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THE
POSITION OF WOMEN
IN ITALY

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FOREWORD

A real understanding of the position of women in any country demands a study of the history, characteristics and social life of the nation as a whole. General statements about either men, women or nations are always easy and almost invariably misleading; they should be made and accepted with caution, yet for the purposes of brevity general statements are a necessary evil. Within the narrow limits of this small book it is impossible to do more than give a brief review of the position of women as a whole in Italy today, with occasional references to the changes which have taken place in the last twenty years partly as the result of the World War, partly as the result of the Fascist Revolution, partly as the result of modern economic conditions.

And because the limits are narrow it is necessary to resist the almost overwhelming temptation to begin by writing of the lives of those women whose names glow like jewels in the history of Italy. Women who influenced the minds and souls not only of their own generations but the future of their race and country and of Europe itself. The great saints like St. Chiara whose fame is linked with that of St. Francis; St. Catherine of Siena whose piety and political wisdom brought the Pope back from Avignon to Rome and changed the history of Europe: Vittoria Colonna the friend and councillor of Michael Angelo: the famous jurists Battista Gozzadini, Giovanni Bianchetti and Bettina Calderini who in the thirteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries held the chair of Jurisprudence in the University of Bologna. In those days there were many English students at Bologna; perhaps Shakespeare heard some of these young men discussing at the Mermaid Tavern the lectures of their Professor and Bettina Calderini may have been the prototype of the even more famous doctor of laws - Portia.

The list of women who held chairs at the Italian Universities or were members of learned academies is too long to be continued. In addition there were writers, painters, sculptors, composers (Francesca Caccini, who was born in Florence in 1581, was the first woman to write a successful opera), many of them famous far

women in Italy -



beyond their own frontiers. There were also the wives of the rulers of the Italian States, such as Isabella d'Este, who were the inspirers and protectors of the artists, poets and writers who thronged their courts. During the first seventy years of the nineteenth century the hearts and minds of the best of the Italians were devoted to the liberation and unification of their country and the women shared the dangers and arduous of that struggle. Two — Eleonora Pimental de Fonseca and Luisa San Felice — were executed, hundreds were imprisoned, while thousands risked if not their lives at least their liberty, for their part in freeing their country.

Today every profession in Italy is open to women with the exceptions of the armed forces of the Crown, diplomacy and the judiciary; if they may not be members of the recently founded Academy one of its first awards was made to a woman writer — Ada Negri; the prize offered by the Fascist Party of a « Heroic Symphony » was won by a woman, as in 1937 was the prize for the best poem of the year.

In the Renaissance it was the exceptional woman who found or made her opportunity: now the way is open to every woman who wishes to follow a career, while as workers, wives and mothers they enjoy rights and protection which were unknown twenty years ago.

AS WIVES AND MOTHERS

It is the fashion among certain pseudo-intellectuals to declare that they see no difference between Fascism and Bolshevism. A study of the opposing philosophies and ideals on which the two movements are based, is entirely outside the scope of this book, but the briefest consideration of the position of the family in Italy should prove the fallacy of such a statement.

Under Fascism the family is regarded as the basis of the nation, morally, spiritually and economically, therefore every effort is made for the benefit and welfare of women and children. At the same time the importance of the part that women play in the life of the nation as a whole is increasingly stressed and unceasing efforts are made to interest them in the great national and international problems of the day. The idea that a woman should have no interests outside her own home which prevailed very largely in Italy before the War, is being steadily combatted; the wider her education, the greater her efficiency whether as a wife and mother or in the professions and industry, the fuller and happier her life will be as an individual and the larger her share in the life of the nation.

The Legal Position.

As in every country the majority of Italian women look forward to matrimony as their natural destiny; great changes have taken place in their legal position as wives and property owners, and their rights will be considerably increased under the new Civil Code which is shortly to be introduced.

Prior to the Concordat with the Church of Rome in 1929 two marriage ceremonies were necessary — one civil recognized by the State, the other religious recognized by the Church. This dual system occasionally had very unfortunate results for women, especially in the country districts where the civil ceremony was often omitted by the peasants. Since the Concordat the State has recognized the religious ceremony performed by the minister of any religion as legal. Divorce does not exist, but marriages can be annulled under the Canon Law of the Church, Formerly legal separations could only be obtained by women if the husband's mistress was actually living in the house; now they can be obtained for adultery on the part of the husband wherever it takes place. Illegitimate children can be legitimized by the subsequent marriage of their parents. If the man is already married he can legitimize a child born out of wedlock, either secretly, or publicly with the consent of his wife; the child has subsequently a claim on the family property.

Men may marry at the age of 16 and girls at the age of 14, the consent of the parents or guardians being necessary in the case of a man until 21 and in the case of girl until 18. On marriage a woman takes the nationality of her husband, and according to Italian custom adds her name to his.

Recent legislation with regard to the property of married women has greatly improved the position of the wife. All money earned by a woman is her private property, and the law by which she was prevented from taking any financial action — her husband's consent was necessary before she could even sign a cheque — was repealed after the World War. While the husband has the right to the income on her marriage settlement, he has the duty to collect any debts owing to her whether as capital or interest, while she cannot be prosecuted for any debts she may incur. In the event of the husband's income being reduced or his becoming bankrupt, the wife can demand the legal separation of their incomes. In cases of separation caused by the misconduct of the husband or of both parties, the wife is granted the administration of her own property. On death or the annulment of the marriage her property reverts to the wife.

An interesting law in the new Civil Code deals with the creation



A Home of the Maternity and Infant Welfare Organization at Montesacro (Rome).



A mother being weighed.

of a « family estate » which is designed to strengthen the bonds of the family. This « estate » may be created by either the husband or the wife or by a third party, either before or after marriage; it is capital which is for the ultimate benefit of the children. It cannot be touched except in cases of most urgent need and then only with the consent of a magistrate.

Maternity and Child Welfare Organization.

After a careful study of the measures adopted in other countries for the benefit of women and children, Italy has built up on her own lines a vast organization. This includes in necessitous cases not merely free medical attendance for pregnant women and mothers, maternity homes, infant welfare centres, but in the case of orphans, abandoned or delinquent children a system of supervision which continues until they are eighteen.

