

supporting three children by brushmaking was unemployed. Her fifteen-year-old daughter had been bedridden five months, as the result of a street accident, and was still incapacitated; her action for compensation was suspended, as two of the witnesses had been called to the War.

The plight of soldiers' wives and mothers was appalling. Men were taken from their homes at a few hours' notice, and sent off without knowledge of their destination. "I had one letter," a poor wife told me. "He wrote that he was going in a boat, but didn't know any more. Only those who have anyone taken away understand what it means not to know whether you'll ever see them again, or whether you'll be left, a widow, with three or four children to rear!"

A woman stopped me in the Old Ford Road to tell her trouble. Her man had been taken for the War, with only three hours' respite to say good-bye. He had served his time in the Army before she knew him, and until the calling-up notice came, she had never realised what his being a Reservist might some day mean. He had given her ten shillings when he went away, and told her to make it last as long as she could. It was all spent now; no more money had come from any source, and she could get no work—her voice failed in a sob. As we spoke together her two little boys ran up to her. They had the wilted look I saw growing upon the children; they seemed like fading flowers.

The War Office had issued notices stating the separation allowances to be paid to the men who had been called up or enlisted. They were paltry indeed! 1s. 1d. a day for wives of privates, corporals and sergeants, the great majority; 1s. 4d. a day for wives of colour-sergeants; 2s. 2d. a day for wives of quartermaster-sergeants and equivalent ranks; 2s. 3d. for wives of warrant officers. The children of all these ranks were put off with a mere twopence a day for the boys under fourteen years and the girls under sixteen years of age! 3s. 6d. a week could be claimed by families living within the London area at the time of mobilisation, but not by those who moved in subsequently for any cause. The soldiers might further allot to their families, if they chose, up to half their pay, which ranged from a shilling a day for privates. To most of them it became a matter of routine to do so, for their families sorely needed this little subsidy. The allotment later became compulsory. Small as were the allowances, they were not always forthcoming and their issue was generally attended by most hideous delay. It was common for wives to be left waiting several months without receiving a penny. It was common also for men to be called up, and sent off to their regiments, without receiving the month's pay due, according to regulations, on mobilisation. They were thus unable to make such purchases as they required for themselves, and were obliged to leave their wives and children destitute.

Such separation allowances as came through during the first months of war were paid in part direct, in part through the Soldiers and Sailors Families Association, a semi-patronal, semi-charitable organisation, which had existed before the War. The Association was supposed to

add something to the Government allowance, should this be considered necessary, in view of the special circumstances of the case. So far, however, from such additions being possible, it appeared that the Association generally failed to receive from the Government the sums necessary to make up the promised Government allowance.

After applying to the Association women were often kept waiting weeks without receiving a penny. Some received small doles and loans to tide them over till the separation allowances came through. The Prince of Wales's Fund (the National Relief Fund), ostensibly collected for civilian distress, was systematically milked to supply the deficiency in Army and Naval payments.

From all over the country, not least from my own district, came complaints that officials of the Soldiers and Sailors Families Association were telling the women whose men were at the War to move into one room, and to sell pianos, gramophones, even furniture, before applying anywhere for aid. The notion that the women were entitled to separation allowance as a right, not as a charitable act of grace, seemed difficult for the Association's officials to assimilate. In Newcastle soldiers' wives were given food tickets instead of the money due to them, and were permitted to obtain household commodities only from a prescribed list, which comprised the cheap, inferior qualities of food.

All day long, rain or fine, the soldiers' dependants stood in a queue outside the Bromley Public Hall in the Bow Road, where many a Suffragette skirmish had been fought in the days before the War. Day after day they stood; for when closing time came, they were dismissed, to return again. All over the country they were standing thus; and when at length they were registered, many of them were refused all aid.

A man living near us in Ford Road had the order from his firm: "Enlist or go!" He joined the Territorials, and went into training at the barracks in Tredegar Road close by. His employers had promised him five shillings a week when he went to the Front, but during his training they gave him nothing. No money had come from the War Office. There were six little children between ten years and eight months, the youngest was wasting, another had abscesses in the head. The mother, after waiting two days in the queue, at length got her case registered, and was told to go home and wait till an official of the Society called upon her. When she came to us in despair on Monday, there was no food in the house. On Wednesday she came again; still no money had come through for her. The visitor from the Association had called at last; but had left without giving her anything, declaring that there might be "something" for her on Saturday.

A fragile little mother came to us with three toddling children under four years. She was expecting another very soon. The military authorities had sent her a month's money—10s. short of the promised allowance, small as it was. "They said it wasn't as much as I ought to have, but they were getting short of money," she said plaintively. She too had been told at the S.S.F.A. to wait till a visitor called on her;



with a grumpiness, which gradually melted to benevolent geniality. He called for each new point: "Next, Miss Sylvia, please."

We poured out to him the pitiful accounts of our poor: men and women thrown out of work at the commencement of war, who had not received a penny of relief from any source yet, despite the existence of the Cabinet Committee and the National Relief Fund, set up for the very purpose of aiding them; of families with little children, without income; people selling and pawning their clothes and furniture, terrorised with ejectment notices from their landlords. . . .

Burns interrupted; the Courts Emergency Act would prevent evictions.

We showed him the printed notices to quit, which landlords were still serving upon their tenants, claiming power to evict without orders from the Court. In the last two days five women had come to me with such notices. Our canvassers had found a poor mother in bed with a baby a few days old, weeping over one of them.

