

OUTSIDE THE GATES.

WAR AND WOMEN.

Miss Maud Pauncefoot points out in the *Times* how gallantly the Dominions are rallying to the support of the Empire in the crisis, and adds:—"The greatest need of the Dominions is for woman and her work. In our midst we have a million and a quarter surplus women before a great war. This surplus is at the root of many problems of vice, destitution, and sweated labour. How to deal with their unemployment is under consideration by the Queen's Advisory Committee. The two alternatives are: Shall it be doles merely or some constructive scheme? Now, if ever, is a constructive policy needed. By giving the Dominions what they lack most we build up a strong British race. Continue the scheme of doles, as all cannot be employed, we sink deeper into the mire of wasted humanity."

Women have always had the reputation of being individually adaptable, but to metamorphose in a few days, huge associations, and fit them for work other than that for which they were originally formed, demands the greatest powers of organisation and cool-headedness. The present crisis provides a test of capacity which, up till now, women generally have never had to face. The women's organisations have responded well, and a visit to the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies gives some idea of what at least one great organisation is accomplishing.

The National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies appears to have been the first in the field of the women's political organisations. Even before the war broke out its "mobilisation" had begun, the National Union having realised that armies of untrained women desiring to help in this supreme crisis, but totally unaware of how to get to work, and rushing hither and thither in the efforts to obtain it, would hinder instead of helping the systematic organisation of relief. The Union, therefore, took prompt steps to prevent this. On Monday, August 3rd, it circularised all its 600 Societies and branches throughout the country, laying before them certain proposals for action in the event of Great Britain being involved. On Tuesday, 4th, it offered the services of its central offices, 14, Great Smith Street, to the Local Government Board for receiving, registering and classifying offers of help. On Thursday, it circularised all its branches urging them to offer their services to the Local Relief Committees. On Friday, it approached the German Embassy to offer help for German women and girls stranded in London. This latter work has now been handed over to the International Woman Suffrage Alliance, whose offices at 7, Adam Street, Adelphi, W.C., are to be used for this purpose. That was the work of the first five days after war was declared.

The chief work undertaken at Headquarters has been the registering and drafting off of voluntary workers into suitable channels, and the main principles on which the Union have worked have been the giving to voluntary helpers the work for which they really have the greatest aptitude, the maintenance, as far as possible, of paid employment and the discouragement of volunteer work likely to replace the paid worker. The shop for registering workers was opened at 50, Parliament Street, Whitehall, on Tuesday, 11th. The London Society, at 58, Victoria Street, opened its offices for the same purpose. Thousands of applications have already been made for both voluntary and paid work, and on the other hand, the demand for workers has been considerable, and in almost all instances the National Union has been able to supply the workers asked for. Moreover, Suffragists are noting with satisfaction the extremely small proportion of incompetent women who apply to do voluntary work. Nearly all the volunteers are trained in some direction, and are therefore fit for immediate service somewhere.

Volunteer helpers are still badly needed for social work, especially on Care Committees and the work of relief generally. Those who fill in the "service forms" are asked to state their capacities for teaching, nursing, midwifery, office work, organising, needlework, gardening, care of children, &c.; even signalling might be useful. Many of the competent organisers of the Union have been busily employed in investigating the extent to which girls are being discharged from work at the present time. Information is also being extensively collected as to the need for workers in fields and harvests and enquiries are being made as to the outlets for employment in other directions.

The National Union is sending various workers to help with the fruit picking in Surrey. They will be paid the ordinary rates, and the fruit when picked will be distributed amongst the hospitals in the neighbourhood.

The National Union has suspended all political activity for the time being, and this work of organising relief for those who will be the sufferers from the economic and industrial dislocation caused by the war calls for fresh funds. An earnest appeal is therefore made by the Hon. Treasurer, who asks that all contributions should be sent to her to the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, 14, Great Smith Street, Westminster, S.W.

Sandgate is the first town to enrol women as special constables.

Mrs. Burke and Miss Mumford have been duly sworn, and take their turn with the male members of the special force in patrolling the town and guarding telegraph wires and the water supply.

previous page

next page