Women, even when not « necessitous cases », are encouraged to avail themselves of the pre-natal clinics for observation and advice and to bring their babies to the welfare centres for regular examination and to receive instruction in the correct methods of caring for infants. In cases of need, pregnant and nursing mothers are provided with free meals, and beds in hospitals and maternity homes for their confinements. Day nurseries are established in the industrial centres where women can leave children from one to three years old and where they are fed and cared for by trained nurses. These day nurseries are succeeded, where necessary, by kindergartens for children from three to six. Unmarried mothers receive every assistance provided they are prepared to nurse their children and the Organization endeavours to arrange the marriage of the parents; when this is impossible it takes the necessary steps to compel the father to contribute to the support of the child. There is a state service of midwives who work under the medical officers of health.

For sick or tuberculous children there are special hospitals, convalescent homes and sanatoria where they can receive the treatment which has been prescribed for them.

Institutions are provided for orphans, abandoned children and for those whose home surroundings are likely to prove dangerous either physically or morally. These institutions are run on the most modern lines, but it is realized that a child thrives better in a good home than in the best of institutions, so every effort is made to find suitable families in the country where the child may live. They are visited regularly and remain under the care of the Organization until they reach the age of eighteen.

The problem of delinquent children has been met by the estab-

lishment of children's courts in which the magistrate and his assessors (one of whom must be a woman) are specially trained in child psychology. An observation centre for the study of juvenile delinquency has been set up in Rome which serves as a model for provincial centres. Children are kept for varying periods at these centres while their futures are being decided; they are examined medically and psychologically and their family history and environment is studied. In the case of delinquents this information is of the utmost value in enabling the juvenile court to reach its decisions. In addition to the immediate benefits derived by the children, the mass of information which is being collected and collated, is proving of the greatest value in the general study of juvenile delinquency and abnormality.

The work of the Organization for Mothers and Child Welfare is carried out by committees composed of representatives of the State, of the provinces and municipalities and voluntary workers, most of whom are women members of the Fascist Party. In large centres the Head of the Women's Section is ex-officio vice-chairman of the committee, while in smaller places the secretary acts in this capacity. Attached to every committee, which is responsible for the general organisation in its district, is a « committee of patronesses »; these act less in a corporate than in an individual capacity. It is their duty to visit every woman whose case is brought to the notice of the committee; they compile records of all cases, they are expected to keep in touch with the women and children who need help, to advise what steps should be taken by the central committee and to make personal efforts to find work for women who need it.

IN THE FASCIST PARTY

An Italian professor who is a master of English once delivered a lecture which he called « False Friends » — the words which look and sound alike in both languages but which have different meanings. He treated his subject from the point of view of literature, but he might have expanded his lecture to deal with those words which are associated with different ideas and ideals in the political sphere, the use of which leads to many international misunderstandings.

The continual use of the words the « Fascist Party » is unfortunate and misleading to the minds of English-speaking peoples. The word « Party » has for them all the implications of political strife, of « ins-and-outs », of contending factions who attack measures regardless of their merits, merely because they are proposed



Doctor and Nurse visiting a baby.

by the Government or the Opposition. In the beginning the Fascists were a party warring against Communism and corrupt governments, but once the seventeen Opposition parties deserted the Chamber of Deputies and refused to take part in the debates, the character and the objects of the Fascist Party underwent, almost inevitably, a complete change.

« Politics » in the party sense ceased to exist; Fascism became as it were, a union of patriotic men and women. Nobody would claim for a moment that all Fascists are unselfish idealists, that would be to claim that Italians have ceased to be human. There are careerists, self-seekers, doubtful characters, as there are in every human organization, but they are a small minority. In Italy today practically all men and women who are serving their day and their generation are to be found within the ranks of the Fascist Party, consequently in writing of women's activities in any sphere of social service it is impossible to disassociate their work from their membership of the Party.

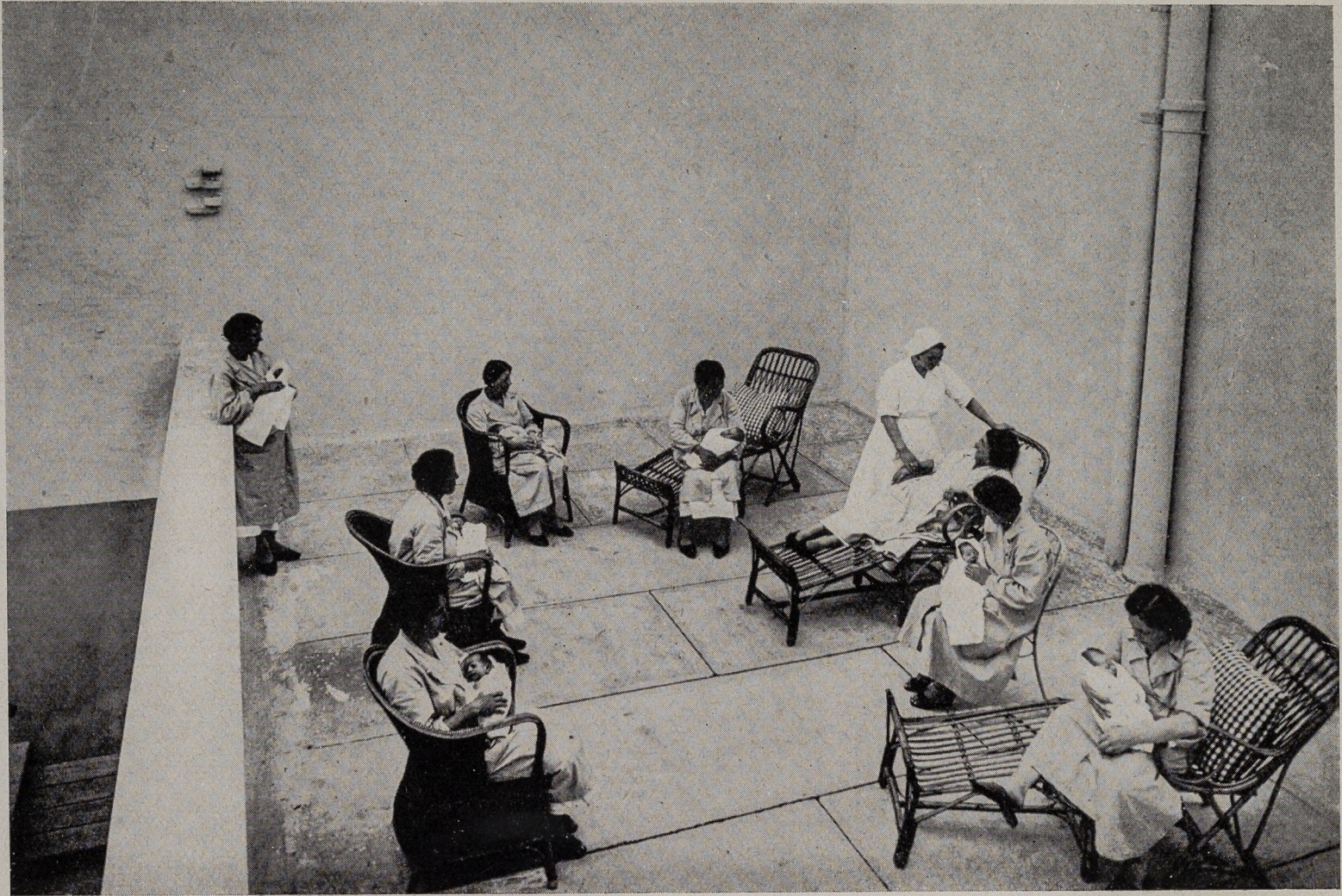
The first Women's Group was founded in Lombardy in 1921; membership was and is purely voluntary, each woman paying a small yearly subscription. On Oct. 28th 1937 their numbers amounted to 737,422 to which must be added the special section of the Rural Housewives with 895,514 members — 1,632,936 in all. The Women's Groups have their own officials and headquarters in every province and town in Italy while they are linked the men's organisation as they come under the control of the Secretary General of the Party.

