

WOMEN.

A BILL which the Women's Christian Temperance Union and other reform societies have introduced before the Chicago Board of Aldermen would tempt one to invent a phrase, "Set women to tyrannise over other women." The absurdity of asking the Aldermen to frame a city ordinance forbidding women to wear Bloomers or "leggings" (we wonder if the harmless gaiter is thus waged war on) in the streets, and to be fined if their skirts are more than two inches from the ground, ought to be self-evident. But these good ladies have the dust of prejudice and reform in their eyes, and their mental vision is decidedly blurred.

Who is to decide as to the length of the women's skirts? Will the police as a body be armed with tape-measures? And will they be authorised to measure the skirts of feminines whose flowing draperies are 'suspected' of not flowing quite so long as is deemed correct by the city fathers? Or will police-matrons be appointed to "take the measure"—in a truly literal sense—of the advanced new young woman who desires that her skirts shall escape the unspeakable mud and uncleanly horrors of the Chicago streets?

A grandfatherly and considerate Alderman, who was present when the Bill came up for the Board's consideration, suggested that a compromise might be effected. "Let us not," he said, "in a free land, interfere too much with the liberty of the subject. Let us frame an ordinance which makes no reference to the length of the outer skirt; but let us, in the interests of morality, exact that the underskirt—the petticoat—shall be only two inches from the ground."

This raises a new difficulty about the tape measures, and would certainly necessitate the appointment of police-matrons. Another point, which did not occur to the masculine mind is this, that in fixing by legal statute the length of the petticoat, they were absolutely fixing the length of the overskirt, for what woman would care to have her petticoats longer than her dress-skirt?

A curious picture presents itself to one's mind: the picture of processions of sprightly Chicago maidens being led off to the police-stations to have the length of their garments decided with mathematical precision, "to be or not to be" brought before stern justices according to the result of a minute measurement. And what an infinity of difficulties and disputes would arise as to quarter- and half-inches!

The Chicago policemen will have their responsibilities somewhat heaped up. It will no longer be necessary only that they shall reach a certain stature and have respectable characters, but their capacity for judging inches will have to be taken into account. And would the state of the weather be held in mitigation of the offence? And how about the crossings—so common in Chicago—where the foot slips easily into a quagmire of mud collected during months of street neglect? On such occasions would it or would it not be a breach of the city laws to raise one's best skirt just a little above regulation height?

Seriously speaking, would it not be better for these "reforming" ladies to try and efface some of the moral

plague spots of their wicked city before attempting to introduce such a pitiable little meddling bye-law as this? To anyone who has been three hours in Chicago, and seen the gruesome, loathsome impurity of the city, the lengthening of the skirts and the forbidding of gaiters can appear only a ludicrous straining of a gnat while such mammoth mastodons of evil are constantly being swallowed.

Much interest is being aroused in the book Mr. Stead is announced to bring out next month, entitled "A Maid of Modern Babylon." The authoress, Miss Morris, deals with the trials and difficulties encountered by the efforts of a girl of eighteen to earn a livelihood in London. Three years of such a life, with all its dangers, its temptations, and its "up and downs," are given, and the whole represents so many pages from the writer's own life. "It is a horrible book," she said recently, "and on reading it over, I cannot help wishing I had never written it. All the insults and degradations I have suffered as a working girl come back upon me, and I would like to tear it up. But the story ought to be told. I have been a governess, a seamstress, a canvasser. I have been in prison, and I have been without bread, and such things ought to be known."

One of the chief difficulties which Miss Morris will deal with is the hardship entailed on honest, respectable girls with no homes in the "between-whiles" of work. They leave a situation; it may be several weeks before they obtain further employment; their savings may be slender, or they may have none. What are they to do? With no credit, no finances, no friends, downfall is a very easy matter, and temptation is rarely, if ever, absent.

To combat this hardship, and to afford a remedy, Miss Morris proposes to establish "Human Pawn Homes"—the title is almost tragic—in which girls out of work may place themselves "in pawn." A certain, definite weekly sum will be charged, because these "Pawn Homes" are to be on the lines of working women's boarding houses, and the girl will be pledged on her honour to repay the sum which is due to the Home which has given her shelter and food. The idea is a splendid one, and no one will question that every help should be given to girls and women in the present transition stage, when the female labour market is so unsettled, and the rate of wages so very low. But it is rather a question if the name "Human Pawn Home" will not prove so revolting that the majority of working women will shrink from identifying themselves with it.

There is an Institution in Boston somewhat on the pawnshop lines, but the invidious name has not been given. There is a good deal in a name, and the "Pawn Home" is a rather ghastly one. Miss Morris has lectured at Hastings and at Eastbourne on the subject, and her views were favourably received. Baring-Gould has worked out the idea of a child in pawn in his novel "Court Royal," and has described how the human pledge was redeemed by the payment of the original shilling, which was the sum given when the baby was handed to the Jew pawnbroker. A great deal has been written of late on municipal pawnshops. It is interesting to speculate as to whether the civic or municipal pawnbrokers will ever deal with the human flotsam and jetsam of our great cities.

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