

THE WOMAN'S LEADER

AND THE COMMON CAUSE

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NOTES AND NEWS.

A Delicate Situation.

Those who have been following international developments more or less closely have of course been fully aware of the almost unstable equilibrium existing in Europe. Recent events have now awakened the less informed general public to the delicacy of the position across the Channel. There is less than a year to go before the Disarmament Conference meets at the beginning of February in Geneva, but in that short time all manner of things may happen to dash the hopes of those who trust that real progress towards disarmament will be made at that Conference. The amount of jealousy and suspicion rampant in Europe is clearly indicated by the alarm shown in France at the proposed visit of the German Chancellor and Foreign Minister to this country at the beginning of May. Those who adversely comment on this invitation to have "friendly and informal conversations" on matters affecting the two countries seem to view it only in the light of recent happenings—the proposed Austro-German Customs union, and the as yet not completed negotiations between France and Italy on Naval disarmament. That a similar invitation was given to France appears to be ignored by the more extreme nationalist press of that country, which is doing everything it can to increase the nervousness of the French people; and further that the Ministers of both France and Germany were unable at the time to accept, but each asked leave to defer their replies until they were better able to judge if they could be spared from their own countries to visit Great Britain. That the meeting here at the beginning of May will be of inestimable value from the point of view of securing progress in preparation for the Disarmament Conference goes without doubt, but a friendly discussion with France is even more important and every effort will be necessary to assure France that Great Britain is genuinely anxious to understand her point of view.

Child Slavery in Hong-Kong.

Another leaflet¹ has recently been issued by Lieut.-Commander and Mrs. Haslewood, in which they deplore the negative attitude of the Church of England and its associated societies to the system of Mui Tsai. We are not conversant with the reasons which may exist to account for this apparent apathy, but we cannot imagine that any religious society could approve of the

¹ *Ah Moy, A Child Slave of Hong-Kong.* By Lt.-Com. and Mrs. Haslewood. (Leaflet published by the A.B.C. Press, Ltd., Bath.)

deplorable state of affairs revealed. The open sale of children into virtual slavery still goes on, and "the orders given by the British Government on 22nd August, 1929, that machinery should be set going forthwith to ensure, with respect to the existing mui tsai, their inspection, control, remuneration, and, when desired, their release, have not been carried out by the Hong-Kong Government." On 25th March, 1931, it was stated in the House of Commons that an average of more than 1,300 bodies of dead children are picked up in the streets of Hong-Kong each year. These figures were not denied by the Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies, who said that "in almost every case no cause is discovered for suspicion that the death resulted from other than natural causes." He admitted that there was certainly a "very high infant mortality there." There certainly is, and we feel that no effort should be spared and no protest omitted which will help to bring about the abolition both of the appallingly high mortality and of the slavery of children in a British Colony.

Teachers and the School Leaving Age.

The National Union of Teachers' meeting at Yarmouth this week passed a resolution urging Parliament to pass without further delay a Bill to raise the school leaving age to 15, by an almost unanimous vote. The idea that the privilege of longer education should be limited to exceptional children received no sympathy, and the argument that the now defunct Education Bill was unjustifiable economically was disdainfully cast aside on the grounds that the removal of half a million children from the labour market would relieve the burden of unemployment in its worst aspects, that of the unemployed adolescent. We are struck by the fact that the National Union of Teachers, a body with a large majority of women members, appears to give a far larger proportion of its time and thought to impersonal educational issues than the hundred per cent he-male National Association of Schoolmasters, which, as we shall see below, concentrates mainly on discussing wounds to its sensitive sex vanity.

Women Teachers for Boys.

Feminist influence was given as one of several causes of the continuance of the placing of woman teachers in charge of classes of boys at the annual conference of the National Association of Schoolmasters in Birmingham last week. It is difficult to see what feminist influence has to do with the matter. Except for very small boys, we agree that boys are better under men teachers and girls under women. But we must remind the Association that there is another side to the picture. There are mixed schools under men head teachers, and in many places we understand women have little chance of reaching such headship. The School Masters' attitude to this sex inequality is based on the two assumptions—first, that "men, except for a negligible majority, would not accept service under women," and, secondly, "that it was equally and emphatically true that the majority of women preferred to serve under a man." The mover of the resolution against women teaching boys challenged any local education authority to dispute that where they had a woman at the head of a mixed school they had the utmost difficulty in securing any men on the staff. Unfortunately, we believe it is true that many—by no means all—of the class of men who enter elementary education suffer from an inferiority complex which makes them very jealous of their masculine dignity and resentful of any imagined slights. If teaching under Public Authorities as a profession for men as well as women received the honour that it deserves, and was recruited from the ablest young men and women from the Universities, these out of date prejudices and jealousies—largely the outcome of ill-breeding and "second-rateness" both moral and intellectual—would disappear.

Training of Older Children in Children's Homes.

A circular foreshadowing an important advance in the training of boys and girls over school leaving age was issued on 27th March by the Ministry of Health to County Councils and County Borough Councils. It asks for information as to the present number of such children who are receiving any vocational or general education, and particulars as to the facilities, if any, which are provided for them. With special reference to girls, the Minister suggests that more use might be made of voluntary training homes. We commend this circular (No. 1189) to the notice of our readers interested in the question of providing opportunities for training and education for children after the age of 14. We wish there were more women on the Public Assistance Committees to look into the matter.