To what a great and growing extent women are called upon to take their part in the life of the country becomes clear from the study of economic and social conditions in Italy. The Heads of the Women's Groups have the right and duty of serving on every committee dealing with the health and social welfare of the nation; their advice is sought on practically every problem and their influence on public opinion is steadily increasing.

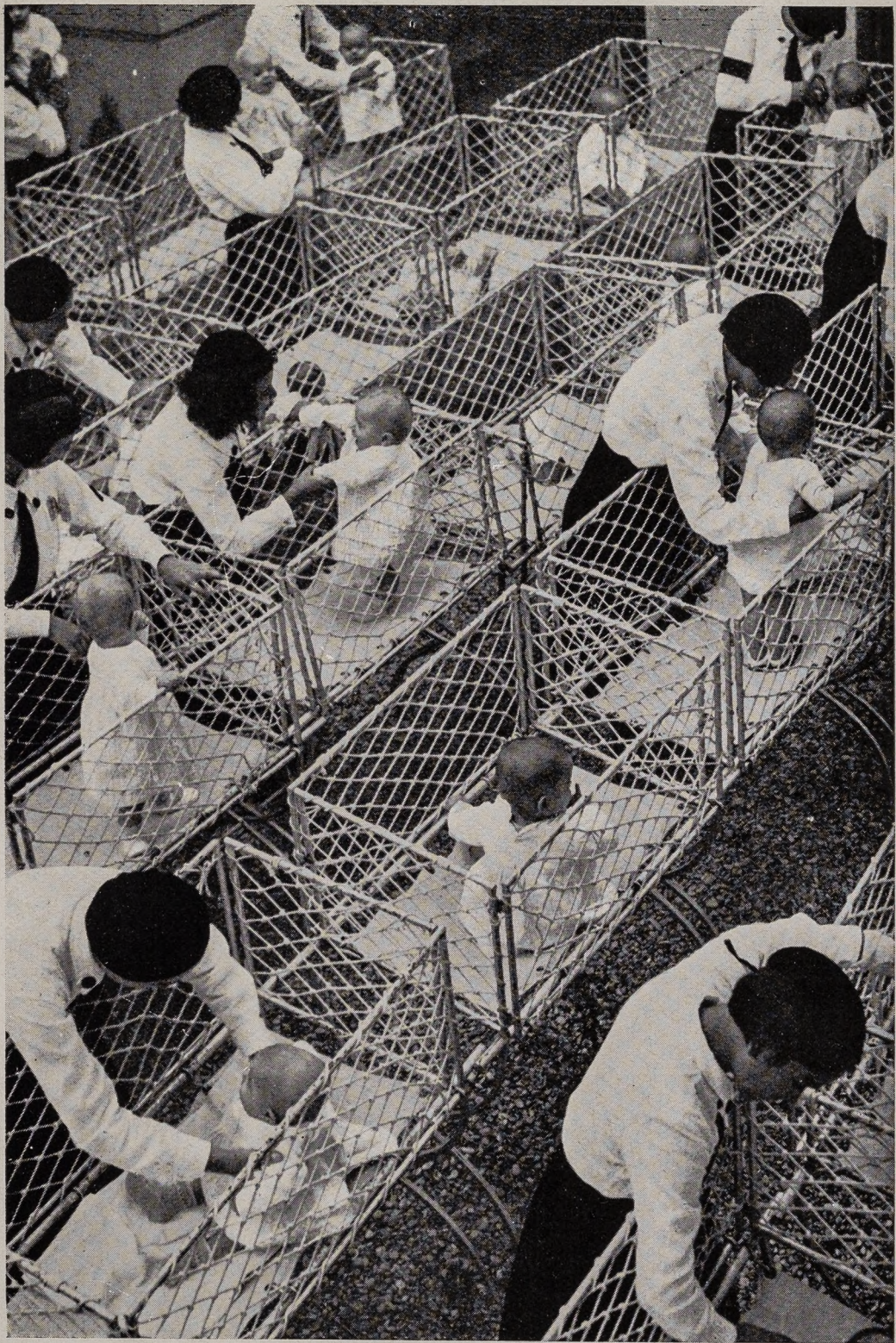
Youth Organization.

Girls join the Youth Organization at the age of 6 as « Little Italians », at 14 they become « Young Italians », at 17 « Young Fascists » and at 25 they are entitled to become full members of the Party. The officials of this Youth Organisation are specially chosen from among the women members of the Party.

The drill, games and sports are carefully graded according to the ages of the girls while the greatest attention is paid to their health. Where necessary medical attention and medicines are provided free, while the poorest children receive free meals at school



Babies in a Home for Mother and Child.



Course in child rearing.

as well as uniforms and the necessary school books through the School Welfare Committee of the Youth Organization.

Summer camps are organized where the children may spend from five to six weeks either at the seaside or in the mountains. There are « day camps » near the large towns and even near some of the villages, where during the heat of the summer the children are taken every morning so as to have the benefit of fresh air, games and nourishing food. Permanent camps are provided for those in need of sun cures, electric treatment etc. where they may remain for as long as necessary. The word « camp » may suggest temporary or improvised accommodation such as tents or « Army huts », whereas both the « summer » and permanent camps consist of buildings designed on the most modern and hygienic lines.

