

Sisterhood and Co-operation.

BY GRACE E. DODGE.

It is often said that one-half of the world does not know how dependent it is on the other half, nor how much each learns from the other. Life is so constituted that co-operation is necessary to keep life. Each part of the body is dependent upon the other, and in the same way each part of the world's great life is dependent upon the others. Womanhood, as well as manhood, illustrates this. Positions, opportunities, obligations differ, but all are interlaced, and without desire or knowledge, the many need the many, the individual the individual. Religious sisterhoods in these days are being multiplied, but the greatest sisterhood of all,—womanhood—stands now as it has always stood, a unity. Few realize this, the young girls and women are divided, one looks down and patronizes the other, because she does not know all the other knows, or has not the same opportunities at home. Even in the same store or factory it is common to find one set looking askance at another group, because their work is not as profitable, or the brains required by the one are not needed by the other. Or else the girls who come in to buy, scarcely notice those behind the counter, and perhaps these look with envy and bitterness at the purchasers.

Again, at school or college, instinctively there is a sense of separation among the students from the other girls in the town or city, who have not their advantages for education. All this is natural. Acquaintanceship is the stepstone to friendship and that must come before sisterliness is developed. Women and girls must learn to know each other. Now there is too much of suspicion and misunderstanding. This must be overcome. What a girl or woman is must be the watchword, not what she wears or does. The busy worker in the store or mill often possesses qualities rarely given the so-called society girl or woman of leisure. They are trained in public schools, imbued with a spirit of personal liberty and independence. The wholesome righteousness of their minds, their grasp of honesty and truth, their hatred of hypocrisy and spirit of self-giving and sharing are full of grand lessons. With them it is natural, it is life to do. They do not talk about their charities, the money they give, the hours spent for others. With them there is no desire for thanks, no thought of patronage, no question: Is it appreciated? Simply, it is duty, we can do nothing else! There are, of course, among them the frivolous and gay girls, those who do not think ahead, but even they are capable of feats of heroism little dreamed of by more sheltered ones.

Outward appearances form a poor basis for judgment of character. This judging from the outside or from appearance has been one of the reasons why in the past there has been so little working with or co-operation in our movement for the betterment of girlhood. Ladies in parlors have talked about how they could help the girls, and the girls have misunderstood and not appreciated what was planned for them, because the loving personal touch had not been added. In what social or moral movement for girls could not those to be beneficiaries have a share in the work, perhaps not always in the executive headship, but surely in the deliberations and councils. With this sharing, there will come understanding! To illustrate: A woman of wealth who had had the pleasure of co-operating with her wage-earning sisters, was addressing a group of them employed in a certain factory. As she was speaking, one of those present whispered to her neighbor, "Oh, she is only doing this for effect; she likes to patronize, to show herself off by talking so." Later on, this same girl associated herself with a number of companies and two or three women of wealth for a common end, the same as urged that evening. She learned to know these two or three and to admire them. In true humility she came to her neighbor of the first night and said, "I understand Miss H. now; I believe in her and honor her. I take back all I said."

A beautiful society girl, afterward a married woman, learned to know and admire many factory and shop girls, and a true friendship opened between them. She has often been heard to say, "I never enjoy myself more, or gain more and never appreciate friends, as I do when among my—street friends." Her manner and bearing with all

women and girls has changed. Sisterhood, in its broad meaning, is being realized by both these women, separated not more widely by distance than by surroundings. Each has come to know those in each other's surroundings, and with the knowledge has come admiration, and the admiration has quickly ripened into sisterliness for all women.

To take this thought into other channels. Church work now means so much more than preaching and meetings. All sorts of practical lines of interest are taken up, and womanhood especially has a place. Bring in here co-operation; do not let the few who have always been workers monopolize the joys of service and counsel, but the others who may be younger or poorer in this world's goods. Throw responsibility on them; be patient with mistakes; train by letting them do. In Sabbath schools let the scholars co-operate. Among the wise men of the Temple, the boy Jesus heard and asked—shared in the deliberations.

Education to-day means so much more than the past revealed to us. It means life in its fullness, body, mind, soul developed, so that they do not only know, but can use and observe. No memorization for the sake of repeating and following, but the gaining, so that the individual will know how to think and act in strong, independent fashion. Then not only in religious, but in secular school the teacher and scholar need co-operation, not one doing all, the other receiving, but both learning from and giving to the other. Froebel, in his message to the world, has given the unity of all as the great keynote.

The thought goes into the homes, and those which are the happiest show co-operation in management and life, children sharing with parents in the government and care of the home. Co-operation in its truest sense has self-sacrifice, meaning love, at the foundation. In many homes there are those who especially serve the family. Have they not rights? are they not sisters? Mistress and maids need our words as few others do. There must be here co-operation, sisterliness, sharing, if the domestic life is to run smoothly.

Sisterhood when understood will work out in still other channels. Money will receive greater consideration, not only for what it can secure, but how it is received. The thought was expressed by a young woman of wealth who questioned: "I am receiving 12 per cent. from an investment in a factory, where I know the laws of the State for the protection and care of my sisters who work there are not observed. What should I do, sell and let the evil go on? or retain and try, even with my small share of ownership, to right the wrong? I have never been to the stock-owners' meetings, but should I not go and speak for my sisters?" Others are asking: "How can I invest so as to be sure that no fellow sister is being unfairly treated where a dollar of my money is?" Let this thought grow and develop among women, and the results will solve some of the labor problems of to-day. There has been too much oppression and misunderstanding in the past.

Profit sharing in business is a phase of co-operation wise and necessary. Space forbid illustrations, but they could be given, especially where women have carried out the principle by successful business ventures. Shoppers and saleswomen come into touch, and sisterliness should here be shown—consideration, friendship. Often have been heard conversations between saleswomen of our large stores, when the buyers were being discussed. "So-and-so must be a Christian; she is sweet, considerate." "Oh! I love to wait on Mrs. —, she understands us and how we try." "Just think, Mrs. S. came in to order Saturday afternoon last September, and kept us all in, for Mr. H. said, that if anyone came at two, the store must be kept open. She is a Christian, too; how could she do it?"

Enough has surely been said, and in closing but one point may be emphasized. Some of the sweetest things of life are the smallest, and so co-operation and sisterliness must show the truest spirit in the little acts of thoughtfulness and love. These must be developed more and more, and yet the great not neglected.

Children of God—joint heirs with Christ! What higher honor can come to us! Shall we accept it? and if so, live it out in truth and earnestness, which means co-operation and sisterhood!

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