Parisian Women's Revolt against Taxation without Representation.

A small group of women in Paris have made the momentous decision that they will not pay another sou in income tax until they have received the parliamentary franchise. We shall follow with interest the commencement of a movement to place the French woman on an equal footing, as regards her political importance, with her sister of nearly every other European country. So far the dislike of fuss and public demonstration of any kind has outweighed any dissatisfaction she may have felt with her inferior status.

Women House Property Managers.

At a meeting of the Liverpool City Council last week an amendment was moved to refer back a resolution of the Housing Committee appointing three women property managers, on the grounds first that women would pry into the affairs of people in the slum areas and that men already on the staff were capable of doing the work. Miss Eleanor Rathbone defended women from the allegation that they made inquisitorial inquiries, and pointed out that the work of property management on corporation estates was essentially a woman's job because it is mainly women who have to be dealt with. The prejudice against women managers is both illogical and unfair. The duties are so obviously those which can best be performed by a woman and by a woman trained for property management. The selection of the most suitable families, the allocation of houses, the week to week problems of the tenant, or, to be more exact, the tenant's wife, because it is the woman who is invariably interviewed, are matters that women can deal with more suitably than men. A resolution to this effect was passed at the annual council meeting of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship; this should lead to local inquiries in different parts of the country by Women Citizens' Associations and Townswomen's Guilds as to existing methods of property management and the possibility of introducing the Octavia Hill system. Liverpool is not the first city to adopt it, Chester, Rotherham, Chesterfield, and more recently the Westminster City Council, are among the corporations which have appointed women.

A College for Working Women.

The Hillcroft College for Working Women, at Surbiton, in its annual report for 1930, gives a very interesting analysis of the previous occupations and after-careers of its first 200 students. The majority who entered were between the ages of 21 and 42. Sixty-five came from some kind of clerical work, fifty-nine from mill or factory, forty-one from household work. The remainder had been dressmakers, tailoresses, shop assistants, nurses, or restaurant workers. In view of the criticism that higher education will unfit the worker for industrial work, it is interesting to hear that over half of the students returned to their former work, no fewer than fifty-three out of the 200 to the same job, and fifty-six returned to the same firm under different conditions. It is not less satisfactory to know that in some cases the year at Hillcroft led to further intellectual training, one student having gained an extra-mural scholarship to read for Modern Greats at Oxford, and a second is going to read Modern History at Girton. Twelve students went on to university social study departments. This last is a very hopeful development. The social services should not be the preserve of the middle classes; the sole barrier that has hitherto prevented the entry of girls of the so-called working classes has been the difficulty of acquiring the necessary background of academic study. We have always hoped that Hillcroft would supply this, and hope that it may do in even larger numbers in the future.

The London Society for Women's Service.

The prevailing depression has, as was to have been expected, affected professional as well as industrial openings for women;

the choice of a career is therefore a very serious problem for both young men and women of the educated classes to-day. The London Society for Women's Service has continued the work in this direction which it began during the war and has now been appointed the official adviser on training for women to both the Oxford and Cambridge Women's Appointments Boards, as well as that of Trinity College, Dublin.

The British Social Hygiene Council.

The fifth Imperial Social Hygiene Congress is to be held this year in London, at the British Medical Association House, from 13th July to 17th, and the preliminary programme has now been issued. At the opening session the position of social hygiene and venereal disease throughout the Empire will be the subject of a symposium from Dominion and Colonial representatives, and a conference the following day will consider what further steps can be taken in the colonies to build up ancillary social services in support of schemes of medical treatment. An important educational conference will consider how the Universities can encourage the teaching of the biological sciences in secondary schools. This congress will be followed by a summer school at St. Hugh's College, Oxford, from 29th July to 5th August, which is designed to meet the needs of officials, health visitors, teachers, social workers, and others, especially those working among children both at home and overseas. Three courses of lectures are announced: "Biology and human life," by Professor Sir J. Arthur Thomson; "The Physiology of Adolescence," by Professor Winifred Cullis and Dr. Israel Feldman; and "Contributions of Psychology to the problems of Social Hygiene," by Professor Cyril Burt and Dr. William Brown. As the programme states, this school will provide a useful grounding in the biological foundations of public health, as well as of those more particular questions of family relationships, sex training for adolescents, and the reduction of venereal disease.

The Lives of Great Women.

Two books which will be received with unusual interest by our readers are announced in the Spring lists, both, it happens, written by former editors of this paper. It was by Dame Millicent Fawcett's own wish that any account of her life which might be written should be the work of her friend and fellow-worker, Mrs. Oliver Strachey. Mrs. Strachey has now completed her task, and her book will shortly appear. The other book is a new life of Florence Nightingale, undertaken at the request of her relatives by Mrs. Ida O'Malley. Our readers will look forward to the advent of both of these books with keen anticipation of enjoyment.

Miss Baylis' Reminder.