Burns insisted that the West London magistrates were refusing to sanction evictions. The Marylebone magistrate had in fact taken a strong line, telling the people threatened with eviction to lock their doors, and sending an officer of the Court to tell the landlord that if he attempted to eject his tenants he would be doing a very dangerous thing. Yet at Old Street ejectment orders were being issued, in some cases against the lowest paid women garment workers. One of these, the sole support of her family, had actually to complain that her sweated rate had been reduced since the War. By three days' work she had only contrived to earn 1s. 8d. I had protested against the sweated rate to the President of the Board of Trade, and against the magistrate's eviction order to the Home Secretary, who had replied that he could not interfere.

"I am sure you ought to know by now, Miss Pankhurst, that the Home Secretary never *can* interfere with a magistrate's decision," said Burns, with a sly grin, well knowing that I had many memories of such prevarication from the days of Suffragette strife.

"So it is said," I answered him dryly.

Again he insisted that no one would be evicted during the War; but next day the Old Street Court gave an order for a family to be evicted in three weeks' time.

We urged on him the need for raising the Poor Law scale of relief to keep pace with the mounting prices; and the cruel parsimony of refusing school meals to the children of parents receiving the meagre Poor Law doles. Poplar, even then, was considered a relatively generous Board of Guardians; yet how miserable was its scale! To a family where there were five children aged eleven to five years, the Guardians were allowing only 5s. worth of food and four pints of milk a week. An unemployed carter had offered himself for the Army, but was rejected as medically unfit. He had eight children between thirteen years and three months old. The Guardians were now allowing only 5s. 6d. worth of food, after an interval during which no relief of any kind had been

given. Everything had been pawned, including the children's bed-clothes. A deserted wife with three children, having lost her work, applied to the Relieving Officer, when penniless, and without food, fuel or light. She was offered only the Workhouse. Refusing it, because this would mean separation from her children, she went empty away. What was to happen in such a case?

Already women and children were being crowded out of the hospitals to make way for soldiers. We had to tell him of many such cases in our experience. A baby with a cleft palate could not be admitted to the London Hospital till after the War. A child critically ill with pneumonia was refused admission by the same hospital. Admitted to the Bethnal Green Workhouse Infirmary, he was so grossly neglected that his mother removed him and exposed his condition to the Guardians, who finally thanked her and remitted the fee. The poor mother excused the Infirmary nurses, pleading that they had more cases to attend to than they could possibly manage. A little girl of twelve disfigured by a hideous skin disease had been brought to us at the Old Ford clinic, having been turned out of the London Hospital to make room for soldiers.

We urged the scandalous treatment of soldiers' and sailors' families; the hardships and humiliations they had suffered from the long failure to pay their allowances, the meagreness of the allowances when at last they came; the disagreeable manner in which they were paid and made up by doles from the Soldiers and Sailors Families Association, to the accompaniment of fussy and impertinent interrogations—though already the women had been compelled to furnish their marriage and their children's birth certificates.

We demanded that the payment earned by the soldiers at the risk of their lives should be treated as wages, to which they and theirs had an inalienable right; little enough as the price of a man's life! The wage should be paid where a man had been maintaining a family as husband and father, whether the woman could show a marriage certificate or not and also where a son had been maintaining his parents or brothers and sisters.

We asked what share of the £4,000,000 housing grant was coming to the East End, and told him of women, with children starving, prohibited by the inspectors from taking in garment work from the factories because of the overcrowded condition of their homes.

We protested against the wretched maximum of 10s. a week to be paid in the Queen Mary Workrooms, when these workrooms should eventually appear—for none were opened yet—pointing out that this miserable rate would militate against women's wage standards in industry as a whole, and also against the wage standards of men. We demanded, at least, the minimum payable in most districts to the unskilled labouring man. We reminded him that the gross underpayment of women in all branches of industry had long been a blot on Society, and urged that if relief committees would set the example of paying a living wage, and the Government would oblige its contractors to do the same, private employers would be compelled to follow suit. Here Burns expressed



Their evening meal was a slice of bread, and again the rancid butter, with a can of tea. Some jobbery doubtless accounted for this poor fare. He and three others had run home to get clean. Twenty men had decamped ten days before. On Monday he returned to camp with a heavy cold and looking, his wife said, very ill. She had heard nothing for many days since, and came to me, fearing he was in prison and that her own separation allowance would be stopped.

I was clamouring for an interview at the War Office. On October 2nd Lord Kitchener deputed Harold Baker to see us. I took with me Charlotte Drake, Edith Jones and nine soldiers' wives and mothers, sorrowful, anxious, their faces a very epitome of all the miseries women suffered in those dark days. At the sight of their poverty Baker, immaculately tailored, arrogant with class prejudice, was taken aback. He turned to me sharply:

"I only want to hear the officials; I do not want to listen to the actual cases!"

The "cases." Oh, wounding, misused term! The poor beings thus designated quivered in dumb distress.

We jarred and jangled, I indignant:

"But surely you want to understand their point of view and to know what their actual experience is!"

He, imperious: "This is not a Court of Enquiry . . . it is no use listening to them."

I, insistent: "This deputation is to represent the opinions and experiences of the women concerned."

He weakened a little, but, as I considered, with insolent unreason declared he would not allow more than five women at a time into the room. "This room is too small!" he glared round the spacious chamber.

