

IS GRANDMOTHER GETTING A FAIR DEAL?

I SUPPOSE the question "is the New Zealand Grandmother getting a fair deal" is prompted by the fact that there are a lot more grandmothers than grandfathers. But I don't know why poor grandfather should be ignored. His difficulties are just as great, in some ways greater, and as a male I'm not going to leave him entirely out of the picture. All the same, whichever sex we're concerned with, I can't help wondering if someone who is not a grandparent himself should be the one who is talking about the subject. After all I've never applied for a pensioner's flat. I've never tried to live in New Zealand today on £4/10/- a week. I've never gone to an employer and said "I'm 60, have you got a job for me?" I've never even tried to get granny into a hospital. If I had done any of these things I have no doubt what my answer to the question would be. It would be a very definite and emphatic "No." Judged by these standards I've no doubt that the New Zealand grandmother would say she was very far from getting a fair deal.

Of course she's taking rather a one-sided view, and we mustn't assume that it's necessarily the right one or the only one. We must first try to see if there's any evidence about these different things and if so which way it points. Let's take housing first. Why should there be a housing problem for the old? They're not setting up house for the first time; surely they must have somewhere to live. They have, most of them, but many of them have to cope with terrible difficulties. There are those, particularly widows, who still have the family home, but find it impossible to manage it—often a large old-fashioned place with none of the modern conveniences that we all take as a matter of course today. You know them, don't you, with their steps and their external sanitation, their solid fuel boilers and wash-tubs, good enough to bring a family up in 50 years ago but a nightmare to an old lady today. Maybe she'd like to stay on in it in spite of its inconveniences because after all it's her home and till now it's been the centre of her life. But how can she keep up mortgage payments on Old Age Benefit? How can she afford to put some new iron on the roof or have a bit of painting done to hide its increasing dilapidation? She's enjoyed its little bit of garden all her life but now the sight of its untrimmed hedges and uncut lawns fill her with foreboding. I've had an old man come to see me and break down into tears when he told me of the nightmare his garden had become. Those are some of the reasons why some of them want to get into houses designed for their failing powers and their limited needs. There are others too who are on the move, leaving their established homes, mostly in the country, and moving to the city with its easier life but specially to be near their grown-up sons and daughters. And above all there are those who are living with their married children but whose growing grandchildren's demands for accommodation make it impossible for them to stay where they are.

It has been estimated that 11% of the population fall into the over 65 age group, and applying that to inner Auckland as an example there must be just under 35,000. The last census shows

The text, slightly abridged, of a "Point of View" talk by DR J. L. NEWMAN, Superintendent of the Cornwall Geriatric Hospital, Auckland

that for the country as a whole there were just under 275,000 over-sixties. Of course, we don't know just how many of these are living in bad or unsuitable homes, and even less do we know how many would be prepared to move into more suitable ones if they were available. But we do know that seven years ago when the Victoria University Survey was carried out 1000 housing units were necessary to meet only the requirements of those who were living in baches and alone in whole houses. I believe that since then the building programme has provided homes for only 677 persons. And all the time the numbers in need have increased. And what about the ones in single rooms or several to one room? What about the ones in converted out-houses and the like. I wish you could see some of them, the lack of conveniences of any sort, the absence of anything that would make them worthy of the name "home." That is why there are 380 applicants for future Auckland City Council pensioner flats, nearly 500 for accommodation in Selwyn Village, 240 already for a proposed 40 places in the Masonic Lodge. That is why as a last resort 30 despairing old folk go to our City Welfare Officer every month to ask in vain if he can help them to find accommodation.

And what is being done to relieve this situation? The Government has decided that it is for the local authorities to build the pensioners' flats and since then the State Advances Corporation has made only a little contribution to the solution of the shortage. Instead the State has offered a very generous subsidy to the local authorities to meet the needs, one that involves the ratepayer in no additional burden. But they simply haven't risen to the occasion. According to my information here in Auckland accommodation has been supplied by them for a paltry 144 old folk. One hundred and forty-four out of 35,000. I ask you; is that a fair deal for the New Zealand grandmother? I don't want to pick holes in the State Advances programme, because they have a terrific job on their hands already with the so badly needed homes for younger couples; but is it a fair deal for the New Zealand grandmother that the vast new housing estates should go up with not enough provision for her, nowhere she can live near her children? Must she be relegated to the established boroughs, even if their hearts were not so stony, maybe miles from the help that only a son or daughter can give. I know that there are many admirable instances of pensioner flats built in various parts of the country by civic authorities and religious bodies, sometimes in association with ordinary family homes, sometimes at least not too far from them. But don't be blinded by them to the needs of the majority, needs that are simply are not being met, but don't forget needs that could so easily be met if we wouldn't blind ourselves to them.