The London correspondent of the *Manchester Guardian* records in his letter of 31st March a story concerning Miss Lilian Baylis, the creator and sustainer of drama at the Old Vic, which we cannot refrain from quoting. Miss Baylis was so unfortunate as to be hurt, recently, in a motor accident. After the accident a crowd gathered round the victims, and one man remarked: "Why it's Miss Baylis of the Old Vic." Whereupon Miss Baylis opened her eyes and said faintly, but decisively, "And Sadler's Wells." The story may or may not be factually true, but it is undoubtedly, as Dame Millicent Fawcett would have said, "dramatically true." The *Manchester Guardian* correspondent records it "in all admiration . . . as illustrating her extraordinary devotion to the cause which owes everything to her concentration of purpose." In this same spirit we retail it to our readers—and as a reminder that Miss Baylis' work is now extended north of the river.

A Distinguished Woman Candidate for Eastbourne Town Council.

Miss Florence Campbell, O.B.E., who was the National President of the Y.W.C.A. for some years, and is now President of the Eastbourne Council of Women, has decided to contest the vacant seat on the Town Council. To those critics who suggest that five women councillors are sufficient for Eastbourne out of a total membership of thirty-six, Miss Campbell replies in the negative. "With the ever-increasing amount of social work which has to be undertaken by local authorities, such as child welfare, maternity work, and now the public assistance work, I feel there is more and more scope for the useful employment of women's services." In the Meads Ward, for which Miss Campbell is standing, women voters outnumber the men in the proportion of three to two. We hope these voters will rise to the height of their opportunity, and we understand that already Miss Campbell has been promised a large amount of support from both men and women.

A GAP IN LEGISLATION.

It is curious to find how often there are gaps in legislation, especially in legislation administered by different Government departments, which a little more knowledge or forethought might easily have prevented. An important instance of such gaps was once again brought to light early in March of this year, when Lord Astor introduced a Bill into the House of Lords to regulate the employment of boys and girls between the ages of 14 and 18. School children are protected by the Education Acts, and "young persons" who enter industrial occupations are protected by the Factory Acts. But, as Lord Astor pointed out, there are many so-called non-industrial occupations, in which there are at present no statutory safeguards at all for the young people who enter them.

Efforts from time to time have been made to deal with this problem. Social workers will remember that a year before the War broke out a Departmental Committee reported on van-boys who sometimes, it was found, worked sixty to seventy-five hours a week; both Government and Private Members' Bills have from time to time been introduced in both Houses, but with no result, owing, not to lack of sympathy, but to the inevitable claims of other business.

It was stated by Lord Astor that about 400,000 young people are concerned. These include indoor servants in hotels, clubs, and places of entertainment, such as page or lift-boys, messengers and chocolate sellers, shop assistants, tea-room assistants, kitchen hands, van and warehouse boys; for the most part, it should be noted, occupations which lead nowhere. This fact was effectively pointed out in the course of the debate as constituting an additional reason for shorter hours, allowing some free time for opportunities of recreation and continued education to enable the young worker to climb out at the other end of the blind alley into which circumstances had forced him.

The Bill introduced by Lord Astor followed the precedents of similar legislation. That is to say, instead of attempting to force a general measure as a uniform basis for the whole country, it gave powers to enable local authorities to make their own by-laws prescribing for all young persons under 18 engaged in occupations to which the Bill applies, the precise age under which employment is illegal or the hours during which employment is prohibited. It also gives the added right of prohibiting entirely or permitting only under special conditions the employment of

such young persons in any particular occupations. On the whole, this method has been found successful in dealing with the employment of children. Though local authorities cannot always be trusted to take action when not forced to do so, they have a good record so far as the interests of children are concerned. An interesting instance was quoted of one local authority which had, indeed, anticipated Lord Astor's Bill. Last year the city of Liverpool obtained powers under a private Act of Parliament to make by-laws for regulating the conditions of employment of young persons, whose hours were not regulated by the Factory and Workshop Acts, for any period of time during which they were employed on errand work.

It is hardly necessary in these pages to quote instances cited by its supporters of the long hours and undesirable conditions of employment which this Bill aims at abolishing. Most of us are only too familiar with the abuse. The term "local authority" is to be defined as the councils of counties and county boroughs which deal with secondary education; they must therefore act in consultation with the education authority which is primarily concerned with the welfare of young persons.

It was satisfactory to hear that the Government not only supported the measure, but had already in preparation a Bill on almost identical lines which it was hoped to introduce as soon as possible. Since the debate took place this promised measure has been completed. It appears in two parts, the second of which "regulates the employment of young persons between the ages of 14 and 18 in agriculture, railway, transport, and domestic service, as well as employment in offices, shops, or in building." It will be interesting to see to what extent private domestic service, hitherto untouched by any form of legal protection, is included.

But—and here lies the snag—will time permit of its introduction? "The exceptionally heavy demands on Government time," have repeatedly blocked the way in spite of the efforts of past Home Secretaries and private Members of both Houses of Parliament. Lord Astor's Bill has once more focused attention on the urgency of the need, and we cannot but believe that legislation on the lines proposed would meet with little opposition. Those who appreciate the importance of this should use their influence with their representatives in Parliament and urge its early introduction.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT NEWS.

By BERTHA MASON.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE AND RELIEF.

In December, 1930, a Royal Commission was appointed "to inquire into the provisions and working of the Unemployment Insurance Scheme and to make recommendations with regard to (1) its future scope, the provisions it should contain, and the means by which it may be made solvent and self-supporting; and (2) the arrangements which should be made outside the scheme for the unemployed who are capable of, and available for, work."

