

## Thirteen States Have Laws Pensioning Mothers

The Washington (D. C.) Herald prints the following interesting review of the mother's pension laws in the United States: While some women are declaring that it is their inalienable right to have their children cared for where and how they chose in order that they may go outside the home and earn money, society is deciding in many states to pay some women, who otherwise would have to go out and earn money, to stay at home and take care of their children themselves.

The women teachers of New York city and some other portions of the community are much stirred up because one of their number has been refused a brief leave of absence with the expectation that as soon as her child should be a few months old she would return to her duties in the schoolroom and turn the care of the infant over to some one else. Recently at a public meeting a number of prominent women protested vigorously against this decision, and urged that it is the right of any married woman, children or no children, to continue her work in any profession or other gainful occupation. If she has children, they said, she could have some skilled person take care of them in her own home, or send them out during the day to one of those places that women skilled in mother-work are establishing for that purpose.

And while all this was going on the legislature was considering a bill to pay women whose profession is scrubbing, or day working, or something of that sort, to stay home and take care of their children themselves. The scrub-woman would send her babies to an ordinary "institution," while the professional woman would send hers to a sort of glorified "institution," but still a substitute, a makeshift, for the home and a hired foster-mother. And it is exactly the home and the mother that various legislatures are saying must be saved for the child, even if the state must pay that mother to enable her to retain her natural place by its side.

The situation has its absurdities, but it is not the first time in the course of civilization that individual desires have run counter to the social conscience and the convictions of the social body. Will the feminists, in the end, recede from their standpoint of extreme individualism and consent to resume the world-old duties of motherhood? Or will a growing and widening social conviction as to the economic value of that motherhood finally lead the state to pay all mothers for the time and effort they spend in the rearing of their children?

Whatever may be the outcome at present among the manifold social movements of the time, there is none that is growing more rapidly than this of providing assistance from the public purse for the mother with children dependent upon her earnings who, otherwise, would have to break up her home and send her little ones to public institutions. Thirteen state legislatures have passed these so-called "widows' pension" laws, the greater part of them within the last year. A number of cities have provided similar aid by municipal ordinances. New York state barely missed joining the movement within the last few weeks. The bill introduced by Assemblyman Levy passed the lower house triumphantly, but failed in the senate during the hurried last days of the session. It, or a similar bill, will be brought up again before the next legislature, when it will probably become a law. It is not unlikely, considering the rapid growth of the movement, that within two or three more years nearly every state in the union will have decided that widowed and deserted mothers must have the helping hand of the state, if necessary, to keep their homes intact. It has even been suggested that there should be a federal law to this effect, but, as yet, no one seems to have taken that proposition seriously.

Illinois is credited with the initiation in this country of this method of extending the helping hand. In that state the provision, which is a section of the juvenile law, was passed just two years ago, and went into operation July 1, 1911. California and Colorado soon followed her example. Since the first of this year ten more states—Washington, Utah, South Dakota, Idaho, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska, Ohio, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania—have passed similar laws. In addition, Missouri has authorized Kansas City to adopt the system. Wisconsin, without definite enactment, has been conducting a similar enterprise in a limited way, and in three other states city ordinances or the powers bestowed upon state boards have estab-

lished therein the principal of widow's pensions. Similar laws are now being considered by seven other states.

The Illinois law provides that if the parent or parents of any dependent or neglected child are so poor as to be unable to care for it properly, but are otherwise suitable guardians, and it is for the welfare of the child to remain in its home, the court may order the county board to pay to its parent such a sum of money, fixed by the court, as may be necessary to provide properly for its care.

A special investigator, C. C. Carstens, sent by the Russell Sage foundation to study the workings of this law in Chicago, made an unfavorable report. He said that in half the cases he studied relatives, churches, and employers had greatly lessened their interest in the families who were receiving these pensions; that in eighty-nine cases the probation officers were found incompetent; that one-tenth of the families so helped were sodrunken, immoral, and diseased that the environment was not fit for children to grow up in; and that one-third of the homes were such that the help given was of doubtful value to the state.

To his criticisms William Hard, who for nearly two years has been conducting a department of the Delineator on the subject of legislation concerned with women and children, and has constantly favored the mothers' pension idea, has replied that the principle should not be condemned because of local flaws in its application. He finds, by Mr. Carsten's own figures, that such a large amount of the money provided went into homes where it was properly expended and helped to keep together homes that were worth preserving, that the law was as successful and served as well the public benefit as do the majority of laws.

The Ohio law was passed a month ago, but will not go into operation for a full year. It was prepared with more care and with a fuller understanding of the significance of what was being done than was the case with the Illinois statute. Of this latter state's action captious observers have said that the legislators enacted the mothers' pension law without realizing what they were doing. It may be taken for granted, however, that those social workers who had instigated the measure knew what they were about. In Ohio a commission appointed by former Governor Harmon to draft a children's law code gave ample study to the question of mothers' pensions, and made that provision a part of the code, which passed the legislature and received the sanction of Governor Cox practically unchanged.

