

The White Ribbon

FOR GOD AND HOME AND HUMANITY

VOL. 20.—No. 234.

WELLINGTON, N.Z., DECEMBER 18, 1914.

2s 6d Per Annum, Post Free.
Single Copy, 3d.

CHILD LIFE IN GREAT BRITAIN.

Address delivered by Mrs Philip Snowden at a meeting held in the Concert Hall of the Wellington Town Hall, on Wednesday afternoon, October 28th, 1914, under the auspices of the Society for the Protection of Women and Children.

Many may perhaps be disappointed this afternoon if they are looking for entertainment. Some things that will be said will doubtless sadden, but I shall speak with the spirit of the optimist. There is no revolution so wonderful as the change that has taken place in the last 50 years in the attitude of the public mind towards little children. The old notion was that "the child was created for the parent," and in his home, "the Englishman's Castle," the British man, seeing the usefulness of the child as a wage-earner, ruled with tyranny. "What was good enough for the parent when a child is good enough now" was the common saying, and very few tried to give their children better opportunities than they had had themselves. Though the old idea still prevails among some classes, and in some parts of the country, among most it has been completely reversed. The parent, it is generally admitted, was created for the child, and each generation should be better than that which preceded it. Perhaps the most striking example that can be given is the enactment, in 1906, of the "Feeding Necessitous School Children Bill." It was proposed by the Labour Party, 40 in number, to levy a rate of 1d in the £ for the purpose of feeding starving school children; and though on both sides of the House there were a few adverse

critics of the Bill who protested against interfering with the liberty of the parent, and with parental control, yet it finally passed the third reading with almost complete unanimity. I had often asked one of my socialistic friends which part of their political programme would be the last to be achieved, and they always gave this of feeding the school children, because of the strong British sentiment against interfering with the responsibility of the parent. Yet this measure met with hardly any opposition, certainly no party opposition. Why this in a country so conservative as Great Britain? Because for many years preceding propagandists of every party, Sir John Joist, for example, and many other statesmen and reformers, had been engaged in a crusade on behalf of children. The Chief Educational Inspector of the London County Council, investigating in the schools in the London C.C. area, found there were 122,000 children going to school seriously underfed, mostly without breakfast. In another large town the same was true of 37 per cent of the elementary school children, and it was the same in every industrial city. When these facts were brought to light, and when simultaneously the Medical Inspection clause was passed, and it was discovered that 60 per cent of the elementary school children were suffering from some complaint, and this due chiefly to malnutrition, all parties united to remove this disgrace, and "The School Children Feeding Bill" became the law of the land. Unfortunately it is only permissive, like many other Acts of similar purpose, e.g., those for Better Housing of the Poor, or Town Planning; they merely give

the local authorities permission to carry out the reforms, but many have used the permission. Over 100 large County Councils have adopted the system for the feeding of the children, and the Labour Party is trying hard to make the Bill compulsory, that the carelessness of a County Council may not stand in the way of the children's best interests. One thing especially strikes one, and that is the great waste of public money through being spent in the education of children who, from insufficient feeding, accompanied with defective memory, are unable to benefit by it. Hence the importance of making the system universal.

It may be of interest to say a little as to the Educational system. At one time Education depended on the activities of the religious bodies, and the denominations all provided schools for their children. This was much better than nothing. There were also the old Dames' Schools, and the Ladies' Academies, where girls were taught how to behave prettily in company, and how to crochet antimacassars, and such like amiable accomplishments. Still we owe something to the old ladies and gentlemen who tried to supply a want; for previous to 1870 there was absolutely no means of free education. Then was established the system of public free, compulsory education, and there are now fine elementary schools, with magnificent buildings. Still there is not yet enough attention paid to education in Britain, for Germany and America are far in advance.

There are fine Universities, but there is a weakness in the system of Secondary Education, because it does not fit on right at either end. Some