

THE FUTURE OF WOMEN IN INDUSTRY.

(Abstract of an Address delivered at Whitefield's Men's Own, on Sunday Afternoon, June 22nd, 1919, by Miss A. Maude Royden.)

Before proceeding to discuss what the lecturer declared to be the sorest point in the industrial problem of home, viz., the cheap labour of women, Miss Royden laid down certain general principles, the recognition of which was necessary to understand and grapple with the social and industrial problems of to-day, just as in the physical world it was only when scientists began to formulate the laws under which the Universe operates that they were able to understand something of its mysteries and wrest from it its secrets. These general principles she summarised thus: It is not the worker, but the idler, that is a burden on the community. It is best alike for the community and for the individual that each should do the best work that he is capable of, and that work should be done by those who can do it best. Women are not all alike, nor ought they to be all alike. Not all women naturally understand or love children, but one who does not is not necessarily a wrong sort of woman, for there are more varieties in human nature than society has usually admitted. The broad differences that exist between the sexes do not always imply inferiority on the woman's side. Thus if, as seems to be the case, in certain kinds of work women are quicker than men, but exhaust themselves sooner, that does not, of necessity imply inferiority, but rather that the conditions under which they work must be somewhat different. Women ought to have the same freedom of choice in their work as men have; to every child, in fact, should be given a much greater freedom of choice than is the case at present. Unwilling work is nearly always inefficient work, then the community suffers. Women have been taught, on the one hand, that if they belong to the richer class they ought not to work lest they take work away from somebody that needs it; and on the other, that if they belong to the poorer class, they must work, and this at work that men do not want to do. Whereas, given freedom of choice, the very differences, physically, between the sexes, and the

differences in the ways of living, would sort out the work they can do best, and the community would be the gainer. Hitherto men have judged what sort of work women should do, and by confession of the War Cabinet Committee on Women in Industry, their judgment has not been altogether wise. They have excluded women from work they were quite competent to do, and have allowed them to do that for which they were not suited, till the war came and broke down all these false standards and barriers. Women have shown that they have more public spirit to respond to the public need than people imagine; and that in taking up a new line of work they have more adaptability and initiative than was supposed. With better conditions in the way of fresh air and good food, they have shown a remarkable degree of physical and muscular strength, and have proved that they can do the work of men, though it may be necessary for the conditions of work to be somewhat different. Now that peace has come, we want the new powers revealed by the war to be used to enrich and dignify life and give it leisure, while at the same time increasing production.

The Restoration of Pre-War Practices Bill, recently presented, has for its object to restore the conditions of organised industry as they were before the war. The result would be that nearly 800,000 women would be turned out of their work, women that have learned a trade, and thereby have learned their own powers. Are they to be sent home, and told not to work? Are they to be told to get married? Very many of them cannot get married owing to the war. But when a woman is denied marriage—the channel into which she would naturally have poured her creative forces, her energy as a human being—she needs all the more some work in which to use her powers, or she becomes a maimed and discontented being. And while it is just that the men who gave up their positions to go to the war should be restored to them as far as possible, it is not just that the door should be closed permanently against the women that have proved their capacity for a new industry. How are we to get over the struggle between the expensive man and the cheap labour of women? To legislate against women engaging in a certain industry will only create a

bitter feeling. The solution of the difficulty lies in the direction of giving equal pay for equal work, whether done by a man or a woman. Then by a process of natural selection, the right people will go into the right work, i.e., that for which they are the best fitted, and which, therefore, they will do the best. Two objections offer themselves to this proposal: first, that the woman will be driven out as effectively as by legislation; second, that it would be an injustice to the man who has a wife and family to support. As to the first, it is quite likely that the woman will be driven out, but it will be so because the work is really done better by men, and therefore it is best for all, men and women alike, that the men should do it. The process of natural selection will ensure that the women do those kinds of work for which they are best fitted, and though in some cases it may cause hardship, in the end it will work out right. The second objection can be met only by some scheme for the endowment of motherhood. There are not wanting signs that this is coming before long, e.g., Widows' Pensions and the War Cabinet's proposal for paying children's allowances to **married men**. Only in this latter case we must use more common-sense, and see that the person who does the work—the woman—gets the recognition of the State for the work that she has done.

By granting to women in the home equal economic independence you will remove a fruitful cause of bitterness, you will equalise men and women in the labour market, and make marriage a real partnership, the man bringing to the home what he has earned, and the woman bringing what she has earned. The rearing of children is the most important work in the world, it is a "service rendered to the State in connection with the continuance of the race," and this burden does fall, on the whole, more on the woman in the home than on the man.

These problems cannot be solved in a spirit of sex antagonism or suspicion, but by considering them from the woman's point of view as well as from the man's, and by bringing to their solution the earnest desire for truth, honesty, and justice. Women have not been slow to make sacrifices for the good of the community, and when appealed to on grounds of justice and loyalty for the good of all, they will be ready to respond,