A Difficult Task.—Since their appointment the Commissioners have held many meetings, private and public. Their proceedings as recorded in the Press will, doubtless, have been followed by many of our readers, who will have realized that the task imposed on the Commissioners is by no means easy, seeing that one of their duties is to find some way of making solvent and self-supporting a fund burdened with a debt amounting to about £58,000,000 and which is increasing at the rate of £40,000,000 per annum. This is the difficult and vital problem before the Commission. Their interim report promised for May is awaited with keen interest.

Views of County Councils' Association.—Pending the issue of that report we call attention to the Memorandum before the Commission on 26th March, submitted by the County Councils' Association, and the evidence given by Sir James Hinchcliffe, Chairman of the West Riding (Yorks) County Council, by Dr. S. W. Maples, Clerk to the Hereford County Council, for the Public Assistance Committee of the Association, and by Mr. Lawrence Richmond, O.B.E., Public Assistance Officer to the West Riding County Council.

It is hardly necessary to remind our readers that the clear and close connection between unemployment insurance schemes and the public assistance branch of local administration makes the views of those who have practical knowledge and experience of the subject worth consideration.

The Memorandum.—The Memorandum states (1) that one of the objects of the Local Government Act, 1929, was to extend the area of charge and in this way to distribute the burden of local rates over a larger rateable area. The County Councils' Association is of opinion, however, that these provisions do not adequately meet the situation and that further legislation is needed by means of which the whole field of destitution arising from unemployment will be covered.

Suggestions.—It is suggested, in connection with this point of view, that the necessitous unemployed should be divided into three classes, and that each class should be dealt with in a separate and distinct manner.

Group (a) would contain persons temporarily unemployed and entitled to receive benefit during a fixed temporary period.

Group (b), persons who by reason of age, infirmity, or other sufficient cause, are permanently unable to work.

Group (c), persons not qualified, or who cease to be qualified, for inclusion in either of the other groups.

It is further suggested, with regard to group (a) that in order to make the Insurance Fund solvent and self-supporting, it should be restored to an insurance scheme on a strict actuarial basis, and that benefit should be administered in definite relation to the statutory contribution; that group (b) should be provided for by Public Assistance Authorities under existing regulations; that group (c), inasmuch as their condition is due to national rather than local causes, the responsibility of providing for them should devolve entirely on the Government, and not on the local rates.

Investigation of Claims.—The Association recognizes that some machinery for investigating personal need and family circumstances of each case, and of estimating the amount of assistance to be given, will be required. It suggests that, for this purpose, the machinery already provided by County

Councils and County Boroughs should be employed; that the local administration should be carried on by a committee of the Council, of which a representative of the local Employment Committee should be an ex-officio member to safeguard expenditure; that the central administration should be vested in the Ministry of Health, assisted by a representative of the Unemployment Grants Committee, the County Councils' Association, and the Association of Municipal Corporations. The Committee would co-ordinate the work of local authorities and promote national work schemes for suitable persons with whom the local authorities cannot deal. Any assistance given to persons in the third class would entail their attendance at instructional classes, if employment could not be found for them.

Questions.—In reply to questions by the Chairman, Sir James Hinchliffe stated that the County Councils' Association was definitely of opinion that the cost of relieving the able-bodied unemployed in class (c) should be equitably distributed over the whole country.

Dr. Maples pointed out that owing to de-rating, a penny rate, which in the West Riding of Yorkshire produced £37,000 in 1927-28, to-day produces under £27,000. In the East Riding a penny rate in 1927-28 produced £5,200; to-day, £2,700. Unless a new source of revenue from local rates could be found, the Association thought that local rates should not be expected to bear the burden caused by unemployment.

It was further pointed out by Mr. Richmond that the incidence of the burden of unemployment was borne by the area least able to afford it.

The Chairman, while in agreement with much of what had been said, was of opinion that the suggestion that the whole burden should be borne by the Government was rather sweeping.

It was pointed out by the witnesses that the scheme submitted was not regarded as final or conclusive but as a step in the direction of making the Insurance Fund solvent and so lessening the burden of taxation.

QUESTIONS IN PARLIAMENT.

EQUAL RIGHTS TREATY.

Mr. Mander asked the Secretary for Foreign Affairs whether he would take steps to bring before the League of Nations a treaty giving equal rights to men and women?

Mr. Dalton: Before this question can be raised at Geneva it would be necessary for His Majesty's Government to approve of the complete application to this country of the principle of equal rights for men and women. The Foreign Secretary is advised that the adoption of this principle would involve the introduction of highly controversial legislation, which might give rise in certain cases to situations of considerable difficulties and hardship.

Monday, 30th March.

REFUSE DISPOSAL.

Mr. Mills asked the Minister of Health whether he intends to bring in a Bill with a view to legislation being passed to put an end to the nuisance and annoyance caused by the dumping of house refuse by one sanitary authority in the area of another sanitary authority without the latter authority's consent.

Miss Lawrence: It is not proposed to bring in a Bill this session for dealing expressly with the dumping of refuse. I may say, however, that the Town and Country Planning Bill recently introduced will strengthen the hands of the planning authorities in preventing or controlling the use of land for such a purpose. Local authorities may also prevent nuisance if by-laws dealing with the disposal of refuse are made betimes and enforced.

