

## PROVINCE OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

# MOTHERS' PENSIONS.

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In the *Christian Commonwealth*, a well-known English publication, of July 4th last year was given a very interesting account of an interview with Judge Henry Neil, author of the American scheme of mothers' pensions. This scheme has been very rightly termed "the greatest asset of civilization." Child-poverty is the only sort of poverty that matters; the adult who has been poor as a child will never get the chill of poverty out of his bones, but he will die and make room for a better-nourished generation. There are, no doubt, property-owners in America who tell Judge Henry Neil that it is confiscation to tax one man's property to pay for the education of another man's children. We have scoundrels of this sort in England too; some day they will perhaps have the opportunity of saying it to a higher Judge than Judge Henry Neil: "He will send them to the place He reserves for those who have learned to say 'Our Father' but have not learned to say 'Our Children.' The one without the other cannot be; also it is unbusinesslike folly." Thus wrote Mr. George Bernard Shaw in a letter to Judge Henry Neil. There are few men in England at the present time to whom a letter of this kind would have quite the meaning it has for Judge Neil, for he has been the chief instrument in bringing about a great reform in the methods of child-welfare in thirty out of the forty-eight States of America. He has converted about three-fourths of the population of the United States to his enlightened ideas as to what is the duty of society to the children committed to its care. He has taught the United States, at any rate, to say "Our Children."

This problem of the children is not a problem of one country but of all the civilized world; it is the problem of taking care of the children who have been, by any of the million chances of life, bereft of one or other of their natural guardians, or who are at the risk of privation and misery because their parents are unable to provide properly for them. The English remedy for this great evil has been to provide "homes" or institutions where the children could be cared for; under the Poor Law mothers and children were taken into the workhouse, where the children were brought up from earliest infancy under distressing conditions. Poverty has been regarded as a crime, and Poor Law officials have rarely been found to possess too much patience, sympathy, or tenderness in dealing with their charges.

The general treatment accorded these unfortunate children has very much improved in England since the time of Dickens, when *Bumble* and *Oliver Twist* only too faithfully represented every-day conditions. Scarcely a child now remains under the old order of things; separate buildings have been provided, or the children, singly or in couples, are boarded out amongst respectable cottage folk, whose homes are constantly and unexpectedly visited. The children under this system attend the elementary school in the neighbourhood like ordinary children, and bear no mark of any kind to show that they are brought up by the State. Private enterprise and