I complained of the terrible delays in paying separation allowance. Sir Charles Harris, a ruddy, bellicose man at Baker's elbow, who conducted the business for his stiff chief, denounced the ignorance of women: the cause, he was confident, of every trouble. Mrs. Drake tersely enquired whether particulars as to their families could not be obtained from recruits on enlistment, in order that their wives should not be left to discover the Army procedure for themselves. He replied that men sometimes "forgot" they had families and were "glad to bolt!"

We pleaded that no woman could keep going the smallest home in any degree of decency, with less than £1 a week; and that, given this nucleus, no child could be kept, even sparsely, for less than 5s. a week. On leaving the elementary schools the children whose fathers had been killed should either be sent to secondary schools and supported by maintenance grants, or apprenticed to trades, as was done for orphans in pre-War Hungary. Harris eyed us satirically, convinced that some of us were fools and the others knaves. He refused to admit the inadequacy of the miserly pension, of 5s. a week for the wife, and

1s. 6d. per child, fixed in the Boer War, and still obtaining. "It all depends who has to live on it!" he smiled scornfully.

Dumb thus far, the soldiers' wives spoke out their resentment. A mother of six had pawned, and sold, and gone days without food, whilst waiting her allowance. A mother of five had been told by the ladies of the S.S.F.A. that she ought to show her patriotism by selling her furniture and moving into a single room before coming to them for aid, when her allowance failed to appear. A poor woman, left with two infants by an absconding husband, had lived six years with a Reservist and borne him children. She complained of her destitution, the harsh denial of all allowance, and urged the claim of the soldier's unmarried wife to the pay her man had earned.

Baker interrupted her brusquely. "I will hear no more of the cases. I am going to make my reply."

He did so woodenly, without a gleam of understanding, conceding nothing, giving no hope of improvement. No trace of sympathy for these sore-tried women did I myself perceive.

In my correspondence, just then, came a fitting reply to Sir Charles Harris. A Welsh soldier's wife sent me a letter from her husband:

"Dear, I hope this war won't last long, for I am quite sick of it. They don't do right by wives at all. It is the same with everyone up here. Dear, it is not my fault that your money is stopped, I can tell you, but I have wrote away about it for you, and the Sergeant Major is writing again to-night, so you see I am doing my very best about it, for it must be hard on you without any money, love, and I shall see you get it too, my love."

This woman had been left five weeks without separation allowance. The relief committee had suggested her husband was to blame.

The original separation allowance of 1s. 1d. a day for soldiers' wives and 2d. a day for their children had by this time been raised to 11s. 1d. a week for the wife, and 1s. 9d. for each of the first three children, 1s. 2d. for the fourth, a maximum of 17s. 6d., with no further increase, however large the family might be. These sums included a compulsory allotment of 3s. 6d. per week for the wife and 7d. per child up to a maximum of 5s. 3d. a week deducted from the soldier's pay.

In response to the stream of horrified protests against the grievous poverty of the soldiers' wives, Asquith announced another small increase, bringing the scale up to 12s. 6d. a week for the wife, 2s. 6d. for each of the first four children, and 2s. each for the rest. Great and general satisfaction welcomed the promise that henceforth the allowances should be paid through the Post Office, without the intervention of the impudent, charity-mongering S.S.F.A., upon which the popular mind heaped, not only its own shortcomings, but all those of the Government and the Army administration.



Sad was the consternation of the soldiers' wives to receive on October 12th, instead of the promised increase in the allowance, a reduction of at least 3s. 6d. Other influences had been at work; the vacillant Government had reversed its policy. The official explanation of the broken promise was the absurd pretence that the War Office had no power to pay the husband's allotment through the Post Office, and that the new method had necessitated stopping the small grants from the S.S.F.A. by which the former allowances had been made up.

Though the general outcry caused the restoration of the allotments, the promised increase proved a delusion. The hope deferred, which maketh the heart sick, was the common portion of the soldiers' and sailors' wives and relatives!

The parents and other dependants of unmarried soldiers had been promised allowances; none were as yet forthcoming. Some had received odd pittances from the S.S.F.A.; the majority got nothing. The Government still debated.

The scale of allowances for the wives of the sailors in Britain's famous Navy remained undecided till September 22nd. When some weeks later the women got knowledge of it they found, if married to Ordinary Seamen, Able Seamen, Leading Seamen and Second Class Petty Officers, they were to get a mere 6s. a week, with 2s. a week for their first and second children, and 1s. a week for the rest. To supplement these wretched sums the men could make a minimum allotment of £1 a month.

Many a woman, despite her own straitened circumstances, was sending money, food and clothing to her husband "roughing it" somewhere in camp or on ship; for the compulsory allotments made too large a drain on men's pay, and the pay itself often failed to appear.

Towards the end of October the War Office decided to relieve the soldier's hard-pressed condition at the expense of his wife. Should a husband "object" to making the full allotment to his family, the wife would be asked whether she would be content to accept less, and if not to state her means. Meanwhile enquiries would be made to ascertain whether her income, without the allotment, was up to the "standard scale." Should the woman fail to return the form, as many weary and anxious women did, not knowing how best to answer a communication, at once so poignant and so terrifying, the reduced allowance would be sent her. Without the consent or knowledge of the soldiers such letters as the following were sent to their wives:

"Madam—Your husband has represented that in view of his own expenses and requirements he finds himself unable to continue the allotment to you. . . . It is thought that you may find yourself sufficiently well off not to claim from your husband a share of his pay."

