

Congress of Nurses, Baroness Sophie Mannerheim, his sister-in-law. This great soldier, in his supreme leadership in the cause of freedom and the civilised world, successfully defended his country in the struggle for self-government. Yet again in 1939, in the Second World War there came the Russian attack upon Finland, once again General Mannerheim took command of his country's forces.

Gustav General Mannerheim will go down in the annals of Finnish history—acclaimed the greatest of her heroes who served his country, as a brilliant soldier, as President, a gallant statesman, and at one time as Regent—all this monumental work he rendered with supreme courage.

A. S. B.

Blindness and Employment.

In the House of Commons on June 1st, 1948, the Minister of Labour and National Service announced that he had appointed a "Working Party" to investigate the facilities existing for the employment of blind persons in industry and in public and other services and to make recommendations for their development.

The Report of this Working Party has just been issued by the Ministry.*

General Summary.

The Report recalls the Elizabethan Poor Law of 1601 which linked the blind with the lame and impotent and others who were "poor and unable to work." It traces the stages by which this idea of incapacity in the blind has been discarded. The fundamental fact, it seems, is that blindness is a handicap which can be, and in innumerable instances is, overcome. "Employment is both a part of the process and its reward. The value of employment to the blind is that it enables them to enter fully, despite their handicap, into the life of the community—to live active, happy, cultured, and contributive lives of their own." On the other hand, the employer's position has to be considered, and the Report deals with this fully and frankly. "We consider that, when he engages a blind worker, an employer has the right to expect that it will be worth his while to do so. We do not wish to minimise the sympathy which is and ought to be extended to the blind worker; but equally we do not wish to over-emphasise it.

"An employer has to make his business pay, and no plan for placing blind people in industrial employment can hope to succeed on any other basis than that the blind worker can and should do a full week's work in return for a full week's wage."

That is, in fact, the keynote of the Report. It makes no appeal for pity for the blind. It recognises blindness as a handicap, but as a handicap which can be, and in numberless cases is, overcome. It contains recommendations for improvements in the existing methods of helping the blind to help themselves; e.g., by the expansion of facilities for their training in the wide range of vocations for which blind persons may be suitable; by intensive specialised services for their placing in occupations open to them; and by the breaking down of any prejudices that may still remain against their employment in "open" industry, as distinct from employment in "sheltered" special workshops for the blind.

Frequent references are made in the Report to the work done by Local Authorities and voluntary organisations for the welfare of the blind. This work is so widespread and takes so many forms that it cannot be summarised here. Mention may, however, be made of the manifold activities of the National Institute for the Blind on behalf of the

civilian blind, and of St. Dunstan's on behalf of the war-blinded.

Among other things, the National Institute for the Blind runs the only existing residential centres established specifically to provide rehabilitation for the civilian blind (they are at Torquay), and plays an important part in the provision of training and placing facilities in different parts of the country.

For the rehabilitation, training, placing, and after-care of men and women blinded as a result of war service, complete responsibility has been assumed by St. Dunstan's and the Scottish National Institution for the War-Blinded. A special chapter is devoted to this work, in the course of which it is recorded that some 2,900 men and women were blinded in the First World War (many of whom are now past working age) and 790 in the Second World War. Of the latter number, 700 have so far come under the care of St. Dunstan's, and of these, 80 per cent. are in remunerative employment, 11 per cent. are undergoing training, and the remaining 9 per cent. are incapable of or do not desire employment, though all have had courses of training or rehabilitation, or both, and many of them are occupied in some way.

Some Facts and Figures.

Here a few facts and figures extracted from the Report:—

There are about 87,000 registered blind persons in Great Britain, of whom 36,400 are within the normal working age range of 16 to 65. Of these, about 11,000 are at present employed or training for employment. Among the remaining 25,000 of "working age" it is estimated that about 3,000 would be capable of taking up employment if they were given the opportunity—that is to say, if the existing facilities for their "rehabilitation," occupational training, and placing by specialist services, were expanded and adapted to meet their needs, though in some cases much might depend on the availability of work in their home areas.

In this connexion, the Report makes reference to the "Disablement Resettlement Officers" in the Employment Exchanges of the Ministry of Labour and National Service and suggests that there should be the fullest co-operation between them and the Local Authorities and specialist placing officers in seeking suitable employment or training for the blind.

Shorthand Typists.—On April 1st, 1950, Government departments employed 63 blind shorthand-typists and 16 typists or dictaphone operators (the Ministry of Labour and National Service employed 22 of these). It is suggested that Local Authorities might employ more blind persons in this capacity, and that their capabilities in this field might also be more widely appreciated by industrial, commercial, and professional undertakings.

Telephonists.—On April 1st, 1950, Government Departments employed 125 blind telephonists; of these, 112 were employed by the Ministry of Labour and National Service; many of its local offices have small switchboards suited to blind operators.

Piano Tuning.—It is estimated that there are between 600 and 700 blind piano tuners in Great Britain, the majority of whom are home workers.

Factories.—The employment of blind men and women in open industry is largely a development of the last ten years. They are able to do a far wider variety of work than was at one time thought possible. There are still some misunderstandings to be dispelled; e.g., supposed liability to accidents, difficulty of finding the way round the works; possibility of slowness in adaptation to changed methods in team work, and so on. But there is abundant evidence—and some of it is cited in the Report—that blind persons can satisfactorily undertake a very wide range of operations in the factory.

* Obtainable from H.M. Stationery Office or through any bookseller. Price 1s. 9d. net; post free 1s. 11d.

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