(Continued from next column.)

women engaged in heavy trades by employing about 460,000 additional women in 1933. It is interesting to note that in Russia among the varied occupations open to women is building. It is expected that about 130,000 women will be employed on building during the next building season.

It may well seem to some of us in Great Britain, even from the brief notes here, that something of historical importance to the woman's movement is being worked out in a considered way in Russia, and that possibly the foundations for a planned regulation of women's labour embodying a real equalization of the rights of men and women are being laid on a national scale, to raise who knows what true and healthy edifice in the coming years.

WOMEN IN SOVIET RUSSIA.

By I. G. GODDARD.

During the past ten years women have been taking an increasing share in the reorganization of Soviet Russia. Just as in Great Britain, so in Russia there is a "feminist" question, and it is of great interest to see how the newly emancipated Russian women are faring in their struggles for recognition and equality. Whether equal rights will come as a result of this increasing industrialization of women seems a question as far from clearly answered in Russia as in England, for, despite the rumours that complete equality exists in Russia to-day between men and women, the latest and most reliable news reaches us that these rumours are not as well-founded as some of us had hoped. Nevertheless, the progress of Russian women is startling, and the degree to which equality is really an established fact is of great importance.

Of a total population of approximately 147 millions, women are in the proportion of 75 to 71 men (*Soviet Union Year Book*, 1930). In 1926 there were 643,000 women employed in industry, a figure which has since risen to 881,000. In 1930 the proportion of women workers to the total workers in large-scale industry was about 30 per cent. Since the inauguration of the now famous Five Years Plan, the absorption of women into industry has received special attention. This is partly because the whole nation is working on all-hands-to-the-pump lines, and partly because of their avowed intention to "liquidate" unemployment.

Rationalization, as rampant in the U.S.S.R. as in the U.S.A., and as it may soon become here, is resulting undoubtedly in encouraging the entrance of women into more and more trades and processes, and while the Russians state that mechanization of industry favours the increased employment of women in industry, they do, nevertheless, pay attention to that great safeguard of feminism—the raising of the standards and qualification of women's labour. More than 55 per cent of Russian women workers are employed in skilled work. The raising of their qualifications is attained by intensive and increasing facilities for technical and other education.

This raising of the qualification of women workers tells strongly on the growth of their wages. For the last five years the wages of women workers have doubled and they are overtaking already those of men workers. In pre-war time the average wages of women a day reached 50 per cent only of those of men, but in 1924 they were already 64 per cent, in 1929 68 per cent, and in 1930 more than 70 per cent. In some branches of industry the wages of women attain even 80 per cent of those of men. Vigorous measures undertaken in order to promote the qualification of women's labour will soon bring about a complete equalization of wages of men and women in the Soviet Union.

Meantime the Government is spending very large sums on the provision of communal kitchens, laundries, nurseries, crèches, and special housing for family and single women workers. At the same time the needs of women in the villages and great agricultural districts is being met by providing communal field-kitchens for lunches, etc., so that more and more women can suitably take part in agricultural work.

Protective legislation, as we know it here, is the law of the present day, and we are reminded that women can claim a number of exemptions based on their sex. These include four months' leave of absence for pregnancy and childbirth, diurnal periods off for suckling, and prohibition of employment in certain industries deemed injurious to health.

One of the interesting things about the phase through which Russian women seem now to be passing is the clear recognition that problems of equality can be solved not by technical measures but by readjustment of the social conditions under which women's labour is performed. In recent articles and official statements of the Labour Commissariat statistics are given to prove that women can and do compete successfully on an equal footing with men, but that freedom from household cares is an essential.

The distribution of women in industry is uneven. In the light industries they have, as in most Western European countries, entrenched themselves firmly. In Soviet Russia this category of trades includes 60 per cent of women. In large-scale heavier industries the number of women is smaller and inadequate for the present plans for expansion. Officialdom accounts for this by the "old ways of living which tie the working women down, and which have given her no opportunity for further training in her trade." It is now proposed to raise the percentage of

(Continued in previous column.)

REVIEWS.

"TOBIT TRANSPLANTED."

Very slowly the outer world is waking up to the literary greatness of Stella Benson, and her latest novel, *Tobit Transplanted*¹ will act as an insistent alarm clock to those who are as yet not wholly awake. We are tempted to think that it is—with the exception of *This is the End*—the best novel that she has ever written. And *This is the End* is, after all, rather a poem than a novel. One cannot fit it into any comparative judgment.

With *Tobit Transplanted* a new access of force seems to have entered into Stella Benson. Those who are familiar with the illuminating analysis of masculine and feminine qualities in literature which is to be found in Virginia Woolf's *Room of One's Own*, will understand what we mean when we say that Stella Benson has, in this latest work, become bi-sexual. She has captured the objectivity of the masculine, while holding firmly to the perceptiveness of the feminine, and the result is a very considerable growth of literary stature.