Many a wife who received such a missive was not yet getting the separation allowance due to her. Alderman J. R. Hurry, J.P., of West Ham, exceptionally well informed, because he was aiding the work of the local S.S.F.A., and also a member of the West Ham Mayor's Committee, told the Press early in November: "I don't suppose more than

one woman in twenty is receiving the full amount she is entitled to from the War Office."

The wives of many Naval and Fleet Reservists whose allowances were due on October 1st in his experience had received nothing.

Whilst the wives were thus urged to forego their allotments of 3s. 6d.—half the soldiers' pay—it was at last announced that unmarried wives might have separation allowance, but only on condition that the soldier surrendered to them not less than 5s. 3d. a week, leaving only a meagre 3d. a day for his own needs—a harsh proviso, truly, when the payments of the legally married husband were actually being reduced. Official parsimony, in the guise of Mrs. Grundy, desired to put his loving faithfulness to an acid test. Even this was only conceded if the woman had been entirely supported by the soldier before enlistment, and would now be wholly destitute without his aid.

The War Office still refused allowances to children born less than nine months after their parents' marriage.

Already many thousands of women were widowed. On November 9th a new scale of pensions for widows of seamen and marines was issued: 7s. 6d. a week for the childless widow, 5s. a week for the first child, 2s. 6d. each for the second, third, and fourth, and 2s. for subsequent children—meagre allowances, which kept them pinched and needy.

At the same time it was at last conceded that some allowance should be made to the parents and little brothers and sisters who had been supported by unmarried soldiers before enlistment. At best the promised allowance was appallingly mean. The highest amount to which the Government would contribute was 12s. 6d. a week. To secure this sum the soldier must give 3s. 6d. a week from his pay. When he had done so he often found that his aged parents, or his widowed mother and young brothers and sisters failed to receive the promised dole, small as it was. Before any payment was made inquisitors called at the soldier's home, and closely questioned his mother as to how she had spent the money her son had brought home to her. The promised 12s. 6d. would only be paid if the inquisitor considered the mother had retained that sum as clear profit, beyond the amount she had expended on her son. The Government would only contribute towards the profit, frequently giving the mother no more than 5d. or 6d. a week.

No indication of this procedure was given in the memorandum promising dependants' allowances, issued by the War Office, nor in the posters put up to induce young men to enlist.

In fixing the allowances no account was taken of the rise in the cost of living, no latitude given in respect of death, unemployment, or any misfortune which had befallen the father, or other members of the family, since the son enlisted. "My son would have given me more had I been placed then as I am now; he would have given his last penny rather than see his little brothers and sisters go hungry,"



break. I often had to go back to the diets I had used when recovering from the hunger strike; days of hot water, days of white of egg and water, then gradually prune juice and dried biscuits, a teaspoonful of scraped raw beef, or an all-fruit diet, assisted at times by dried seaweed. With such expedients I kept on, unceasing.

Tracing the sums due to the women was a tedious business. Paymasters wrote in pencil, their writing often almost illegible. Army departments contradicted each other, failed to keep their own rules, and made unconscionable muddles.

The unmarried wife of a soldier came crying to me from Bethnal Green, bringing three little children between three years and three months. Her man, who was now wounded and in hospital, had allotted her 9s. a week, but neither the allotment nor any other money had reached her in the three months since he was called up, save small doles amounting to 39s. 9d. from the S.S.F.A. She had pawned all her furniture and was in desperate straits. Should her man die before the allotment question were settled, she would probably get no pension of any sort.

A woman whose separation allowance was 18s. 6d. a week, had 10s. a week deducted from it, to repay some doles she had had from the S.S.F.A., which amounted to 50s., and which she had not known to be loans. In dozens of cases I was pleading with the authorities that if they would insist upon recovering such doles, the repayments should be in very small sums.

A Bow Reservist, set to guard Wapping tunnel, came over to see me. Called up fourteen days before, he had had no pay, and had only managed to get a loan of five shillings from the colour-sergeant to bring home. He had Army rations, of course, but his wife had no money to feed his five little children. On their account he had hurried here. His baby was ill and his wife—little wonder—was far from well. I telephoned to the local S.S.F.A. The office was closed. The officials were not present on Wednesdays, a charwoman said. The soldier blasphemed when he heard it. Relieved when I told him Nurse Hebbes should go round to supply his family with their immediate needs, he talked of his own hardships. He and his mates were sleeping in their clothes on the floor of the ladies' waiting-room in the railway station. They got little rest, for they were forbidden even to take off their belts, and officers came round frequently to inspect them. Their uniform was arriving by instalments. He showed me some of the garments marked "made in Germany." "It's a fool's trick," he grumbled, "taking me from my work in Bow to guard that tunnel. There's men in Wapping out of work could do it, and sleep in their own beds!"

## CHAPTER X

BEARDING HERBERT SAMUEL—THE BITTER BREAD OF CHARITY

APPEALS poured in on us:

"Will you open a workroom for the poor women in Hackney Road or Mansford Street? I am a poor mother with two sons at the War and I am nearly starving. If we ask for help we are told to sell our homes. We have plenty of people coming to enquire all our business, and then walking away."

"Chronic poverty"; thus lightly the Pharisees dismissed this lack which seared my heart. People in terrible need constantly appealed to us. Often I was constrained to take the food from our table to give to starving people, sometimes the blankets from our beds. Smyth had a board in her room covered with little bits of paper intended to record the repayments of unfortunate people to whom she had lent her money. Once, twice, thrice, even four times they might come with their pennies and shillings; then, almost invariably, they broke down. "Do not lend," I begged her; "they cannot repay except by starving their children. Give what you can afford and leave the rest."