Is the New Zealand grandmother getting a fair deal from her own family? You'll often hear it said that children



aren't what they used to be and that if they did their bit there would be far fewer problems for the old to face. But I don't believe a word of it. I see far too many examples of devotion through thick and thin for that, not only by children either, often by grandchildren and even nieces who are under no sort of material obligation to the old folk they care for. They do it simply out of love for them. Of course there are a few sons and daughters who neglect their parents; there always have been. The only difference today is the increased number of old folk in the population and hence so many more parents who can be neglected. But is it fair either to granny or to the children that the whole burden should fall on them, day in, day out, year after year? The foundation of a balanced emotional life and regard for one's parents is a happy home background. But today there are thousands of New Zealand homes where anything like a normal family life is rendered impossible by the constant presence of an old relative. I know, as every doctor must who goes into the homes or can read between the lines at hospital interviews. To have a frail old lady wandering about the house, or an old cripple sitting in it expecting attention, is something that must react adversely on anyone after a time. But I'm not only thinking of the relative in this case, whether near or not. I know how the sense of dependence and being in the way can sap the morale of the granny herself and make her welcome even the hospital as a refuge. Good houses are not

the answer to this one, nor above all are more hospital beds. What granny needs, and what the family need, is a little respite, a short rest and the freedom that a holiday can give. Where can the old lady turn for one? Here is a challenge that must be met if we are to give the New Zealand grandmother a fair deal. It is no use expecting the present generation to shoulder the whole burden of caring for the last, to whom we owe so much, unless we make it possible for them to do so without sacrificing the next. I'm not here to talk about what New Zealand can do to give its grandmothers a fairer deal, but I can't leave this aspect without saying that my own feeling is that here is something that the churches and other charitable bodies could well contribute to. Holiday homes for the aged are so far not in their regular programme, but who could do it so well? Who else in fact could do it at all?

I said that I doubted if I could live on four pounds ten a week. Well, I suppose I could if that was all there was to it; but there's more than that. I couldn't do much more than live. And judging by the applications of so many old age beneficiaries for help, that is the position a good many of them find themselves in. Our City Old Folks Welfare Officer, who is brought into daily touch with these applications, is satisfied that it's not enough. If it was why should the onset of winter bring 572 old folk for help in buying firing? Why should the following three months bring 150 applications for clothing? A trifling number out of so many possible folk in need? I don't believe it. Think of those who are too proud to go to the Town Hall and ask for help, who would rather try to make do for the present in the hope that they'll get by for a little longer, or that the weather will turn warmer. Real destitution is maybe something that we do not see nowadays, thank goodness, but that there is something approaching it is a thing that Social Workers I have spoken to are well aware of. Our New Zealand grandmother has cause to be thankful that probably never in history has the State provided for her so generously. She gets her four pounds ten, and besides what is available from other sources there is a Special Assistance Fund as well that can offer a small additional sum. But the Special Assistance Fund has to be administered with a pretty rigid hand, as all State Funds must. I wonder if it isn't a bit too rigid? I don't know. The war against poverty has been waged as long as history and it isn't won yet.

Tied up with the question of benefit is the question of employment, because at present the payment of the benefit is conditional on limitation of earnings. The old pair between them are allowed to earn £104 a year: but that's not much of an inducement for the old man to keep on at work, if only because if he's in regular employment he can't very well limit his income to that. And there aren't many other ways in which he can pick up £104. So he sits at home and does nothing, and his wife wishes he wouldn't. She'd wish it even

(continued on page 15)

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

Drama - - - - -	4	Open Microphone - - - - -	16
Winston McCarthy's Rugby - - - - -	5, 23	Music of the Twentieth Century Films - - - - -	17
Music: The Czech Philharmonic Orchestra - - - - -	6, 7	Shepherd's Calendar - - - - -	19
Short Story - - - - -	8	Radio Review - - - - -	20-21
Facing the Music - - - - -	9	Ask Aunt Daisy - - - - -	22-23
Editorial - - - - -	10	"The Listener" Crossword - - - - -	23
Letters from Listeners - - - - -	11, 26	Programme Guide - - - - -	24-25
Books - - - - -	12, 14		
Music on Record - - - - -	15		

PROGRAMMES DAY BY DAY

Mon. to Sun., October 5-11 - 27-47