The plot of *Tobit Transplanted* is adequately indicated by its name. It is the plot of that engaging apocryphal fairy story concerning the fortunes of the Tobit family in the days of the Jewish dispersion, re-told in terms of White Russian exile under Far Eastern conditions in the decade following the war. And here, of course, Stella Benson writes with peculiar authority, for as an observant inhabitant of these parts of many years standing she knows inside and out the lives, cross-currents, and peculiarities of this indeterminate frontier of three Eastern Empires. Japanese, Chinese, Russians, Koreans, and missionaries move and jostle through her pages and group themselves for the pre-determined drama of her chosen narrative. Nor does she deny to their animals—dog, mare, goat, as the case may be—the abundant life which she bestows upon her human creatures. There is, and there has always been, something animistic about Stella Benson's attitude to her environment. Even a Ford car reflects malignant or beneficent spiritual powers under her hands. Thus she is peculiarly at home in the world of Tobit, a world in which men strain their eyes to perceive "the angels of the spirit of the winds and storm, of clouds, of darkness, of thunder and lightning", and in which, not very many generations later, a greater healer than Tobit's Archangel could "rebuke the storm and the wind" or "rebuke the fever". Thus to Stella Benson the transplantation is easier than it would be to many of her contemporaries. It is a transplantation of date and name and local colour. It is no great transplantation of mental attitude, for Stella Benson was more than half-way there already. She tells us in her foreword that "a re-reading of the Apocrypha while she was living in Kanto, Manchuria, some years ago, seemed to her to show a curiously exact parallel between the position of the exiled Jews of Tobit's day and that of the exiled White Russians in ours." We are tempted to suspect that there is more in it than that—that, in fact, a re-reading of the Apocrypha seemed to show not so much a curiously exact sociological parallel as a curiously exact spiritual parallel between the myths of Tobit's day and these animistic aspects of our twentieth century world, the perception of which differentiates the work of Stella Benson from the work of her contemporaries in time.

As to the matter of the book, the poetry which illuminates all Stella Benson's writings—and which here, on one occasion breaks into delicate and beautiful verse—the wit which causes the reader at moments to laugh aloud, the vitality and perception which gives to unfamiliar figures in an unfamiliar setting familiar and eternal life, all these are here. And tucked away at the end among the publisher's advertisements is the good news that the earlier works of Stella Benson—some of which have been for some time out of print—are now available in a 3s. 6d. edition.

M. D. S.

ANOTHER OMNIBUS.

To be promoted to the authorship of an omnibus edition is a high compliment to any writer, for it presupposes a considerable popularity. It is not every writer who could venture forth in a guise so physically unattractive, in a form so nearly approaching the cubic, as is conditioned by the publication at, say, 7s. 6d., of material sufficient to fill the covers of three or four full-blown novels. But Ethel Dell has done it, and Barry Pain has done it, and Galsworthy has done it, and Conan Doyle has done it, and so now has Mrs. Agatha Christie. Here she lies,

¹ *Tobit Transplanted*, by Stella Benson. (Macmillan. 7s. 6d.)

in her omnibus form, black, cheap, and approaching two and a half inches thick.¹ Here between two covers we have *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, *The Murder on the Links*, and eleven short stories under the heading *Poirot Investigates*. But of course they are all about Poirot, that superhuman Belgian Sherlock Holmes of Mrs. Christie's creation, with his more-stupid-than-Watson confidant and friend, Capt. Hastings, the "I" of her narration. What can we say about it—we who have never participated whole-heartedly in the present crime-wave of enthusiasm for the unlimited repetition of detective stories? (It is regrettable, for all the best people are in it, but there it is. One must be honest.) Well—it may be that this external approach sharpens the discrimination and opens the eye of intelligent criticism; for certain it is that this thirteen-course meal of Agatha Christie products has suggested a generalization that may be of use to our generation of detective story writers. It is simply this:

Of the thirteen stories that comprise the meal, one "gripped" with a peculiar force which the others lacked, competent and ingenious as they might be. Why? For some time we sought in vain for an answer to this question. At last, by a process of elimination which would have done credit to the judgment of M. Poirot, we put our finger on the element of difference. It was simply that in this one story, *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*, the reader is allowed to get to know the corpse, is actually introduced into its family circle, before it becomes a corpse. With the result that thereafter an element of personal interest attaches to the process of its becoming. We are well aware that for the genuine detective story confraternity this is a matter of no moment. A corpse is a corpse, and the sooner you have one the sooner you can get to work on the business of detection; therefore if the corpse can be produced ready made on the first page, so much the better. Any corpse will do. But we are equally convinced that outside this charmed circle of devotees a wide margin of readers exist who are prepared to enjoy detective stories on one condition: a personal introduction to the corpse before it is a corpse.

M. D. S.

ELECTRICAL HOUSECRAFT.²

This is a small handbook going into considerable detail with a name which led us to hope that it would be written on the lines of those well-known motor-bicycle text-books by which any road repair might be done "with your text-book by your side." The book, however, has no help for the housekeeper who would buy and fit up an electric iron, or for the owner of one of the latest in shades (whose brother always put them on!). "Such an apparently simple thing as the re-attachment of a flexible cord to a ply cannot be described within the limits of a small hand-book. . . . It is definitely dangerous to attempt any practical electrical work without personal instruction in the art." This is sheer nonsense. A small shock or two does us no harm unless we do our repairs while having our bath! There are excellent chapters on avoiding danger, on current costs, lighting with all its various gadgets, vacuum cleaners, and refrigerators. But the chapter on water heating at 4d. per bath is hardly a recommendation, a geyser which couldn't do better would be heartily ashamed of itself, while but one half-chapter on that most useful of all household electric appliances—the fumeless electric cooker—is rather unkind to the latter. Pictures and details of four or five representative makes with comparisons of their various advantages—rapidity of heating up, accessibility for cleaning and reliability is simply essential and most interesting to one who contemplates installing electric cookery.