An inquest on a Southwark baby revealed that a man working short time and his wife and six children had been struggling to exist on 12s. 6d. a week, out of which 6s. 6d. had to be paid in rent. The baby at fifteen months weighed only 7 lbs. 6 ozs., instead of the normal 18 to 20 lbs. They had had no relief from any source. The coroner's jury returned a verdict of "Death from natural causes." A poor charwoman went to the caretaker of a mission house in Notting Dale, crying: "I haven't had any food for three or four days, I have strangled my little boy!" She was tried for the murder of the two-year old boy and sentenced to ten years penal servitude. It was admitted that she was suffering from lack of food. Though sometimes relieved, we were informed in Poplar that charwomen were "casual" workers, ineligible for aid from the National Relief Fund; this being the opinion of a Local Government Board Inspector.

Beside the time-honoured Poor Law disability there were all sorts of foolish and cruel restrictions against granting these or those children the free school meals, which should have helped to protect the children from hardship—the children had been having the meals already a certain time (though the family income, so far from improving, had actually been reduced). The school meals were indeed nothing to



Patriotism was fashionable, and patriotism at other people's expense most fashionable of all. A poor woman whose husband had just been killed at the Front was informed that the Royal Patriotic Fund had granted her £7, and that she must apply for it to the local S.S.F.A. Then a certain lady called from the Association and told the widow that she had put the money in the bank for her and that if she wanted "to hear any more about it" she must call on this lady next week. Crushed by her grief, the widow heard of this "blood money," as poor women called it, scarcely caring what might happen to it; but a week later her two-year-old child was taken seriously ill, and the doctor ordered special nourishment which she could not afford to buy. She hastened to the S.S.F.A. and pleaded for the money due to her; for some of it; even for 10s. The lady she had previously seen refused to hand over one penny, insisting that £5 of it must be put into War Loan, and the rest held in the bank. A woman brought the poor widow to me. I put the case in the hands of one of our solicitors, who eventually secured the widow her money.

Poverty and overstrain were evidenced by the increase in the death rate of women from consumption, which had been falling steadily during the preceding ten years, and which mounted higher with every year of war. The general death rate for civilians, which had been falling, also rose.

The Minister of Education now gave instructions that the school feeding of necessitous children must cease. From one school near us nearly fifty children, whose need had been recognised by the School Managers, were thus left to go hungry. The number of children attending our "Penny Carltons," as the Press termed what we had named "Cost Price Restaurants," leapt up by 100 per cent. Though on the part of voluntary enthusiasts there was a concentration of effort to save the babies never previously made, the then appallingly high infant death rate rose, especially in London, where from 103 per 1,000 births in 1914, it became 112 per 1,000 births in 1915.

As the summer advanced diarrhoea and enteritis attacked huge numbers of tiny victims. Poor mothers came flocking to our clinics with their wasting infants, wizened and fleshless from wasting, twisted and misshapen by rickets. Rickets, impetigo, scabies—which the soldiers brought home with them—poverty diseases; I learnt to know them sorely.

We made no pretence of confining ourselves to preventive medicine, as the Minister of Health now advises. We did what we could for the sufferers, only referring them elsewhere for treatment we were unable to give. To have done otherwise would greatly have limited our usefulness; indeed the majority of our patients would have gone untreated. The hospitals were too much taken up with soldiers to give adequate attention to ailing babies. Our patients were generally too poor to pay for attention from the local private practitioners, who in any case were less able to advise in relation to pregnancy and infant nurture than our own doctors, who specialised in such work.

I believe that if professional interests were put on one side it would be found best for the present maternity and infant welfare centres to treat the bulk of the ailments they now refer to private general practitioners.

A lady came to me from the Beit clinic for sea water plasma injections, urging me to use this treatment for infantile diarrhoea. In a few days we had it working, and obtained from it remarkable results under Dr. Alice Johnson, who attended our cases at the Mothers' Arms. Numbers of infants brought to us in a state of collapse, despaired of by the general practitioners, were restored. I realised how handicapped is the doctor attending poor people when circumstances permit him to order nothing for his patients beyond a bottle of medicine. Many sick babies we took into the nursery by night, as well as by day. They were the special charge of Nurse Hebbes, who nursed them with patient tenderness, spending herself unsparingly. "I believe you love them better than the healthy babies," I said to her, watching her fondling a piteous little morsel, who crinkled his shrivelled face to smile as her finger gently stroked his cheek. She answered with wan brightness: "I think I do."

It seemed a miracle to witness the tiny creatures recovered from the collapse of imminent death, the listless, flaccid limbs gradually regaining vigour. Yet the process of recovery was slow indeed as compared with their swift failing. Several times it happened that after a baby had been nursed patiently to apparent health, and had been sent away to the country to assure its stability, it would return home, catch a chill or some childish ailment, collapse and die, quite suddenly, as though the physical well-being we had built for the little body had been merely a house of cards. It was the sad loss of infants for whom she had laboured with beautiful devotion, and the tragic state of overburdened mothers in crowded homes, which sent Nurse Hebbes to be the first nurse in the birth control clinic of Dr. Marie Stopes.



"My poor wife and children are starving. . . . They have stopped my wife's allowance this three weeks. . . . If they don't soon send her some money God knows what she will do!"

