popular work, which should be of great benefit to all who seek to live in union with God. Jaded Christians who may have lost early fervour will find here helpful advice to renew faith and vigour. It is moderately priced at 3s. 6d.

Servants of the King. By Rev. Martin Dempsey, B.A. (Washbourne & Bogan, Ltd., 5s.)

The Servants of the King are those called to serve God in the priesthood. Some of the characters brought before us are historical, some imaginary; it would have been better if Father Dempsey had confined himself to one category or the other. The book is not intended to be in any way scholarly; it is a popular work, pleasantly written.

L. de A.

ANNUAL MASS

The Annual Mass for the repose of the souls of members, associates, and benefactors, of St. Joan's S.P.A., will be offered at St. Patrick's Soho, on Sunday, November 5th, at 10-30. We ask our members to make every effort to attend.

* * * *

A Mass Meeting for the Right of the Married Woman to earn will be held on November 14th, at the large Central Hall, Westminster, at 8 p.m. Twenty-eight women's societies, including St. Joan's S.P.A., are co-operating. We ask our readers to make the meeting known, to come themselves, and to bring their friends. Mrs. Pethick Lawrence will be in the chair, and among the speakers will be Viscountess Astor, M.P., and Miss Nancy Stewart Parnell, B.A. It is not only in Nazi Germany that a determined attack is being made on workers' rights to earn their living, the enemy is to be found also in our own and other countries. Women must defend themselves against this unwarantable interference with their liberties.

* * * *

We offer our congratulations to our member, Dr. Schlüter-Hermkes, on the birth of a daughter, her fifth child. We hope little Reinhold will follow in her mother's footsteps, and grow up a good feminist.

THE WORLD POSITION OF WOMEN AS EARNERS

Under the auspices of St. Joan's S.P.A., a meeting on the above question will be held at St. Patrick's Club, Soho Square, on Friday, October 27th, at 6 p.m. Chairman: Dr. Ethel Poulton, of Birmingham.

Speakers: Mrs. Elizabeth Abbot, Miss E. Butler-Bowdon, British delegates to the recent Open Door International Conference at Prague. Admission free.

Unmarried Women—(Continued).

sible to tell his readers that only two qualities are necessary in a prospective husband, that he should be a Christian, and capable of keeping the pot boiling (*de faire vivre la famille*). The girl must not be too parictular it seems.

The book may prove an object lesson to those who persist in looking upon every woman solely as a potential mother, disregarding her dignity as a human being, and her right to develop her personality and her mind, and to choose the walk of life best fitted to her individual characteristics. We may say here that it is not always those who sentimentalise over maternity, who are the most ready to take their part in working for proper conditions for mothers. We cannot repeat too often that the maternal death rate is very high, and that a great number of deaths in childbirth are preventable.

The Abbé's obsession has led him into strange extravagance, and one wonders why he thought fit to embark upon such a subject. We note with dismay that the book has run to three editions. But French women, with their sound commonsense, may be trusted to appraise the Abbé's lamentations at their true value.

L. DE ALBERTI.

International Notes

Recent issues of "La Vida Catolica Feminina" and "La Sembradora" are as we should expect full of indignation at the recent law of the Cortes prohibiting religious orders from teaching. They call upon all Catholic women to unite in defence of their children, and dropping all party differences to vote only for such candidates as will uphold Catholic standards. Catholic women are called upon to use their vote. A. Matas, in "Vida Catolica Feminina," prays that God may give them the faith of Breton women, the faith and energy of the Irish, that the government may realise that between it and the children an invincible barrier is raised—the will of Christian mothers, who in the name of God, of justice, of right and of liberty, claim the right to guard the souls of their children.

* * * *

The Chilean author, Lucila Godóy, is appointed Chilean Consul at Madrid, where she is now resident.

TREASURER'S NOTE

Will members kindly remember the Christmas Sale, which takes place on the 16th and 17th of next month, and send us something for our stalls, at Caxton Hall.

We are also badly in need of second-hand articles of any description for the barrow.

Would those who have not yet paid their subscriptions for this year kindly do so as soon as possible?
P. M. BRANDT.

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STATE REGULATION OF VICE

Many of us were shocked to read in "The Catholic Times" of 22nd September, a letter from Father Rope repeating that "according to St. Thomas, State Regulation of Vice may be tolerated to prevent worse evils . . ." With all that we now know of the iniquitous system, it would be interesting, but painful, to hear a modern apologist of this system put forward his sorry case before an audience of men and women acquainted with the subject. That it is a safeguard against disease has been proved to be false, it gives a false security, and as sanctioned by the State it is an encouragement to vice, it is known to be the root of the traffic in women and children.

No, we who speak with knowledge, will not tolerate State Regulation of Vice, but take our stand with Pope Pius IX, who stigmatised the system as a commerce in human flesh patented by the Government. An official protest was sent by our chairman to "The Catholic Times," but did not appear.

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