However, electrical housecraft is somewhat more varied than a motor-bicycle and this book packs some information and many good illustrations into its hundred pages and we would like one with the motto we have met before—"What any fool can do you can." R. R.

¹ *An Agatha Christie Omnibus*. pp. 296 + 319 + 298 = 913. (The Bodley Head. 7s. 6d.)

² *Electrical Housecraft*, by R. W. Kennedy. (Pitman & Sons, Ltd. 2s. 6d.)

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OBITUARY.

DR. FLORENCE BUCHANAN.
By NAOMI MITCHISON.

Dr. Florence Buchanan, who died a few weeks ago in Oxford, where she had lived and worked almost all her life, was one of the figures of my childhood, alarming and ambivalent as only the single-minded can be. For she was intensely single-minded; she lived for science, in an other-worldliness which it was hard for those who did not share her enthusiasm to understand. Her own particular branch of science was a peculiarly difficult one, for electro-physiology has no obvious and immediate bearing on ordinary life, and even in that her work was extremely specialized. Her first scientific papers were published in 1889, at a time when it was almost unheard of for women to be scientists, but gradually she made herself a name among physiologists, and was the first woman to be elected a member of the Physiological Society. She came to Oxford in 1896 to work with Burden Sanderson, and was his private research assistant for nearly ten years. In those days it was obviously a great handicap to be a woman, and, in defending herself and having to assert her right to be treated seriously, she was bound to develop a certain eccentricity and violent independence of attitude.

She had an attack of eye trouble in 1901; it was ultimately to leave her almost completely blind. But she refused to let it interfere with her. This was all the harder, as her work involved very fine measurements and adjustments, and the use of complicated mechanisms. She was kept lying on her back for three months in hopes of averting the eye trouble, and while she was there she dictated a paper on "the electrical response of muscle in different kinds of contraction," which won her the D.Sc. of London University. During the following years she was elected a Fellow of University College, London, and given several prizes for scientific work. All the time her blindness was advancing on her, but she insisted on bicycling to work, and would not allow anyone to help her or even to sympathize too much; her mind was on other things. The one thing which interested her about the eye trouble, and which she would talk about, was the curious objective phenomena which it produced; here it had touched on her own world and she could let herself take notice of it.

She came of good stock, gallant, and able men and women; it was partly that which enabled her to face a life, of which the last thirty years at least were full of discomfort and pain, with such admirable stoicism. But it was also the vision of science, a vision which few women have had, the abstract and inhuman passion for knowledge, for a more and more minute and accurate tracking down of truth. It was this, I think, which made her sometimes almost terrifying, like a dedicated person. Yet she was very kind in ordinary ways; I remember her nursing me, as a very small child, through whooping-cough, when my mother had to go suddenly to Scotland.

Hardly any other women have felt for science as she did. She was a scientist first and a woman last; that kind of difference did not enter into her world. She was a priestess.

MISS SUSIE SORABJI.

Miss Susie Sorabji, whose death at Poona was announced on Monday, was not so well known in this country as her distinguished sisters, but she has left behind her a permanent memorial in her work for the education of women in India. From her earliest years she worked with her parents, who were pioneers in Indian education, and after her mother's death she founded St. Helena's High School, which was later transferred to the Church Missionary Society. She also made herself responsible for two vernacular schools for children of the poor, and served on the committee of the All-India Educational Conference. Her work for education in India may, indeed, be compared in its fearless originality with that of the English pioneer, Miss Margaret Macmillan, whose loss we are mourning in this country.

POLICY.—The sole policy of THE WOMAN'S LEADER is to advocate a real equality of liberties, status and opportunities between men and women. So far as space permits, however, it will offer an impartial platform for topics not directly included in the objects of the woman's movement but of special interest to women. Articles on these subjects will always be signed, at least by initials or a pseudonym, and for the opinions expressed in them the editor accepts no responsibility.

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OUR NEW HEADQUARTERS.

We are now installed in our bungalow at 4 Great Smith Street, within a few paces of the Westminster end of Victoria Street. Once again we are in communication with the outside world, the telephone now being fixed. The number has not been changed.

UNJUST WILLS.

May we remind readers interested in Miss Rathbone's Wills and Intestacies (Family Maintenance) Bill (England and Wales), which is shortly coming for examination before a joint Select Committee of both Houses of Parliament, that we have a useful leaflet (price 1½d. post free) entitled "Unjust Wills," outlining the law with regard to testamentary provision in this and other countries, giving some "hard cases" resulting from the present lack of legislation in England, and indicating briefly the provisions of the Bill.

NATIONALITY OF MARRIED WOMEN.

Unfortunately there seems little hope of the Bill on Nationality of Women introduced in the autumn by the late Dr. Ethel Bentham getting through the Standing Committee to which it has been referred in time for it to be passed through its final stages this Session. But the subject is in consequence quite as urgent, if not even more so, because it will be coming up for consideration again before the League of Nations Assembly in September. Every effort will have to be made up and down the country to make public the unanimous demand of women for equal rights of nationality with men. A very full description of the present law, and progress made towards its reform, both nationally and internationally, is given in a pamphlet by Miss Chrystal Macmillan. All our readers should possess a copy, which may be obtained on application to us (price 2½d. post free).

