

after lunch, I found an enthusiastic V.A.D. watching a large saucepan full of eggs. The men had eggs for their tea almost every afternoon, but as tea time was not until 4 p.m., and it was then only 1.30, I inquired the reason of the early cookery. 'I have never cooked eggs before' she said, 'but I know they take three minutes each, and there are thirty-six in this saucepan.'

Those who carefully study this book will obtain a very sound idea on what is involved in entering the nursing profession. We offer Miss Cochrane our congratulations on this achievement, and also on a publisher whose expert judgment and knowledge of his craft has produced a book easy to read and pleasant to handle, at a price so moderate that it is well within the means of every probationer to purchase.

M. B.

BOOK OF THE MONTH.

"OLIVER UNTWISTED."*

This little volume, by Miss M. A. Payne, deserves consideration because it embodies an ideal, the hitching of a wagon to a star.

The cleverness of its title explains its *raison d'être*, which is the study of the psychology of the child and in particular of the poor law child.

It has been said with some truth that a bad home is better than a good institution, and those who hold that opinion will be strengthened in it after reading "Oliver Untwisted." If we could endorse unconditionally this description of a Guardians' Home, we should heartily exclaim: "Thank God for the passing of the Poor Law," but we are much surprised to learn that so late as 1928, and in one of the suburbs of a great town, so unsatisfactory a children's colony could have existed or a Clerk who considered the "Standing Orders, 30 years old, for the management of the Home an important document."

Our experience of another Clerk to the Guardians is widely different—but then, of course, the whole question really boils down to the personality of Guardians and Officials. Miss X. vowed when she was young that she would have twenty children. This never materialised, but she sought to satisfy her maternal ambition by seeking appointment as Matron to A to Z Homes, containing five hundred and sixty children. These homes were twelve in number and were built round two big yards. Incredible as it seems, in a system whose proud boast is, at least, that they are spotless, the ceilings were black with dirt and age. That a child could receive a "clout of the ear" from the nurse in the presence of the new Matron Superintendent, or that a single-handed House Mother had forty to fifty-six children to attend to, does not speak well for the official inspection by H.M. Inspectors, though we are told that Matron and the Ministry of Health were the gods that instilled "terror into the Staff."

Apparently, the floors and stairs were better treated than the ceilings, as they are described as "spotless," which puts us at once on familiar ground. The play-room doors were invariably locked "because they had been cleaned."

The stairs were almost sacred to some House Mothers, the children even having to remove their slippers before going up to bed. In one House the children had to talk in whispers because the House Mother had "nerves."

That children brought up under unnatural conditions did not do well in after life was attributed to heredity and original sin. The idea that there could be anything wrong with the upbringing of the children never entered the heads of the Committees. Miss X. was taken her first round of the Homes by her Assistant. Everyone we met got

"blown up" for something. She comments: "I assure you I was too overcome by the atmosphere to do anything but gasp!"

Nevertheless, this Sister Assistant was anything but soulless. She had only become contaminated by this attitude of superiors to subordinates which riddles so many Institutions. She had this terrible madness for speckless floors and polish. The routine for the children was given by Bella to the new Matron by her request.

"We gets up when we hears the bugle and we makes our beds. We goes to breakfast when we hears the bugle, and then when the bugle goes we goes to school. We comes home to dinner when we hears the bugle and in the evening we sits and mends our clothes, and when the bugle goes we goes to bed."

This soul-destroying life Miss X. sets herself out to supersede. If, as we believe to be true, the author of this book vouches for the incidents related in it as happening in the past few years, and for all we know are happening at this moment, one would say good-bye to the "Poor Law" with a sense of failure and of terror of faithless stewardship.

But there is a brighter picture to be drawn, and we have visions of happy toddlers playing on a sunny verandah, of confiding little paws held out to much-maligned guardians for the "lollies" that are certain to be produced. We can see the Girls' House Mother proudly exhibiting new summer frocks and hats, "every one different," except little sister's, with a flower for the elder girls as a concession to the approaching flapper stage. We know of the monthly party, which includes all who have achieved a birthday in that period. Of happy exodus to the seaside for the yearly fortnight. And yet the idea underlying this little volume is all too true. The *Vision* set forth by Miss X. is sadly lacking. No alteration in the *Authority* controlling these Homes will effect that.

It is the *personality* of the person in charge that counts every time, and Miss X.'s are apparently scarce.

Some comments on the religious aspect have an unpleasantly familiar note. How often do we hear the little culprit described as a "wicked child" unfit for the favour of its Heavenly Father. Analogous to the exclusion of the sick child from the Children's Ward if the *Vision* were there. We hope that this book will fall into the hands of the new Authorities and that they will *begin* with the Epilogue. There must be many another Miss X. among the 100,000 "surplus" women. Here is their chance for a satisfying life.

Dear Miss X., wherever you are, follow the *Vision*. It is within the range of many and the material side makes it possible for most.

One word of warning:

"The art of being kind is *not* all this poor world needs." It will *not* prevail alone with Selection Committees. It must be allied, maybe camouflaged, with sound common-sense and practical experience, so that authorities may rest in the assurance that its beloved floors *will* be shining, that the accounts *will* balance, that little ears and heads *will* be above reproach, and then Miss X. will be able without interference to get on with the one supreme work of those to whom the care of children is confided. The seeking *first* of the Kingdom of God and His Righteousness. She has His Own assurance that then *all* other things shall be added.

H. H.

A WORD FOR THE MONTH

"I hold every man a debtor to his profession; from the which as men of course do seek to receive countenance and profit, so ought they of duty to endeavour themselves by way of amends to be a help and ornament thereunto."—FRANCIS BACON (1561-1626).

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