

MUSINGS and MEDITATIONS

By Dog Toby

CHILDREN OF THE BUSH.

IT was a lonely place, far away from all trace of civilisation, nothing but scrub and fi-tree and desolate barren hills as far as the eye could reach. A rude, square wooden house, with a lean-to at the back, seemed to have been dumped down in the midst of the small clearing. The front door, which was never used, opened on to a tiny patch of ground called by courtesy the flower garden. A few stunted chrysanthemums tied to sticks eked out a miserable existence therein. Fowls poked about the empty tins that lay littered round the back door. Two grimy ragged children were playing in the dirt outside, and from within there came every now and then the shrill voice of a woman telling them to hold their noise. The children stared when they saw me coming, and called out to their mother, and a thin, worn, hard-featured woman, with a sugar-bag tied round her to serve as an apron, came and looked out to see who it was. She had been scrubbing—that eternal toil of the wife in the back blocks. A bucket of dirty water stood in the middle of the room, and a scrubbing brush lay in the midst of a small puddle of brown soapuds. She wiped her hands on the sugar-bag, and asked me in. She brought forward the only chair that wasn't broken, and apologised for going on with her work, saying that she wouldn't be long. The two youngsters stood at the door and gaped till they were hunted outside again. Now and then a fowl would come in only to be chased away with a well-directed blow from the scrubbing brush. When she had finished, and re-arranged the scanty furniture, she took down two cups from the dresser, emptied the teapot into a kerosene tin outside the back door, and proceeded to make tea. She had a tired hopeless look—a look such as one sees only too often in the bush, and she kept putting her hand to her side, as if in pain. She explained that she sometimes suffered from spasms. The husband and the boys came in later from their work. They had a wash in a tin basin that stood on an empty candle box near the tank, and sat down to their tea without further ceremony. After tea came the washing-up of innumerable dirty dishes. The woman never seemed to have finished her work. The children had been put to bed, and the boys had ridden off for their nightly diversion of gossiping at the village store. The tired mother was trying to put a crying baby to sleep in another room, and the husband and I were left alone. For some time we smoked in silence, then he said, "I suppose this strikes you as a bit rough, mister; not much used to these outlandish places, I daresay." I mumbled some polite disclaimer, but hazarded the opinion that he must find it dull at times. "No," he replied, "I can't say I find it dull. You see we have our work, and then there are a good few neighbours about, and now and then they get up a dance for the young people. But I sometimes think it is a bit hard on the women. You chaps from the city don't understand us country folk." Feeling sure he had a story to tell, I passed him my tobacco pouch, as he knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and asked him if he cared for a drop of whiskey out of my flask. Having duly mixed his grog and filled his pipe, he told me the following story of his early life: "My people kept a sort of mixed country store, with a butcher's shop and bakery attached. We were comfortably off, and had good prospects. I

worked on the place mostly, but now and then I would take a job bush-felling or harvesting for a bit of a change. Tessa (that's my missus) and I had grown up together as children. We had gone to the same little country school, and were playfellows long before we were in our teens. Her people were well-to-do settlers, and kept open house to all the countryside. As she grew up she came to be known as the reigning beauty of the place, and I suddenly realised that my childhood's playmate was a child no longer. She had thick dark hair and dark lustrous eyes, with a fair, delicate skin and the fresh colour of perfect health. I began to feel a little shy and awkward in her presence, but her manner towards me was still that of the comrade of old days. But it slowly seemed to dawn on her that our boy and girl friendship was developing into something more, at any rate on my side, and she would always take her brother or sister with her if I proposed a ride together. You may think it a bit strange, seeing us as we are now, but I often think of her as she was then, so daintily fresh in her print or muslin, with her slim girlish figure and smiling roguish face. I remember the day when I made up my mind to ask her to be my wife. We had gone out with her two brothers to see some kauri logs that were being split in the bush for fencing posts. She knew, I fancy, what was in my mind, but, womanlike, she seemed to put off giving me an opportunity of speaking. At last I had my chance, while her brothers had gone off to look at another tree they were to cut down on the morrow, and there, sitting by a huge log, with the chips and sawdust of the splitters' camp all around us, I gained her shy consent. Poor little woman, we have had our ups and downs since then. I lost heavily on some contracts I took a few years after our marriage, and I practically had to start life again. We have had a struggle, but she bore up bravely through it all, and has been a true wife and a true mother. You city chaps don't know what a woman's love is, or how our country-bred lasses will brave all for the sake of their husbands and little ones. Yes, the life does come hard on the womenfolk. In the morning we were up early, the work on the place commenced as soon as it was light. The woman looked tired, as usual, but as I gazed on that poor lined face, the thin toll-worn hands, the dragged dress, I seemed to see behind it the dainty maid of other days. Her husband said good-bye to her with an unaccustomed tenderness; he, too, was, perhaps, thinking of his childhood's playmate and that fateful hour by the kauri logs. "Ah, little woman," he said, "you little thought we should ever be living like this. I wonder if you had known all whether you would still have said 'Yes'?" A new light seemed to come into her eyes, as she answered, almost shyly, with her head on his shoulder: "You silly boy; of course, I would."