Over 700,000 children were sent to summer camps in 1937, the funds for this work being provided by the Fascist Party and sympathizers.

For the elder girls courses are organized during the winter in domestic economy, hygiene, first aid, and the care of babies; in the towns they can study foreign languages, typewriting, shorthand, book-keeping, photography, dressmaking, needlework, embroidery etc., while in the country districts there are courses in the care of domestic animals, gardening and fruit growing. For all there are theatricals, games, sports and excursions.

A recent development is the organization at the women's centres in the different towns of employment offices for young girls from country districts who are looking for work. A system has been adopted whereby the official to whose group the girl belonged notifies the Head of the Women's Group in the town to which she is going so that the girl may be found accommodation, assisted in her search for employment, advised as to suitable occupations and protected from exploitation, while the local Group provides her with interest and amusement and friends of her own age.

Sport.

One of the most remarkable changes which has taken place in Italy is the enthusiasm for sport which has grown up during the last twenty years. This is encouraged in every possible way among the younger members of the Women's Groups. There are provincial, inter-provincial, national and now international competitions in which they take part and great was the delight when an Italian girl won the 80 metres hurdle race at the Olympic Games in Berlin in a time which equalled the world record.

Less emphasis is laid however on the training of champions than on raising the general standard and providing opportunities

for games for as many girls as possible. Tennis, fencing, ski-ing, skating, athletics, archery and swimming are all encouraged. Through the Party organization thousands of girls are able to take part in sports and games that in many other countries are still the privilege of the well-to-do.

The Rural Housewives.

Practically every European country is faced today with the problem of the drift of the population from the countryside to the towns; motor-buses, cinemas and silk stockings have cooperated with the fall in the price of agricultural products to make villagers discontented with their lot and to make them believe that money and amusements are to be found only in the towns. For many reasons — economic, demographic and hygienic — the Italian Government is determined to do all in its power to discourage this tendency.

The import of raw materials and food — stuffs is a serious drain on the finances of the country; therefore everything must be done to encourage the production of those food — stuffs in which Italy has been deficient in the past; the peasants are, and have always been the most virile and hard working section of the population; the overcrowding of the towns and the struggle to find employment are deleterious to the health and wellbeing of men, women and children.

Agricultural conditions and traditions vary amazingly in the ninety-three provinces, partly as a result of the geographical formation of the country, partly as the result of the centuries of political disunion. In some districts in the north where there are large freehold farms employing regularly a large number of labourers, the farmer's wife holds almost as important a position as her husband, she is a queen regnant not a queen consort. The stock, the dairy, the poultry are all under her control, while she has to supervise the cooking of the meals for men employed on the farm who at harvest time, with the extra hands employed, may amount to as many as fifty. She rules her domain and frequently her husband efficiently but kindly, there is no fear that she will desert her kingdom.

The position is very different in other parts of the country where there are small farms, where the land is held on a crop-sharing basis or where there are a large number of labourers not in regular employment. There the attractions of the towns are more strongly felt and a new organization has been created to deal with the problem from the woman's point of view. Groups of Rural Housewives have the fourfold object of increasing the



Garden of Mother and Child Home in Rome.



Children playing a ball game.

production of food stuffs, of giving the women a fresh interest in their lives, preventing the drift to the towns, and making a welcome addition to the family resources.

Special committees have been organized in rural centres by the women members of the Fascist Party in conjunction with the Ministry of Agriculture and the syndicates of agricultural employers and workers. They help and advise the women in the keeping of poultry, rabbits and bees; elaborate tests have been carried out by the Ministry to discover the best type of hen, clutches of eggs are given free to the women and they are instructed in the simple elements of chicken-farming. In some districts they are provided with small books in which the « life history » of the hens may be recorded so that the centres have records of the results obtained. The same methods have been adopted for rabbits and bees; tasted seeds are distributed and instruction given in the growing of vegetables and herbs for home consumption and for the market.

Rural industries such as the raising of silk worms, spinning, weaving, embroidery, lace making and the use of vegetable dyes — many of them traditional in the various districts — are encouraged. Lectures on child welfare, on first aid, on cooking (so as to make the best of the materials provided by the countryside) and dressmaking are arranged, while a new development is teaching the women to be « house proud ». A very popular form of competition is that for the cleanest and prettiest house. Over sixty special films have been made dealing with all these activities and are shown by the Ministry of Agriculture by means of travelling vans which give open air performances in the villages. Every year exhibitions are held in the large towns with prizes for the best hens, eggs, rabbits, etc. and for the best products of the local handicrafts. Special stalls are provided free in the local markets for the sale of the products of the Rural Housewives.

The organization is extremely elastic and the methods adopted vary considerably from province to province in accordance with local conditions. In Turin for example, the central committee has issued two small books, one to be given to the women themselves dealing with every aspect of rural industries and containing even pictures of herbs which may be cultivated with profit, while the other is a text book on which secretaries may base their lectures on domestic economy and deals with such subjects as cleanliness, cooking, first aid, child welfare, the campaign against mosquitoes, flies, etc.

Although the organization has only been in existence for a few years it now boasts 895,514 members and runs its own monthly

paper. The training of the mistresses for the elementary schools in country districts to act as leaders of the groups, is described in the section on Education.

University Groups.

Women students at the Universities are organized in groups and with the men's groups are affiliated with the International Union of Students. The women's groups carry on educational, sporting and welfare activities and collaborate with the men's groups in matters of general interest.

Social Work.

A description has already been given of the work of the women members of the Party in the sphere of maternity and child welfare. One of the activities particularly of the younger members is the provision of complete layettes for the babies in poor homes. The materials are bought wholesale out of Party funds and sewing parties are organized which are sometimes entertained with lectures or discussions on the questions of the day. The knitted boots, caps, dresses and blankets which complete the outfit are generally made by the elder members of the Party in their own homes. At Epiphany — which is the children's festival in Italy — hundreds of thousands of the poorest children received parcels containing warm garments, toys and sweets.