Private M'Adams, a poor fellow in the Poplar and Stepney Rifles, was torn from his sick wife's bedside as an absentee. The police magistrate, in pity, allowed him to return to her, but he found her dead. "Can a man soldier with a wife and children starving at home?" pleaded Samuel Brook, a gunner in the Royal Garrison Artillery, when charged at Marylebone Police Court as an absentee. He had gone home in Christmas week, because his wife's allowance had stopped unaccountably, and she had neither food nor fuel in the house. He was handed over to an escort and taken back, a prisoner, to his regiment.

Serving soldiers sometimes applied to me to defend them. An Army driver was told off to arrest a drunken recruit, who flung a tumbler in his face, and thus deprived him of an eye. For eight months the driver was under treatment for this injury. Whilst still an out-patient at the London Hospital, he was mistakenly arrested as a deserter. His pay was also stopped in error. I had just succeeded in getting him most of the arrears due, when he wrote appealing to me to do my best "for an innocent chap." Again he had been arrested as a deserter, and on an easily disproved charge of obtaining *ros.* on false pretences from the S.S.F.A. I appealed to the War Office and the commanding officer, and obtained the intercession of a Member of Parliament; but no explanation of the case ever reached either the Member of Parliament or myself.

Shortly afterwards I approached the War Office and the Paymaster, on behalf of a soldier in the 10th Norfolk Regiment, who was informed that he had been overpaid, but declared he had only had his due. The Paymaster answered me curtly, with a threat of punishment for the soldier:

"I beg to acknowledge letter signed E. Sylvia Pankhurst, dated 23/9/15, re Pte. F. A. Prior, 10th Norfolk Regiment. Will you kindly inform the writer that her letter has been forwarded to his commanding officer, who will probably take disciplinary measures against the man for making frivolous complaints? A statement of accounts has been sent to his C.O.

"Yours faithfully,

"B. E. WINTER, Lt.-Col.,

"For Regimental Paymaster."

Anxious on the soldier's account, I forwarded the letter to the War Office, pointing out that I had often intervened in such cases. In reply I was informed by C. W. Cooper, "for the Assistant Financial Secretary," that the man being a serving soldier, should address any complaint to his regimental officers. "Any other method of preferring complaints, such as approach to outside societies, etc., is expressly forbidden by the King's regulations."

I was not prepared to accept that dictum; I knew too well that many a case of hardship and victimisation would go unredressed if there were no outside appeal. I reminded the War Office that I had frequently induced it to alter military decisions. I agitated both publicly and privately, and presently received another letter from the same C. W. Cooper, virtually reversing his previous statement.

"I am directed to acquaint you that you will be quite in order in referring to this department any complaints from serving soldiers who have failed to obtain redress on application to their regimental officers.

"Your obedient servant,

"C. W. COOPER,

"For the Assistant Financial Secretary."

I felt I had scored a point in defence of the soldiers and their families. The reply was not wholly satisfactory, for many soldiers were afraid to make any complaints on their own account, either to their regimental officers or anyone else. However, that part of the letter I was disposed to regard as padding. Certainly I should continue to deal with the soldiers' complaints without formalities, as and when they came to me. Ah yes, indeed, as the poor mothers implored me, I would "keep at them!"

Again a poor widow came crying to me from the amazing lady official. An official communication had informed the widow that £7 2s. 7d. was due to her on her husband's account, that the money had been placed in a bank, and she might withdraw it, as she wished, on application to the local S.S.F.A. Desiring black garments for herself and children, in mourning for her dead, she applied for £2 of the money due to her, a very modest sum for such a purpose. The irrepressible official, whom I had already brought to book in a similar case, refused the money. Perhaps she considered the observance of mourning an unwarrantable extravagance on the part of a soldier's widow. Be that as it may, she impertinently told the widow that *ros.* would be enough, and when the poor woman persisted in asking for £2 she was thrust outside the office and got nothing at all.

A sailor's wife had loans from the same local branch of the S.S.F.A. amounting to £3 5s. od., whilst awaiting her separation allowance. The allowance, when it came, was much less than her husband used to give her for housekeeping. She had to buy a part of his equipment, to pay his fare when he came home to see her once a week, and purchase little extras for the days he came, which all too soon would cease! She could not make ends meet; much less repay the S.S.F.A. loan. She went out to work, but the pay was small, and before she had time to benefit from her little wage, she received a threatening letter:

"MRS. S—,

"Unless your debt to the S.S.F.A. of £3 5s. od. is repaid in full on



before they are settled with by the Pay Office. . . . These men get nothing until I write to S. and S. help, or the minister of the parish to look into the matter. Were it not for the action I am able to take, many of these men would be left utterly destitute."

This helpful action by this particular official was done purely on his own initiative, and formed no part of his official duties. His experience, and that of Sir Frederick Milner, was my own. The question glared at me : was this the grossest inefficiency conceivable, or was it the deliberate policy of the Government to leave the broken men to sink or swim without aid, so that they might be forced into the labour market, and the power of their shattered frames to toil might be tested, under the stern urge of hunger, before their pensions were assessed ?

In every case the Medical Board insisted upon knowing the man's earnings when determining pension, and the man must answer truthfully under pain of being punished for a lie. Their earnings, if they could earn at all, were reckoned in reduction of pension, however feeble and broken might be their condition. This done, men with the wounds of battle and operation unhealed, with eyes newly extracted, limbs newly amputated, crippled by rheumatism and "trench foot," had their pensions determined, not on their present state of health and capacity, but on the condition the medical assessors believed would be theirs after a period of recovery. Even then the pension was still only conditional, and subject to reduction or stoppage should their condition improve.