THE GUINEA POEM.

A CHEQUE FOR £1 1/ has been sent to the writer of this verse, Miss A.E., Vincent-st., Remuera, Auckland.
I used to fear white linings to wear,
Before great SAPON'S reign;
If now I will them, 'tis no toil
To wash them out again.
WIN A GUINEA! Prize Form published every Saturday. Best original four SHORT-
ly advt. verse about "SAPON" wins each week. "SAPON" wrapper must be enclosed.
Address, "SAPON" (Ostmen) Washing
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PROTECTION OF INFANT LIFE.

MEETING AT GOVERNMENT HOUSE.

ATTENDED BY THE PREMIER.

SOME STRONG SPEECHES.

A meeting was held at Government House on Saturday last to form a branch of the Infant Life Protection Society in Auckland. The meeting was convened by her Excellency Lady Plunket, and was largely attended. The main object of the society is to provide specially-trained nurses, to give demonstrations in the proper feeding and treatment of infants, and to visit mothers when asked to do so.

His Excellency the Governor presided. On the dais at the end of the great hall, in which the meeting was held, sat their Excellencies, Lord and Lady Plunket, the Premier, Sir Joseph Ward, Mrs. Bedford, Marsack, Robertson and Purdy, and Nurse Beswick. There was a very large attendance of representatives of the medical profession, clerics, leading citizens, mothers, nurses, and others.

His Excellency, in opening the meeting, said he had no doubt that those present understood the question from what they had seen in the Press better than he could explain it. Miss Beswick had come from Dunedin to specially explain the objects of the Society for the Protection of Infant Life. His Excellency also read a telegram from the Hon. Geo. Fowlds, and a letter from Bishop Lenihan, expressing their interest and appreciation of the movement.

"IN THE CRADLE LIES THE FUTURE."

His Excellency read a letter received from the Mayor, in which Mr. Myers, after apologising for his absence on account of his recent accident, said: "In the cradle lies the future, and there can be no doubt of the immense public importance of the objects the society has in view. The question of a milk supply is one to which I have devoted a good deal of attention, and it is at present being considered by the City Council. By licensing vendors of milk we have already been able to effect considerable improvements, and I hope we shall be able to accomplish something more later on. In any case, there is room for private and public action in this matter, and I shall be only too glad to do anything in my power to help any such society as that which you have been good enough to inaugurate here. I enclose cheque for £5 5s as a small contribution from the Mayor and Mrs. Arthur Myers towards the funds."

THE SOCIETY'S OBJECTS.

Her Excellency Lady Plunket then described the objects of the society as follows:—

To encourage the bringing up of children by nature's methods; to disseminate accurate information on matters affecting the health of women and children by means of letters and pamphlets; to provide for the issue of humanised milk to the public; to provide and employ nurses, ready at any time to give advice and instruction to mothers in the home or elsewhere; to promote legislative reform in matters affecting the health of women and children; to co-operate with other organisations working for the same end. The society hoped to engage a trained nurse, said her Excellency, and to send her to Dunedin to Dr. Truby King's home for infants, where she would augment her knowledge of infant feeding by the various excellent means there provided, and would be thoroughly trained in the treating of cow's milk to resemble as closely as possible infant's natural food. On the nurse's return to Auckland she would give lectures and give demonstrations on health and babies; she would visit any mother who invited her to do so; and would continue to give her advice and help as often as the case required. The humanised milk which was so strongly advocated by Dr. Truby King and others for infants would be carefully prepared, and the right quantity for each meal (for the 24 hours) would be correctly measured in separate bottles and sent out to the mothers. All the latter would then have to do would be to warm up the bottles before giving it to the baby. Messrs. Ambury and English were ready to send out this humanised milk. They had trained a nurse in Dunedin to prepare it and had said they would pay her wages entirely. The milk prepared and delivered would cost 4d. a pint, or if fetched