By this law assistance may be given to mothers whose husbands are dead, permanently disabled, prisoners, or have deserted their families for three years, if their children are not old enough to work and they can not support their families without working away from home, and they are themselves proper persons to have the care of children, and have been legal residents of any county in the state for two years. The making of the allowance is put into the hands of the juvenile court, and the allowance is limited to \$15 a month for one child and \$7 additional for each child under legal working age. The bill provides for an annual tax levy of one-tenth of a mill, which, it is expected, will create a mother's pension fund of \$700,000 each year.

Pennsylvania followed Ohio within a fortnight and passed a bill appropriating \$200,000 from the state treasury for mothers' pensions, to be apportioned among the counties according to their population. Any county desiring to use its appropriation may petition the governor, whose duty it will then be to appoint a committee of five women to administer the law for that county. They are empowered to investigate the case of abandoned or widowed mothers and recommend payments of not exceeding \$12 a month for one child, \$20 for two children, \$25 for three, and \$5 per month for each additional child. The New Jersey law makes a slightly less generous appropriation per child, while the law of Michigan, also passed less than a month ago, provides that needy mothers having children dependent upon them can draw from the public funds not to exceed \$3 per week for each child, upon the order of the probate court.

All this legislation shows by its wording that it is based upon the conviction that the best person to care for a child, except in exceptional cases, is its own mother, and that this mother care for the state's future citizens and the con-

sequent home environment are such valuable assets that it is worth the state's while to spend effort and money to conserve them.

Thus the Ohio law in specifying the conditions under which the allowance may be made says that the child for whose benefit it is offered must be living with its mother, that without the allowance she would be required to work regularly away from home and children, that with it she will be able to remain at home with her children. Her own character and the sort of home environment she will provide are also made the subject of investigation by accredited officers. But, granted that these are found even passable, it is the evident conviction of the lawmakers that humanizing, saving, ennobling influence is exerted upon the child's character by the holding together of the home, of their own little possessions, and by enabling the child to feel that around him, and being exerted constantly for his interest, are the mother interest, the mother care, the mother love.

It is a long recognized fact among social workers that home care has to be very poor indeed not to produce better results than does the upbringing of children in institutions. It has been found in practice also that the plan of boarding out children in other families is not nearly so efficient in fostering some of the best elements of character as the plan of allowing them to grow up in their own homes, provided that these are of equal or nearly equal grade.

Therefore, the state is beginning to deem it expedient to step in and conserve that asset of home influence and mother-care, just because it produces better citizens than does any other method of child rearing. Of course, the movement is a step square in the face of that modern tendency to remove children more and more from the hands of the mother and put them under specially trained supervision of one sort or another in order that the mother may be left free to follow her own avocations, or, if she choose, her vocation.

The unanimity and heartiness of the mothers' pension movement and the rapidity of its progress seem to indicate that society is recoiling from the idea of allowing mother and children to be so much separated, to feel that it is unnatural and therefore of sinister omen. Perhaps before long society will begin to ask itself why, if it is so desirable, as much for the general benefit, for mothers who are poor and uncultivated to rear their own children, would it not be still more for the public benefit for well-to-do mothers of education and capacity to devote their time and talents to that same work.

Many of the advocates of the mothers' pension system object to the term "pension." They feel that it implies, especially for Americans, the idea of payment for past services, a rigid rule of payment, regardless of needs or conditions, and a lack of responsibility on the part of the person receiving it for its beneficent use. They object still more to such terms as "relief" and "charity" and "aid," because these connote the dole of alms rather than payment for services rendered. They object vigorously to having the mother caring for her children by means of state aid referred to as a "dependent." They want her to feel, and every one else to feel concerning her, that she is giving value received and they do not want her self-respect to be in the least wounded. Says William Hard in a recent article in the Survey. "To call such a person a 'dependent' is to me as monstrous as to call the librarian of congress a 'dependent.' He is paid for his work; she for hers. And she should be paid by those for whom she does it—all the citizens of the state, not the subscribers to the charities."

It has been suggested by another writer that "children's pensions" would be a better title for this new form of state aid than any other yet proposed, and many of the proponents of the principle agree with him. They urge that the money is intended to benefit primarily, not the widow, but the children, and that to bring out his idea more plainly would help people to see that such an appropriation is intended to further the general good, just as is an appropriation for bridges or good roads.

The Levy bill in this state recognized this feeling against giving to such pensions the aspect of charity, for it established a "department of home assistance," which was to be applicable, however, not to the whole state, but to New York city only.

Prof. Hobhouse, of London university, has stated in very clear terms the position of those who believe in mothers' pensions, but object to any characterization of them of any feeling about them that carries the taint of charity. In his book of "Liberalism" he says, and his words