"That disabled men shall not be discharged until arrangements for the payment of pension are complete ; that there shall be no interim between the cessation of Army pay and separation allowance, and the commencement of pension."

This was the resolution of our League of Rights often emphasised.

. . . . .

"Ask the lady to come upstairs," I said. It was only one short flight, but Nurse Hebbes answered : "Oh no ; she is not fit to walk upstairs !"

I went down to the visitor. She sat panting for breath. I knew her well. A tidy woman, not yet forty years of age. Nature had given her a clear skin and bright hair ; there was a grey ghastliness over her now. I saw with concern the change hardship had wrought in her. She was eight months pregnant, suffering from heart strain and general debility. She spoke to me painfully, in a slow hoarse voice. Her case had been coming back and back to me since December 1914. When war broke out she had six children, the eldest a girl of seventeen afflicted by hip disease, who would never be able to earn her living, the youngest a two-months-old baby. Her husband was a chief scaffolder, a steady, hard-working man, earning a regular wage of 42s. 6d. a week, never ill, never idle. He had been a soldier years before and had fought through the Boer War. He enlisted when the Great War broke out. From sleeping in tents on marshy ground, without proper protection in wet, cold weather, he had been stricken with rheumatoid arthritis in the arms and legs. His hands were so drawn that he could scarcely open them. He was discharged on December 16th, 1914. His pay and his wife's separation allowance ceased. He had come back to his old life, a broken man, racked with pain, scarcely able to hobble with the aid of a stick. The wife got £2 from the local S.S.F.A., but was told that the Association could do no more. The family had only the earnings of the eldest boy, a child of fourteen, to depend on. Nurse Hebbes brought their unhappy plight to my knowledge, and with Keir Hardie's help, I secured a temporary grant of 17s. 6d. a week. We protested, without success, that this was too small a pittance for the maintenance of eight people. The home was in fact steadily dismantled, everything possible being pawned and sold to keep the rent paid and the children from crying for food.

On April 5th, 1915, "the Lords and other Commissioners" of Chelsea Hospital were "pleased to grant the soldier a pension of eighteenpence a day for twelve months conditional, with arrears from December 17th, 1914. The S.S.F.A. grant of 17s. 6d. a week ceased ; the family must henceforth exist on a mere 10s. 6d. weekly. But the unfortunate people were nevertheless, for the time being, overjoyed ; because the accumulated arrears enabled them to satisfy their chronic hunger, and to get some necessities out of pawn.

Their future would be grim. Determined to avert the blow, if I could, I claimed 25s. a week for the man and 2s. 6d. each for his five dependent children on the strength of the then recent recommendations of the Select Committee appointed in response to widespread complaint to deal with the pensions scandal.

Chelsea Hospital replied that the Select Committee's recommendations, though men were being recruited on the promise of them, were not yet in force. In May 1915 the man succeeded in doing three weeks' light work ; but from pain and illness was compelled to desist.

The Committee's recommendations were at last embodied in a Royal Warrant. Again I appealed for increased pension, and on our doctor's



the children had a meal in the restaurant there. At once I had telephoned to the S.S.F.A. and persuaded them to make her an immediate grant, and then had written further to the S.S.F.A. and the War Office and pestered them till they made further grants. She reminded me of it with a catch in her voice. The grants were paid, but not regularly; and the income was a good deal less than she had before the War, though it cost much more to live. After a time the factories began to reopen. She got a little sewing machining, but trade was still slack, and she could not earn more than ros. a week. After three months the separation allowance began to be paid. She did not get all the arrears due to her, but she thought she had given me and the others at Old Ford trouble enough already; and as the authorities paid no attention to her own letters, she let the arrears go.

She and the children had food to eat now, but before the separation allowance came she began to have a little hacking cough. As the winter advanced it grew worse. She made light of it, but it remained. Then followed a severe attack of bronchitis and pleurisy. The doctor told her she had a tendency to consumption and should go to a sanatorium; but there was no one to leave with the children, and she let the months drift by, hoping that either the War would end, or something else would happen to make it easier for her to go. Then suddenly she was taken so ill that the doctor sent her away at once. Her eldest girl was fourteen now and able to stay at home.

She remained at the sanatorium from May to July 1916, and was brought home worse than she went. In the same month her husband was discharged from the Army with gastric ulcers. He had already been in and out of hospital for five months. His Army pay and her separation allowance immediately stopped. Pension was refused him. The family was again destitute. Neighbours, hard pressed to find food for their own children, generously spared a meal or a shilling for these unfortunate ones when they could; but the children often cried for hunger. "We had to manage the best way we could," said the mother—stern words, so often heard in working-class homes.

After five weeks the husband was well enough to go to work. If he felt ill he hid it from his wife. The eldest girl had now learnt to take the care of the home and children upon her shoulders. The acuteness of the crisis passed, but the mother, a young woman of thirty-six, had been broken in the struggle. The doctor ordered brandy every hour for her; but his order was never executed unless he left 2s. on the table for it. He ordered milk, and she got that from the Mothers' Arms; for though she would not "trouble" us again, we had heard, too tardily, of her need. A lady from the Insurance Commissioners had recently called to ask if she were working; but though the seal of death was on the woman's face, no benefit was paid. She was working still!

Fearing that she had grown to be a burden on her children, she had asked to be taken to the infirmary, but the doctor had said she was too ill to be moved. She was doing what she could to ease the burden she would not be, with those frail hands.