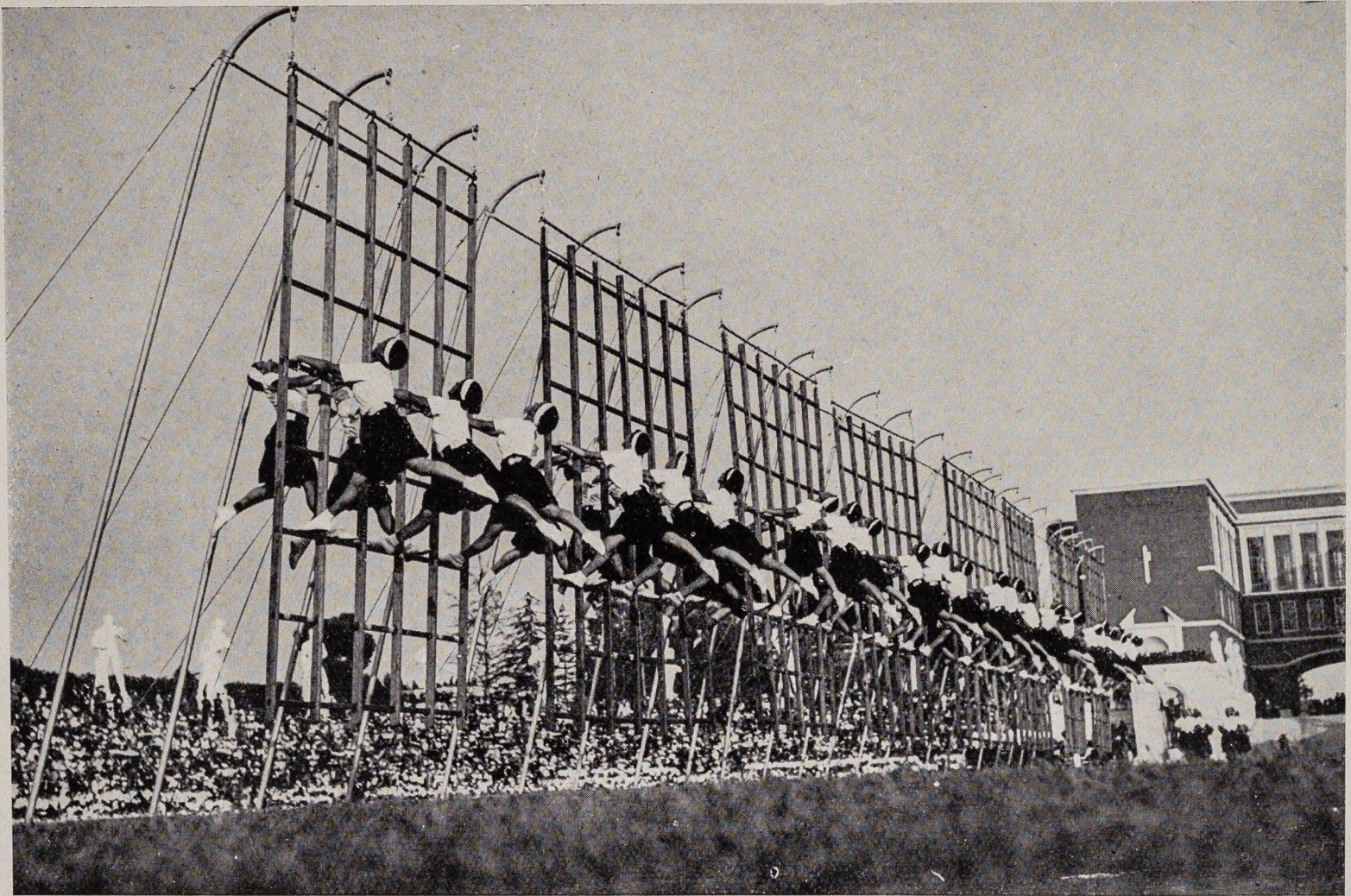
Until the present year — 1937 — the winter relief work was carried on exclusively by the Fascist Party. The large charitable funds in existence have now been consolidated and placed at the disposal of the communes, but the actual work of helping the needy will still be carried on by the welfare workers among the women members of the Party.

This work is not undertaken in any half-hearted or amateurish way. The « Visitors » as they are called are required to undergo a training course of four months, at the end of which they have to pass an examination. They have to be acquainted with the details of the various insurance policies, including the many hospitals, clinics and sanatoria at which workers are entitled to free treatment; with the organization of the maternity and child welfare centres and with the elements of first aid and hygiene. At the same time they have to form a personal judgment on each case and the most suitable form of assistance.

The same care is taken in the selection and training of helpers



Girls skiing.



Pupils of the Orvieto Academy of Physical Culture.

in the summer camps for children; in Turin special courses are organized lasting for 40 days in which instruction is given in matters of health, diet, clothing, timetables, physical exercises, sun and sea bathing etc.

Long stretches of the sandy shores of Italy are now lined with the summer holiday homes to which — with those in the mountains — over 700,000 children were sent during 1937. The staffs are composed of women Fascists, many of them young school teachers who are enthusiasts and return year after year to spend much of their summer holidays caring for and amusing the children.

IN POLITICS

In the Italian Corporate State the representation of men and women is vocational, not geographical. There are twin syndicates of employers and employed for each of the several branches and subdivisions of agriculture, industry, commerce, banking and insurance, while professional workers compose a fifth group. The syndicates are the basis of a pyramid, being organized into provincial unions, national Federations, into nine Confederations and for economic purposes employers and employed are represented in equal proportions in the Corporations.

The members of the syndicates choose from among themselves their representatives on the Provincial Unions, and on the Federations; these in turn nominate representatives on the Confederations and Corporations. At present the Confederations submit their lists of candidates for the Chamber of Deputies to the Grand Fascist Council by whom the final selection of Deputies is made. This procedure is however now being studied with the view of trying to obtain a still more direct representation of the interests of the nation as a whole, and a new method of selecting the Deputies is to be adopted.

Women are entitled to join the syndicate of their particular employment on exactly the same terms as men; one has already been appointed a member of the National Committees of Corporations, while five represent occupations which are exclusively or mainly carried on by women, in the Council of Corporations. It is not yet known whether they will be eligible to serve in the new Chamber.

They are entitled to sit on the advisory Municipal Councils which superseded the former elected Councils. Gorizia led the way in appointing a woman member and was followed by Rome.

IN EDUCATION

All schools and Universities in Italy are open to girls; in the elementary schools girls and boys are taught in separate classes, but practically all the higher schools are co-educational, except for private boarding schools which are the exception and not the rule.

