

OLD AGE PENSIONS.

Mr. H. W. Manly's Brilliant Address.

The following paragraphs from the paper read by Mr. H. W. Manly, as President, before the Institute of Actuaries, in London, contain his views of the suggestions or schemes of relief for the aged poor. Mr. Manly's address has attracted the serious attention of public men in Great Britain, and he is being awarded unstinted praise for its "practical wisdom," and "forcible phraseology." Mr. Manly said:—

What, then, have been the remedies proposed? There are two prominent suggestions of a diametrically opposite character. On the one hand, Canon Blackley proposes that every man and woman on attaining the age of eighteen shall be made to subscribe a minimum sum of £10 within three years, which sum, with its accumulations, is expected to provide sick pay up to age seventy and a pension afterwards. Setting aside the question of the adequacy of the proposed payments, or even the possibility of every person being able to pay, I am satisfied that the people of this country would never submit to compulsion of that kind. Such a scheme must be ruled out as quite impossible of realisation. On the other hand, there is Mr. Charles Booth's proposal, that every individual, on attaining a certain age, say sixty-five, shall, by right, have a fixed pension from the State, irrespective of his health, antecedents, character, or private means. If we are prepared to make light of the enormous cost of such a scheme, and the evil consequences it would have on the self-reliant, virile character of the masses, followed by an early deterioration of the race; it must still be rejected because there is no finality in it. Let the people once get a pension from the State for nothing, and with no condition but that they shall live to sixty-five, an agitation would be immediately started to lower the age to sixty. And, if sixty, why not fifty-five or fifty, and, in fact, why should we not all have at once 10s. a week from the State, by Act of Parliament. (Laughter.) That, at least, would put an end to all pauperism. It is heroic, but it is not statesmanship.

Between these two extremes, innumerable proposals have been suggested of subsidising, by State-aided pensions, a class who have belonged to some society, or anyone who has managed by saving to provide himself with an income, however small. All, or most of these schemes have been exhaustively examined by the Old Age Pensions Committee, and their report is a clear, judicial verdict against them. They say: "From what has been said above, it follows that any pension scheme coming within the terms of our reference would be limited to a comparatively small section of the community, and we are thus face to face with a very serious difficulty. We can hardly, for the benefit of so limited a section of the community, recommend the Government to establish a pension system which must be extremely difficult and costly to administer, which excludes the really destitute, and

those who, owing to broken health or misfortune, or want of employment, or a lower rate of wage-earning, can make no contribution, and which would be open to innumerable fraudulent claims, difficult, and often impossible, to detect." I am convinced that everyone with an unbiassed mind, after reading that report, and the evidence, will endorse the conclusion.

Are we then to say that the object aimed at—the amelioration of the condition of the aged poor—is impossible of attainment? Certainly not. We actuaries are used to looking at a problem from different points of view, and if we cannot arrive at a satisfactory solution one way, we try another, and occasionally turn it upside down to see how it looks that way. I believe that all these worthy enthusiastic Social reformers have been following the wrong road. The ideal Socialist, who dreams of an ideal, but impossible, state of society has formulated an ideal theory that everybody is to cease work at a certain age, and thereafter be supported by the State, as an inheritance of his birth; and this is the trail which everyone has unconsciously been following.

Most of you will remember the story of the early attempts to reach the summit of the Matterhorn. For a long time the attempt was made on that side which appeared to be the easiest and direct way; but at last one man, Mr. Whymper, studied the formation of the mountain, and discovered that it was a stratified rock, with the strata tilted downwards towards the side they had all been trying to scale, with the result that they had all been endeavouring to get up overhanging steps. If that were so, then the other side, which looked impossible, ought to prove easy, for it should present just a series of steps like a staircase; and, behold, when it was tried the monarch was conquered.

So, I believe, it will prove with regard to this giant of a problem. Try as much as you will to get up the apparently direct and easy way, and you will ever be met with overhanging and insuperable difficulties. Anyhow we might at least study the formation of the rock, and see if there is not another way to conquer it.

LIME AND ACETYLENE.—Dr. Stern, of Berlin, says that lime quite free from phosphorus is scarcely to be got in such quantities as might be required for acetylene making; at any rate, at any practicable cost; and that, unless this be obtained, acetylene must always be purified, for if it contains any phosphorus it attacks gas pipes, meter, fittings and burners, and launches phosphoric acid into the air of the room illuminated. He says that Ullman's method of purifying acetylene by means of chromic acid is a complete success, and that while phosphoretted hydrogen and sulphuretted hydrogen are oxidized to phosphoric and sulphuric acid, and the ammonia is absorbed, with the effect that the liquid remains clear, it is not the case, as has been alleged, that the chromic acid attacks the acetylene itself, forming carbonic oxide. He regards this method of purification as having, for the first time, brought acetylene into the category of illuminants admissible from a hygienic point of view.