

EXTRACT FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH MR JOHN OXENHAM.

("Christian Commonwealth," Sept. 27, 1916.)

What Mr Oxenham is most interested in at present is not literature, but morality. He talked much to me, and earnestly, about the crusade he has helped to start, called "White Knights," the aim of which is to counteract, by purely moral and religious influences, the terrible evil of sexual vice among the fighting men. "White Knights" is the title given to a tiny booklet that Mr Oxenham has printed, containing verses of his writing, and a moving plea written by a Roman Catholic lady who lives on Dartmoor. To the world she is known as Beatrice Chase, and has written several very excellent Dartmoor books under that name, but to her friends she is known as the bearer of a great historic name, which traces right back in a direct line to the reign of Henry VIII. The meaning of the crusade in which she is joined with Mr Oxenham may be shown in two quotations, one from the verses he has written, "Mother's Cry and the Boy's Reply." The other from her appeal. This is from the Mother's Cry:—

"Heart of my heart, I would sooner
you dead
Than home to me maimed of soul;
Ravaged and marred by that terrible
thing
That is death in life and life's worst
sting:
Oh, my boy!—come back to me
whole."

And the boy's reply is a cry of penitence and remorse, which begins:

"God! if I could but undo it all!
I shall never be clean again.
What a price to pay for a moment's
sway!
A clean, sound life given up to decay,
For a thrill that was half a pain!"

Mr Oxenham told me, in speaking of the impulse that led him to begin this crusade, that the evil is far worse than it is possible to relate at this time. "Some of the facts I could describe," he said, "you would not be allowed to print. You can only say that the reality transcends our worst fears. Conditions have prevailed, and still prevail, in the Army

beyond anything you can imagine, and these horrible diseases have eaten like cancer into the lives of our men out there as well as at home. "White Knights" is our weapon against it. What we want is to distribute as widely as possible among our soldiers and sailors this little booklet. We believe that if they read it they will be moved to respond to the simple appeal we make to them. All that we invite them to do is to send in their names to Miss Chase as a pledge and promise to "keep white." These names are given to men and women in the crusade who have promised to pray every day for the men who bear them, to write to them, to help them to be loyal to their pledge. There is a very beautiful idea behind Miss Chase's share of the work. On Dartmoor, close to her cottage, she has a little chapel built of white granite, and there every day she lays the names of the men in a book bound in olive wood, and prays for them before the altar. "I know well of what nobility men are capable." Miss Chase writes in her appeal: "Among other things, I know that no true man ever breaks his word to a woman. So I want every man who reads this little booklet to send me his name and the words 'I promise, with the help of God, to be true to honour.' No man must make the promise or send in his name who does not mean to keep white. God must not be mocked. But if a man has fallen countless times he may yet rise and conquer the evil. It is never too late."

"There are 140 noble women praying for these men now, and all denominations are uniting in this enterprise. We have kept the whole movement free from any kind of organisation, and the machinery is as simple and flexible as we can make it. We want only a treasurer to be responsible for the money subscribed for the printing of the booklet. A friend gave me £100 a few days ago for the purpose, on condition that he remained anonymous, and Mr A. K. Yapp, of the Y.M.C.A., will help to distribute it, and there are other agencies doing the same thing. The matter has been submitted to the United Army Board, which includes all the Free Churches, and their co-operation has been heartily promised. I have letters here which show that individual helpers have begun to distri-

bute the appeal, and there are other letters which show that the appeal is already bearing abundant fruit. But as conditions are now, many of us who know the facts fear that they will be much worse when the war is over. I have high medical authority for that opinion. Nothing that we can do to stem the evil should be left untried. Legislation of some kind will probably have to be made, and some of us think that a regulation ought at once to be made to prevent women of a certain class from approaching within four miles of the camps or military areas. I know that this proposal will not be universally approved, but the matter is vital, and in default of better proposals, some such regulation as this will ultimately be necessary. For our part, however, we feel that the best thing to do is to make a direct, personal appeal to the men themselves, both in the Army and Navy, and this is the meaning of 'White Knights.' Methven and Co. are publishing the booklet at 2s per 100. Any one can get them there, or through their booksellers. And any one circulating them among the men will be doing good work, not only for his generation, but for the next three or four. For this is, more than any, that sin of the fathers that is visited on the children. I hope you will urge every reader of your paper to bear a hand in a matter of such moment to us all."

ORGANISING FUND.

TREASURER'S REPORT.

The following amounts have been received for the Organising Fund since the last report:—

Auckland, £4; Blenheim, £3; Bluff, 10s; Devonport, 15s; Hamilton, £1 4s; Hastings, £1; Hikurangi, 11s; Invercargill (additional), £4 8s 6d; Matakana, £1; Ngāio, 14s; Normanby, £2 18s; Palmerston North, £10; Richmond, 16s; Tinwald, 10s; Westport, £1 4s; Tauranga, £1. Total, £33 10s 6d.

Expenditure for the same period, £8.

NELLIE BENDELY,

N.Z. Treasurer Organising Fund.
Auckland, 5th February, 1917.

The "White Ribbon" will be posted to any address on receipt of 2s 6d, payable to Mrs Peryman, Port Chalmers.