3d. The Committee hoped by means of tickets to enable those mothers who could not afford to pay so much to get the milk at a reduced price. Humanised milk could, of course, be prepared by private individuals in their homes, and the nurse would give demonstrations on its preparation so that those who were unable to get it from the dairy could make it themselves. These demonstrations were not only for those who had children under their care. Much useful work could be done by individuals who would learn and spread the knowledge, teaching others in those districts where there were no opportunities of learning.

Her Excellency then remarked that two objections to the scheme had been urged upon her. The first was that a mother's instinct ought to tell her how to feed her baby, and that, therefore, it would be only in exceptional cases that the society's nurse would be required. A mother's instinct would go a long way if she brought up her baby by the laws of nature, but comparatively few were ready to do this, and it was absurd to say that a mother's instinct would be sufficient concerning artificial feeding, which was not a natural process. Common-sense might help her, but she needed a certain amount of knowledge as well, and besides this the society hoped to help many who had very little common-sense. The other objection which was put forward was that mothers were "touchy" of being offered advice. With this she quite agreed. "We are 'touchy,' rightly or wrongly," said her Excellency. "But I wish to make it perfectly clear that this society does not interfere with mothers or force advice upon them. The nurse visits only where she is welcomed. It is clear from our experience in Dunedin and Christchurch that mothers eagerly avail themselves of the opportunity offered them, and I think we may be perfectly confident that Auckland mothers will be equally ready to ask for the nurse's advice." Lady Plunket, continuing, said that half an hour after Miss Beswick's arrival in Auckland she received a telephone message from a mother at Otahuhu, asking her to visit her baby and show her how to prepare humanised milk. (Applause.) Miss Beswick had most kindly come all the way from Dunedin—taking the time out of her hard-earned holiday—to help to give this branch a good start. She was prepared to give public demonstrations in different parts of the city, and would also be ready to visit any mother in her own home who might ask her to. Letters addressed to her at Government House would find her for the next week.

Her Excellency, in conclusion, said that whilst she had spoken of starting with one nurse, she was confident there was immediate work for two at least. And if the Auckland public gave as generous support to this society as they had done to so many other worthy objects, the committee would gladly begin their crusade for the little ones by sending down two nurses to receive the necessary training. She would be most grateful to any who would become members by subscribing 5s. a year, and who would use their influence to get others to follow their excellent example. (Applause.)

THE SUBSCRIPTION LIST.

The following donations and subscriptions were received:—Donations, their Excellencies the Governor and Lady Plunket, £20; Mr. A. M. Myers, £5 5s.; Mr. H. M. Clark, £5 5s.; Dr. R. Stopford, £2 2s.; Mrs. E. Pierce, £1 1s.; Mrs. J. Trevelthick, 10s. 6d.; Anonymous donors, £8 12s.—£42 15s. 6d. Members' subscriptions: Mrs. W. Coleman, £2 2s.; Dr. A. C. Purchas, £1 1s.; Dr. N. McK. Grant, £1 1s.; Mrs. S. Robertson, £1; Mrs. C. Colman, 10s.; Mrs. J. Clark, 10s.; Mrs. H. Butler, 10s. Subscribers of 5s.: Mrs. R. Guene, Mrs. Nelson, Mrs. R. H. Hunt, Miss A. Chappell, Mrs. E. Fitch, Canon MacMurray, Mrs. R. H. McDonald, Mrs. H. W. Wilson, Nurse L. Pownall, Mrs. E. A. Cain, Mrs. M. J. Sheppard, Miss M. Margettas, Mrs. M. C. Cook, Mrs. J. A. Runciman, Miss J. Boulton, Miss D. Peiper—£10 14s. Grand total, £53 9s. 6d.

A NATION'S STRENGTH.

Dr. Bedford said he was quite satisfied that it was full time that some such work as that proposed should be undertaken. However carefully, and however skilfully, infants' food might be prepared, it could not possibly have the same good effect on the health of the child as the food intended by nature. It might be that by means of artificial feeding there would be something achieved in the