The number of women entering the Universities has increased from 6 p.c. of the total number of students in 1913 to 15 p.c. in 1935. The figures for this latter year show clearly the trend of interests of women at the present time.

	Women	Men
Jurisprudence and political science	469	13,755
Economics and commerce	523	10,267
Literature and philosophy	3,224	3,092
Teaching	2,300	1,991
Medicine and surgery	543	12,923
Mathematics and physics	1,025	3,687
Chemistry	942	1,520
Engineering and Architecture	50	3,771

The large number of graduates in Literature and Philosophy and in Teaching is explained by the fact that the teaching profession offers the largest number of openings, especially in view of the preference of the Ministry of Education for mistresses in the rural elementary schools. It has been calculated that there are now about 135,000 women teachers in Italy.

All teaching in kindergartens is done by women; in the elementary schools the proportion of women teachers is 81 p.c. and heads of schools are 25 p.c.; in the higher schools 44 p.c. of the teachers are women and 10 p.c. of the heads; in the technical institutes 2 p.c. of the teachers are women and in the Universities 1.3 p.c. of the professors are women. There are in addition many readers and assistants, notably in the faculties of obstetrics, medicine, mathematics, physics, natural sciences, philosophy and corporate studies.

In the teaching profession the rule of « equal pay for equal work » is general; men, however, frequently receive higher salaries owing to family allowances; when, however, a woman is responsible for the maintenance of children under fourteen or dependent relatives, she is entitled to the same allowances.

In addition to the regular educational facilities which are common to both sexes, four special educational institutes have been founded for women within the last few years. These are the Aca-

demy for Physical Training at Orvieto; the Schools for Teachers in Rural Districts, for Domestic Economy and for Factory Assistants, these three being on the outskirts of Rome.

Physical Training College at Orvieto.

Founded in 1937, the College occupies a fine modern building in the outskirts of one of the most picturesque hill towns in Umbria. Entrance is by competitive examination, the course lasting for two years. In addition to instruction in gymnastics and games, needlework, dressmaking and handicrafts are taught, while great emphasis is laid on the development of character in order to fit the students to become leaders in the Youth Organization.

After securing their diplomas the graduates are attached for nine months to the provincial committees of the Women's Section of the Fascist Party in order to obtain practical experience.

School for Teachers in Rural Districts.

Candidates for posts in the schools in country districts who have already obtained their ordinary teaching diplomas can spend ten months in this school, board, lodging and instruction being provided free. The object of the course is not merely that they should be competent to teach children, but that they should use their knowledge to influence farmers and their wives to adopt up-to-date methods in agriculture.

Among the subjects taught are law, agriculture, rural industries, rural economics, domestic economy, care of stock; poultry, rabbit and bee farming, growing of vegetables, first aid, child welfare, religion, drawing, singing, and physical training. The instruction is not merely theoretical but practical, for there is a model farm attached to the school. The course lasts for ten months, at the end of which an examination is held and diplomas awarded.

School of Domestic Economy.

This school is intended not only for teachers but for all those interested in the subject. The mistresses who hold its diploma can obtain posts to teach domestic economy in the high and technical schools. The course which lasts for ten months includes law, social science, domestic economy, history of art, book-keeping, chemistry, dietry, anatomy and physics, first aid, child welfare, social hygiene, religion, singing and physical training. There is practical teaching of cooking; dressmaking; mending; knitting etc.

School for Factory Assistants.

All candidates for admission to this school must hold a university degree, a teacher's certificate or pass an examination; they must be unmarried and between the ages of twenty-one and thirty. Scholarships are awarded by the Confederations of Industry and of Industrial Workers, and students who pass the examination held at the end of ten months are immediately appointed to posts in factories.

The subjects taught include law (civil, criminal and labour), psychology of social assistance, principles and technique of social service and their practical application, social science, factory legislation, labour and health insurances, the pathology and physiology of work, anatomy and physiology, first aid, child welfare; provision of meals in factories, religion; history of art; singing and physical training.

These four schools are providing new professions and opportunities of employment for women.

IN THE PROFESSIONS

Reference has already been made to the position and activities of women in the field of education and the numbers of those taking degrees; the following table shows the approximate numbers of those practicing in the various professions in 1935:

Teachers:	135,000;
Lawyers:	180;
Doctors:	795;
Dentists:	30;
Notaries:	5;
Veterinary surgeons:	2;
Engineers and chemists:	195;
Architects:	13;
Agricultural experts:	13;
Writers:	300 - 400;
Journalists:	130;
Artists and musicians about:	600.

This table however does not include women in certain civil service posts (for which they compete on equal terms with men), nor the large number of women occupying important positions who are difficult to classify. For example the heads of the three largest libraries in Italy, including that in Rome which corresponds to the British Museum Library, are now women; many of the

best of the younger archaeologists are women and the Professor of Archaeology in Rome University (a woman) is also head of the Government Expedition for Excavations in Crete: while a woman is vice-director of the Observatory in Rome. The head of a recent scientific expedition to Africa chose two women scientists as his assistants. In the fields of biology and chemistry women are doing increasingly important research work. Women doctors are being employed for work among women and children, and women lawyers are finding work in the special courts for juvenile delinquents.

A considerable change has taken place since the war in the nursing profession. Formerly this was almost entirely in the hands of the nursing sisterhoods; now lay hospital and district nurses are being trained in large numbers. Examinations for diplomas are held by the State, the course being two years for hospital nurses, three for district nurses. In addition to the hospitals, maternity homes and child welfare centres, there is a growing demand for trained nurses in clinics, in first aid stations in factories, in elementary schools and in the large number of free sanatoria for workers suffering from tuberculosis and occupational diseases; there are also trained nurses working under the doctors in charge of all the holiday camps. District nurses are rapidly being appointed in all towns and villages.

Reference has already been made in the section on education to the special school for the training of welfare workers. This new profession is providing many openings for women especially in the large factories where they are welcomed as counsellors and advisers of the workers on all social problems and an invaluable link with municipal, school, insurance and all other authorities. Their tasks are multifarious and range from instructing the workers on their rights and obligations under the various insurance schemes, advising mothers about ailing children and obtaining necessary documents, to composing family quarrels.

In literature «the wind bloweth where it listeth» and the number of outstanding women writers in any country at any time bears but little if any relation to the position of women as a whole, but Italy can boast of three outstanding women writers of the early twentieth century — the late Matilde Serao, the late Grazia Deledda who was awarded the Nobel prize for literature, and the poetess Ada Negri who was awarded the Mussolini prize by the Italian Academy. A notable development has taken place in journalism for women: two of the largest reviews in Italy, «Gerarchia» and «La Rassegna Nazionale» have women at the head of their editorial staffs, while there are a large number of weeklies and monthly reviews published by and for women.

