

THE WOMEN'S INDUSTRIAL HOME

HACKNEY

This Home is one of much the same class as that which I have just described. It has accommodation for forty-eight girls, of whom over 1,000 have passed through the Institution, where they are generally kept for a period of six months. Most of the young women in the Home when I visited it had been thieves. One, who was twenty-seven years of age, had stolen ever since she was twelve, and the lady in charge told me that when she came to them everything she had on her, and almost all the articles in her trunk were the property of former mistresses.

In answer to my questions, Commissioner Cox informed me that the result of their work in this Home was so satisfactory that they scarcely liked to announce it. They computed, however, that taken on a three years' test--for the subsequent career of each inmate is followed for that period--90 per cent of the cases prove to be permanent moral cures. This, when the previous history of these young women is considered, may, I think, be accounted a great triumph. No money contribution is asked or expected in this particular Home. Indeed, it would not be forthcoming from the class of girls who are sent or come here to be reformed, many of whom, on entering, are

destitute of underclothing and other necessaries, The needlework which they do, however, is sold, and helps to pay for the upkeep of the place.

I asked what was done if any of them refused to work. The answer was that this very rarely happened, as the women-Officers shared in their labours, and the girls could not for shame's sake sit idle while their Officers worked. I visited the room where this sewing was in progress, and observed that Commissioner Cox, who conducted me, was received with hearty, and to all appearance, spontaneous clapping of hands, which seemed to indicate that these poor young women are happy and contented. The hours of labour kept in the Home are those laid down in the Factory Acts.

While looking at the work produced by the inmates, I asked Commissioner Cox if she had anything to say as to the charges of sweating which are sometimes brought against the Army, and of underselling in the markets. Her answer was:--

'We do not compete in the markets at all, as we do not make sufficient articles, and never work for the trade or supply wholesale; we sell the garments we make one by one by means of our pedlars. It is necessary that we should do this in order to support our girls. Either we must manufacture and sell the work, or they must starve.'

Here we have the whole charge of sweating by the Army in a nutshell,

and the answer to it.

In this Home a system has been devised for providing each girl with an outfit when she leaves. It is managed by means of a kind of deferred pay, which is increased if she keeps up to the standard of work required. Thus, gradually, she earns her outfit, and leaves the place with a box of good clothes. The first thing provided is a pair of boots, then a suitable box, and lastly, the materials which they make into clothes.

This house, like all the others, I found to be extremely well arranged, with properly-ventilated dormitories, and well suited to its purposes.