The eldest girl and the youngest sat huddled together for warmth, both listening to their mother's tale. For them, as for her, it was part of the history of the Great War. She saw her life shipwrecked in the whirlpool of the immense tragedy wherein millions had lost their all; and asked, with wistful pity for those who would live on after her, when this cruel War would end.



Victoria Park was thronged next day as it had not been since the War. The mass of the crowd was friendly, but there were some noisy opponents; and approving comments were punctuated by hostile retorts. A man in the front kept gnashing great yellow teeth at me as I spoke, declaring that he would like to bite off a German's nose. Several police reporters were present and many Pressmen. One of the latter, a new hand perhaps, commended us with enthusiasm. "They are women of ability! Remarkable! What courage!" As I stepped from the platform he rushed forward to take my hand, profuse in congratulations. . . .

In the pause whilst a speaker descended from our little rostrum, a mere step with a high front of lightly-erected match-boarding, and another took her place, the opponents made a rush at us. It was successfully resisted. Melvina Walker silenced the crowd with her poignant tales of woe. . . . A man with a Union Jack made a sudden dash for the platform. An organised gang behind him, thrusting forward unitedly in a compact wedge. The rostrum was overturned and smashed to pieces. A park-keeper, Mrs. Drake, and Mrs. Cressall were thrown to the ground. . . .

They were helped to their feet. The disturbance was over. People were standing about discussing the brief affray.

The disturbers had achieved their object. The report could now go out that the Peace meeting was broken up.

The vast crowd remained. Mrs. Boyce, not to be baulked from getting her say, began to speak from the ground a dozen yards away. The people were attentive, but the park-keepers, fearing another disturbance, ordered her to desist. People clamoured about me for another speech. Our women hoisted me. I spoke but briefly—I would not long burden my kind upholders. Clara Cole, Mrs. Bouvier, and others followed. I left them speaking and went home alone, tired out, and a little pensive, that after all these years, we should have our platform broken in Victoria Park.

Mrs. Payne was on the doorstep waiting for me; two anxious women beside her. They had come over unexpectedly from West Ham and found their sister in sore straits. Her husband was discharged from the War, unable to work, and without pension, and she had given birth to twins fourteen days before. A new-comer to the street, she knew no one here to help her. They had found her in this plight and having done what they could—not much, for they had brought with them only a few pence—they must hasten away now and begged that I would aid. It was a sad sequel to a broken up Peace meeting!

I went immediately to the address they had given. The mother lay pallid as parchment, almost unconscious; the babies, blue and flaccid, wellnigh moribund. Their father, with bowed head, ill and dejected, sat by a fireless grate; five little children crouched in a corner.

I ran back to Old Ford and got a bucket of coal and some sticks to make a fire and called to Mrs. Payne to send her Jim for Nurse Hebbes and a doctor, and to parcel up food to keep the family for some days.

Later the man told me his story. He was a Royal Marine, a "Gallipoli hero," as the men sent out on the hapless Dardanelles expedition were termed then. Having contracted enteritis in Egypt, after leaving the

Dardanelles, he had been discharged with a certificate of good character and £1 gratuity in February. In April he was granted a pension of 11s. 3d. a week. Many months later he was notified, first by his approved society, then by the Panel Committee for the County of London, that he was entitled to medical benefit. There had evidently been a muddle, for the panel committee had written that they were "endeavouring to establish the claim to medical benefit of some of the cases of Dr. Paynton," his panel doctor. Nevertheless, up to the day when I found the family in this plight, neither sickness nor unemployment benefit had been received. Weak and suffering as he was, sheer necessity drove him to seek employment. In July he was engaged for shell boring at the National Projectile Factory, Hackney Marshes. A Government pledge had now been given that pensions should be based on the disability of the soldier, not on the wages he might happen to be earning at the time. Nevertheless his pension was cut off altogether as soon as the authorities became aware that he was employed. Soon after his pension had been stopped, his work at the factory was changed. He was set to feed six machines with 95-lb. shells. Strain as he might, he could not maintain this exertion. He explained that the work was too hard for him, and was told that he must go. He received his discharge certificate on November 4th. He was now too ill to work at all, and he and his family wholly without income, save what they could raise by pawning their furniture and clothing. His wife was in poor health and expecting shortly to be confined. On December 14th she gave birth to twins, after a difficult labour, in which the midwife was obliged to summon medical aid. The maternity benefit fortunately came through before Christmas; but little of it remained when doctor and midwife had been paid. The midwife ceased her visits at the end of the prescribed ten days, though the mother was still too ill to do anything for herself. The midwife had induced the organisation for providing invalid dinners, recently started in our district, to send in a daily meal for the mother; but after she had partaken of it four days, this boon was discontinued "for the holidays"—of those who superintended the service! Alas, the needs of the human body are not conveniently suspended at such times!

The poor "hero," one of those for whom Lloyd George averred he would make Britain a "land worth fighting for," applied to the Local War Pensions Committee in his desperate situation. In response to his appeal the S.S.F.A. official had called. (That lady official again! Would she ever grow less callous, I wondered.) She had seen the poor mother lying there with her puny babies, the fireless grate, the hungry children; she asked only to see the rent book. When the sick woman murmured that there was no use in looking at it, for no rent was owing, the lady enquired the address of the landlord and went away.

For four days the mother had been too ill to wash the babies, the father too ill to attempt the unaccustomed task. Her sisters had found them thus, with no food or fuel in the penniless home. They washed the babes and put the room in order. With the few pence in their pockets they procured such nourishment as they could to sustain their sister.