Women's Organizations.

It was amusing to read a report in a British newspaper of a speech made by a man in which he stated that in the dictatorship countries (among which he presumably included Italy) «where women's influence was of no account, the greatest pains were taken to suppress and dissolve societies for women». The statement seems slightly contradictory, as if women have no influence their societies have obviously no importance, while the speaker was clearly ignorant of conditions in Italy where there are a large number of extremely active women's societies.

The Federation of Professional Women and Artists which includes the National Association of University Women has a membership of over 10,000, and is affiliated to the Confederation of Professional Workers and Artists. It assists its members in every possible way, both with advice and encouragement; in addition to helping artists to organize «one-woman» shows, it has induced many women to take up such professions as furnishing and interior decoration, floriculture and garden designing while not neglecting the older arts and crafts of embroidery, weaving etc.

The Italian National Council of Women is a large and energetic body which plays a considerable part in the activities of the International Council of Women. Its President — the Contessa Daisy di Robilant — is the Convener of the International Child Welfare Committee and Professor Maria Castellani is the Convener of the International Radio Committee. Italian Women also play their part in the International Federation of Business and Professional Women, Professor Maria Castellani being one of its Vice-Presidents and the sculptress Signora Paoli Pogliani, the President of the Fine Arts Committee.

Other societies which are affiliated to international organizations are the Federation of University Women, the Federation of Women Jurists, Federation of Women Doctors, Federation for Women's Rights and the Lyceum Clubs, of which there are six in Italy.

There are in addition an immense number of women's organizations such as the Association of Soldiers, Wives and Mothers which engages in patriotic work; the clubs such as those in Milan and Turin which organise lectures, art exhibitions and theatrical performances; the Alpine Club for winter sports; others which care especially for young girls or women out of work, as well as the large number of charitable organizations connected with the Roman Catholic Church.

An aspect of women's work in Italy which is frequently overlooked is that of the great nursing, teaching and charitable Orders. The Mothers Superior of these Orders, entirely apart from their

religious duties, occupy administrative positions of the heaviest responsibility. They have great funds under their control with which to carry on their work; the schools under their direction, which have to comply with all the regulations of the Minister for Public Education, range according to the Convent concerned from kindergartens for the poorest children to boarding schools for the well-to-do. The hospitals provide the most up-to-date treatment for all classes and for the training of nurses; there may be large vegetable gardens attached to supply the hospital. Other Orders provide the staff for all the welfare work of great factories; others care for the old people; others serve in the women's prisons.

IN AGRICULTURE, INDUSTRY AND COMMERCE

Both in agriculture and in industry the number of women employed has decreased during the last twenty years; Professor Maria Castellani, the well-known statistician and expert on all questions connected with women's work, regards this as a proof of the growing prosperity the country — fewer women being obliged either to support themselves or to add their earnings to the family income. In 1911 3,000,000 women were employed in agriculture, by 1931 this figure had dropped to 1,500,000; there were 1,400,000 employed in industry in 1911 and 1,300,000 in 1931. On the other hand in commerce the figures rose from 190,000 in 1911 to 280,000 in 1931; in banking and insurance from 11,000 to 12,000; in administrative posts (public and private) from 11,000 to 50,000; in teaching from 75,000 to 135,000; in the health services from 28,000 to 74,000. This shows that from a variety of causes — improvement in education, a desire for independence and a diminution in the average income of the middle classes, that an increasing number of educated women were seeking and obtaining employment.

Agriculture.

As these figures demonstrate agriculture still provides the livelihood of the largest proportion of the population in Italy, the figures for the men showing an even greater difference — 6,500,000 in agriculture only 4,800,000 in industry. The million and a half women includes those who farm their own land, the wives of farmers and farm labourers and the large numbers employed on seasonal work; where whole families work together it is difficult to estimate exactly the number of women employed or the tasks

which they perform. In the section dealing with the Organization for Rural Housewives a description has been given of the new impetus that has been provided for the encouragement of women's work; in addition they help in the ordinary tasks on the farms, cleaning the land, harvesting, fruit gathering etc.

There is, however, one seasonal occupation which is entirely in the hands of women, the weeding of the rice fields. Until the present Government came into office the conditions under which this was carried out were deplorable. The women were recruited haphazard, were lodged in hovels with no proper arrangements for either cooking or cleanliness or for the care of their infants whom they were obliged to bring with them.

