OUTSIDE THE GATES.

WOMEN.

Miss Mona Wilson, who has been appointed a Commissioner under the National Insurance Bill, is a daughter of Canon Wilson, formerly Archdeacon of Manchester. She has devoted her career to the investigation of the problems of industrial life, especially among women. She is an appointed member, under the Trade Board Act, of the chainmaking and paper box-making trade boards, and has served as a member of the Home Office Departmental Committee of Industrial Accidents. She is to have a salary of £1,000 a year, the same as the male Commissioners.

No one could have been present at the meeting of Mistress and Maid at the Albert Hall last week and failed to realise the bright intelligence and energy of the audience. The instantaneous manner in which the girls grasped "points" and their repartee was refreshing. There is no doubt the modern domestic servant is "all there" when occasion demands, and her innate antipathy to being "driven" in the direction she does not desire to go, and the manner in which she kicked over the traces was a fine lesson to party politicians with their genius for invertebrate inactivity, under like circumstances.

The outcome of this colossal protest has been the formation of the Tax Resisters' Defence Association with Ellen, Countess of Desart as its head, and we are informed at the office, 61, South Molton Street, W., that pledges are being signed in hundreds daily to resist the payment of this tax. All living-in women workers are catered for on the same terms, but nurses and domestic servants stand to lose most by compulsory insurance, as they fully realise that 7s. 6d. for a few weeks is a very poor substitute for the benefits custom accords them, either in private houses or well-managed hospitals. Board, lodging, the most highly skilled medical and nursing care, fire, lights, washing, &c., are now available, and what is 7s. 6d. a week towards the weekly expenses of these benefits? Living-in women workers realise that they stand to lose more than they are likely to gain if they draw their insurance money, and thousands appear determined to resist a law they have had no part in making. Indeed, never was a Bill so unpopular permitted to become law.

From a suffragette lately released from Holloway prison, we learn that it is a very different place from what it was when political women prisoners were first incarcerated there—both for "politicals" and criminals. She says that more than one poor woman whispered to her: "Thank God for what you ladies are doing for us." A splendid way of killing two birds with one stone. Suffering for conscience' sake, and doing a good bit of social reform at the same time.

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

HURDCOTT.*

Part shepherd, part mystic, Cornac, "watchnig his sheep on the hump of down between Avonsbury and Folly Bottom, was thinking of those other shepherds, who nearly eighteen hundred years before him, had watched theirs in the winter fields of Bethlehem. For down in the cup of the plain the first bells of Christmas were ringing, and through the frozen air their sound came plainly, there being no wind to scatter it." Hearing a strange cry and searching for the cause, he discovers a tiny child laid in a heap of straw. This was Hurdcott, who grew up as the shepherd's child.

The events of this story took place in the beginning of the nineteenth century, and the precise flavour of those days is imparted with admirable skill and with a restraint that relieves it of tedium. Hurdcott in his early manhood is described as handsome, with a manner that was wholly free from awkwardness.

"Consuelo Dauntsey was more struck by himself than his features.

"'It is good of you,' she said, 'to be at the trouble of leading me to my uncle's.'

"She thanked him just as she would have thanked a gentleman of her own rank for such a service, and he answered, just as a gentleman might, but with a plainer courtesy than some in higher station might have been able to show. . . . He was conscious that she was beautiful rather than aware of her beauty, and he did not perceive that her beauty had anything to do with him."

The circumstances that led up to this their first meeting, and indeed the whole of this remarkable history, should be read by all who value true art.

Jocha, who was in the "usual trouble," as she said hardily and boldly, had from the first repelled Consuelo, who wished "she could be useful to those poorer, less happy than herself."

"'I'll tell 'ee miss,' she said, fingering the strings of her bundle, 'the name of the man.' . . .

"Consuelo's pale cheek flushed.

"'The fellow as pays for the child—he gives *me* nothing—is the lad they call Hurdcott.'

"Before Jocha had time to drop her malignant, shallow eyes Consuelo spoke.

"'It is a lie,' she said, with a cold scorn and anger that she made no effort to mitigate."

It was a lie, but Hurdcott had to pay for it with his life. Jocha's body was found murdered behind the old mill, and the fact that Hurdcott, had for a year born the stigma of her accusation was damning evidence against him.

When lying under sentence of death, Consuelo is forbidden to visit him, but a hasty marriage

* By John Ayscough. (Chatto & Windus, London.)

previous page next page