NEWS FROM SOCIETIES.

ST. PANCRAS S.E.C.

On Wednesday, 25th March, the St. Pancras Society for Equal Citizenship held its Annual Meeting at the lovely house of Mrs. Seymour Seal, 1 Cumberland Terrace, Regents Park. The first part of the evening was occupied with business; this was followed by a meeting open to non-members at 8.15, when Miss Winifred Holtby, M.A., the well-known novelist, explained "The Equal Rights Treaty." Following the work done at the 1929 Assembly of the League of Nations, a Conference was held in London on 4th November, 1929, to which the leading organizations of British women sent representatives. Keen interest was shown, and during the next few months as many as fifteen organizations declared their adherence to the Equal Rights Treaty. Such a volume of support, declared Miss Holtby, enabled the Six Point Group, the responsible body, to advance rapidly. On 9th September the Equal Rights International was formed; its object being "to obtain the adoption, ratification, and practical application of the Equal Rights Treaty by the nations of the world." Article I of the Treaty reads as follows: "The contracting states agree that upon the ratification of this Treaty men and women shall have equal Rights throughout the territory subject to their respective jurisdictions." At the close of Miss Holtby's speech many questions were asked, and the following resolution was passed unanimously: "That this meeting convened by the St. Pancras Society for Equal Citizenship approves the principles of the Equal Rights Treaty and begs the Government to support its promotion by the League of Nations."

Miss Monica Whately, the Chairman of the St. Pancras Society, was in the chair, and in the course of her speech, pointed out the need for organizations working along the lines of their Society, so that women and men might be taught that Citizenship meant not only rights but also responsibility. As a candidate at the recent London County Council Elections, Miss Whately said she was shocked to find how many men and women refused to vote. She said she had always contended that the vote was not an end in itself, but a means to an end, the key to open the door to women, that they with men might enter into that fuller life.

At the close of the meeting a vote of thanks was passed to Mr. and Mrs. Seymour Seal, and refreshments were served.

THE HERITAGE.

In the *Manchester Guardian* of 14th February, Mr. J. L. Hammond published an article on the Trade Union movement which should, in our opinion, be read aloud at every branch meeting held throughout the country in the course of the next few weeks. We venture to think that it might also be read with advantage in every middle-class drawing-room or West End club where labour politics are likely to be discussed with lack of practical knowledge or sympathy. He points out that the General Strike of 1926 has done infinitely more harm than might be supposed from its orderly handling and the atmosphere of moderation and self-control which characterized those who handled it and those who suffered its operation. It has, in fact, "been allowed to dominate politics and industry in a most sinister manner." This mischief began with the Trade Disputes Act of 1927, which was, in fact, far from being the careful and discriminating revision of trade union law which moderate trade unionists would have accepted. Thus we get an act of party warfare which is to-day provoking its unfortunate and embittering sequel—and this at a time when "our progress depends on getting the ideas of industrial warfare out of the heads of trade unionists and employers, and teaching them to think of their relations in a wholly different spirit." The trade unions, says Mr. Hammond, have, as a result of broad economic facts, so much power that they ought now to have more responsibility than they are willing to take or employers to concede; and it is idle to talk as though that power were created by law. Meanwhile they are using that power under the influence of their own fierce history in the days when they were fighting for their lives without political weight. They are facing their present situation with "the rebel mind" at a time when constructive power rather than the rebel mind is needed. Simultaneously with Mr. Hammond's wise article came news of the collapse of the Lancashire cotton lock-out. The employers have, in this particular struggle, been fairly and squarely beaten. There are to be no eight loom experiments. Doubtless the "rebel mind" will be well satisfied with this result. Yet it can hardly be regarded as an example of constructive power—either on the part of those who provoked the fight or those who won it.

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Sir Philip Hartog. (Review in "Nature," 23rd January, 1931.) "Miss Caton and her collaborators have produced a book which is indispensable to the student of Indian problems—social, religious, educational, sanitary, industrial, and political."

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Mr. E. T. Paul, Member, India Round Table Conference. (Review in "The British Weekly," 15th January, 1931.) "An Indian edition should be immediately issued and sold at one rupee each. Translations in all the chief Indian languages should be immediately arranged for and sold at four annas a copy. Millions ought to read it without delay."

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COMING EVENTS.

B.B.C.

Monday, 20th April. 7 p.m. "New Books." Miss V. Sackville-West.
Wednesdays, 10.45. "The Week in Westminster." 15th April: Mrs. M. A. Hamilton.
Thursdays, 7.25. The World and Ourselves. 16th April: "Finland."
Fridays, 7.25. India. 10th April: "India and the Past."
Saturdays, 9.20. The Ideal Holiday. 11th April: Mr. R. H. Mottram v. Sir Barry Jackson: "East Anglia v. the Malvern Country."

ELECTRICAL ASSOCIATION FOR WOMEN.

17th April. Annual Conference, Park Lane Hotel.
 11.30 a.m. Morning Session.
 1 p.m. Luncheon. Speaker: Sir John Brooke, C.B., Sir Douglas Newton, M.P., Mrs. Wintringham. Chair, Mrs. Wilfred Ashley.
 3 p.m. Afternoon session.
 9 p.m. Ball (in aid of new premises fund), Park Lane Hotel.

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