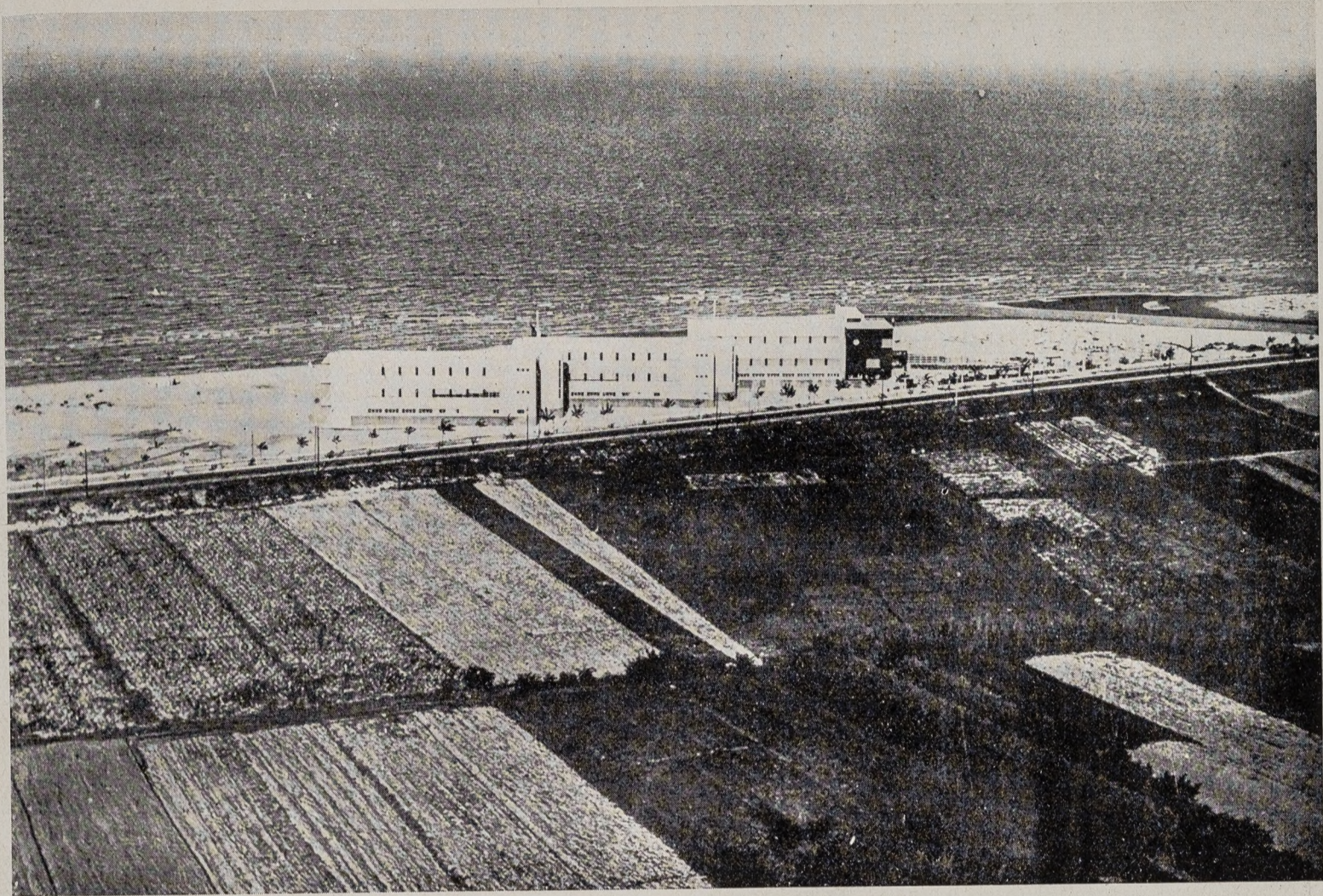
That has now been entirely changed. Special employment bureaux exist for the recruiting of the workers for the rice fields. Employers are obliged to provide suitable accommodation, which is inspected regularly by the heads of the local groups of the Women Fascists; crèches are set up for their children; a standard wage is laid down, standard rations are provided as well as proper equipment to protect them from the leeches which invest the fields.

On a smaller scale the same arrangements are made for the olive harvest, though here the work is not exclusively in the hands of women; during the vintage men, women and the elder children work together. Nature waits for nobody and the grapes must be gathered when they are ripe and the sun shines or a year's work is lost.

Industry.

The greatest proportion of women workers in industry are employed in the textile factories — notably those of the Snia Viscosa, the largest exporters of rayon in the world. This new industry which has virtually come into existence since the War enjoyed the advantage of being able to plan its buildings and equipment on the most up-to-date lines. It is the policy of the Company to erect its factories in the country in the neighbourhood of large towns. Model villages are built for the workers, arrangements are made for others to live in nearby villages, motor transport to and from the factory being provided free; where necessary there are hostels for girls, with cookery and dressmaking classes and evening lectures.

Under Italian law no woman may be dismissed on marriage; she is entitled to leave her work one month before the birth of a child and to return one month after it during which period she receives her wages and may not be discharged. The employer is compelled to provide a crèche under the charge of a trained nurse



Seaside Colony at Riccione.



Cow Stable for providing babies with milk.

for the babies of the women workers, who are entitled to two half hour periods with pay so as to be able to nurse their babies.

No woman may be employed on night shifts or on work likely to injure her health. In the textile factories there is no competition between male and female labour; the line is clearly and easily drawn between the shops in which there is the lifting of heavy weights and the chemical processes which are considered deleterious to the health of women, and the spinning, washing and grading which is done entirely by female labour owing to the need for fineness and delicacy of touch. In the grading shop this is so important that the women's hands are manicured regularly. The packing is also done by women, though here it would be possible to employ men.

Large firms pride themselves on doing far more for their workers, whether men or women, than is demanded by the laws. Kindergartens with modern equipment, playing fields and free meals for children up to elementary school age, allotments, sports grounds, clubs, excursions; large dining halls where nourishing meals can be obtained at cost price; rest rooms with wireless sets and gramophones; first - aid rooms, clinics and free medical attention both at the factory and at home are some of the welfare services which are available for the workers. In the model villages of the Snia Viscosa Company the rents are progressively reduced on the birth of each child until a family with four children lives practically rent free. As a result employment in the works is becoming hereditary, and there are now boys and girls being taken on whose first acquaintance with the factory was as babies in the crèches.

As was stated in the Political Section, women enjoy the same rights in the syndicates as the men, but so far have shown little interest in the larger problems affecting labour and industry. Representatives who are elected by the women and confirmed by the management, report and discuss any small grievances, while more serious matters which affect the workers as a whole are taken up by the secretary and the committee of the local syndicate.

Commerce.

Most of the women shown in the census as being employed in commerce are to be found in such essentially feminine occupations as dressmakers, milliners and shop assistants, a small proportion as employers, the vast majority as workers. There are also clerks and shorthand typists and a certain number occupying administrative posts in commercial firms.

As a result of the economic crisis an agreement was reached

between the Confederations of Employers and Employed in Banking and Insurance that 12 p.c. of the staffs of the banks should be women and in the insurance offices, 15 p.c. This agreement can be modified at any time with the consent of the two Confederations. As a matter of fact the percentage of women employed in banks is only 11 p.c. while in insurance companies it is 17 p.c., 2 p.c. over the figure originally laid down.

A comparison of the figures of the census of 1911 with those of 1931, shows that the proportion of women employed in commerce has fallen from 23.30 to 21.26 p.c. while in banking and insurance it had risen from 3.56 p.c. to 12.09 p.c.

* * *

This short survey is an attempt to answer a question which is often asked — « what is the position of women in Italy today? ». In the minds of many the question is really phrased. « What is the attitude of the Government and the Fascist Party towards women and women's work? ».

As has been shown, the position of women has steadily improved; they are protected and helped as wives, mothers and workers. Practically every profession is open to them, but a very definite effort is made to prevent unhealthy competition between them and men, which almost inevitably leads to bitter feeling between the sexes. The Fascist Party does not want to turn women either into domestic drudges or bad imitations of men. As Mussolini said. « Do not let us waste our time discussing whether women are superior or inferior to men; let us agree that they are different ».

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