

COMMITTEE No. 5.

HUMANITARIAN QUESTIONS.

The subjects assigned to this committee for consideration were penal administration reform, child welfare, traffic in women and children, and opium and other dangerous drugs.

The special interest which women have in such questions was very suitably recognized by the appointment of a woman as Chairman of the committee. This was, I believe, the first occasion on which a woman has been appointed to such a position on a League Committee.

PENAL ADMINISTRATION.

This was the first occasion on which this subject was considered by the Assembly. It had, however, been brought before the Council in January, 1930, in a petition from the Howard League for Penal Reform and other similar bodies, and the Secretary-General's report (Document A. 26) sets out the steps taken with a view to enabling the Assembly to deal with the matter. The resolution on the subject adopted by the Assembly (Document A. 64) provides for the circulation to all Governments of copies of a set of Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, drafted by the International Prisons Commission, and for an invitation to Governments to submit their comments thereon with reference to prison administration in their own countries. Meanwhile, the rules are also to be considered by the International Labour Office and various committees of the League, and by unofficial organizations, so that a future Assembly, when considering the question, may have the benefit of full data. The Standard Minimum Rules are contained in Document A. V/2, 1930, forwarded herewith.

I took the opportunity of informing the committee that in New Zealand our prison administration conformed to all the rules set out in this document, and in many respects went considerably beyond them, and I specially stressed the very highly satisfactory results achieved in our Borstal institutions. From remarks made to me afterwards by various delegates it was evident that they were much impressed by the fact that only 8 per cent. of boys who had passed through such Borstal institutions returned to crime. I further stated that I felt sure New Zealand would be pleased to furnish full information on the subject, which might, on some points at any rate, prove not only interesting but also helpful.

CHILD WELFARE.

In addition to the Committee report to the Assembly on this subject (Document A. 59), I am enclosing the report of the Special Committee on Child Welfare, which meets annually, and whose report furnished the basis of the discussion in the Fifth Committee (Document C. 223, M. 110). As this latter document contains very full information on the work being carried out by the League in regard to child welfare, I will draw attention to only one or two special points.

No great progress appears to have been made with the two draft conventions mentioned in last year's report. As only twenty-two Governments have so far submitted their remarks with regard to the draft convention concerning the return to their homes of children and young persons who have escaped or been removed from their homes to another country, the question will again appear on the agenda of the committee at its next session, by which time it is hoped that a larger number of replies will have been received. The second draft convention, relating to assistance to foreign minors, has not met with an altogether favourable reception, as the British and some other Governments deem it wiser not to attempt to separate this subject from the general question of assistance to indigent foreigners. However, it appears possible that the matter may be satisfactorily settled by means of bilateral or multilateral agreements between countries more particularly concerned with this problem, which does not, of course, affect New Zealand to any extent. Of more direct interest to the Dominion, perhaps, are the efforts being made by the committee with a view to promoting international agreements enabling maintenance orders to be enforced in foreign countries. Such agreements would doubtless follow on the lines of those already in force as between England and the various Dominions for the mutual enforcement of maintenance orders.

TRAFFIC IN WOMEN AND CHILDREN.

Fortunately this is one of those subjects which is of little practical importance to New Zealand. That the necessity for active work still exists in some countries, however, there can be no doubt, and it is equally beyond doubt that the machinery of the League is particularly helpful in co-ordinating the efforts being made in various countries to deal with this infamous traffic, which is largely international in character.

Arrangements have been made for a Commission of Investigation to proceed, in the latter part of this year, to a number of countries in the Far East, to investigate the extent to which this traffic is still carried on in that part of the world. The cost of this inquiry is being paid by the American Bureau of Social Hygiene, which made a grant of 125,000 dollars for the purpose.

As will be seen from the report of the special committee (Document C. 216, M. 104) and the report to the Assembly (Document A. 76), the movement towards the abolition of the system of "licensed houses" continues to make headway, though there are a considerable number of countries which still consider it undesirable to abolish it. Though this is more particularly a domestic question, it is held by many that the system encourages the international traffic in women and children, and thus rightly comes within the orbit of the committee's activities. A similar reason is advanced in support of the action taken by the committee in requesting all Governments to furnish particulars, in regard to the year 1929 only, with regard to obscene publications.