

Woman's Mission.

Under the above general title the Baroness Burdett Coutts has edited, with a preface and notes, a series of papers by eminent writers on the philanthropic work of women. The collection, which has been compiled in connection with the Chicago Exhibition, fills a sumptuous royal octavo, and is published by Sampson Low, Marston and Company. The reports are all drawn up by women, amongst whom are such well-known names as Mrs. Mollesworth (the author of many delightful tales for children), Mrs. Cashol Hoey, Miss Heba Strotton, Mrs. George Augustus Sala, Mrs. John T. Gilbert (Rosa Mulholland), Mrs. Charles (author of "The Schonborg Cotta Family"), and other literary ladies, with several ladies not literary, like the Princess Christian of Schleswig-Holstein. There are some thirty-four papers in all, many of them extremely well written, like Mrs. Mollesworth's "Food, Fun, and Fresh Air for the Little Ones." In her introductory poem, Mrs. Alexander recalls

"The living love that walked of yore
Where Hermon stood and Jordan leaped
Against his empyreal shores.

That thrilled a slumbering world and broke
The chain that fettered woman's life,
And to a nobler purpose woke
Her: toy of ease, or cause of strife.

The beauty and the strength life gave,
The love refined that beat the heart,
The courage that could watch life's grave
Regardless of the Roman guard.

And still she holds her precious gifts,
Hath smiles to cheer, and charin to win,
The heart that feels, the hand that lifts,
The foot that seeks the haunts of sin."

We are not sure of more than two Catholics among the contributors; but there are no traces of a disposition to ignore the efforts of Catholic philanthropy. For instance, when Mrs. Charles describes very prettily a certain institution, "Friedenheim or Home of Peace for the Dying," established six years ago near London, the Baroness Burdett Coutts takes care to add in a note that "there is also a hospice for the Dying in Dublin, of which a touching account is given by Mrs. Gilbert at the close of her paper 'on the Philanthropic Work of Women in Ireland.'" And in her own paper on Woman the Missionary of Industry, the Baroness gives great prominence to the efforts of an Irish Sister of Charity, Mrs. Morrogh Bernard, to procure industrial employment for the poor girls at Foxford. Miss Emily James, who is the Organizing Secretary of the National Union of Women Workers, at the outset of her paper on Associated Work, does not pretend that this is a modern invention, but alludes to what the Old Church had always been doing.

"Let us give precedence to the oldest organized bodies of women workers among us. Let us think for a moment of the memories clustering round the names of St. Theresa, of St. Catharine of Siena, of religious orders like that of St. Vincent de Paul. They are among us now, these Sisters of Mercy, Sisters of Charity, Nuns of the Good Shepherd, Faithful Companions of Jesus, and members of other religious orders—some three thousand in number in England and Scotland—who, with unwavering fidelity to their traditions, teach the poor, the orphan, the blind, and the deaf and dumb, and tend the sick, the convalescent, and the insane. If, as one shrewd observer calculates, but one in ten of the members of a sisterhood is competent to do more than carry out directions given by the organizing head, the remaining nine-tenths being unfit even for so much as that without incessant supervision and advice, one can but admire the more the results gained by continuity and rule. The educational standard of the Loretto Nuns is of the highest, the care of the aged poor by 'The Little Sisters' worthy of all praise; and the industrial and reformatory schools managed by other sisterhoods satisfy even our Government

inspectors, men who know nor fear nor favour. It is evident that each sisterhood must have a due proportion of women with force of character, mental power, and capacity for rule; that, in community life, the average woman can be trained to much usefulness; and that, far from offering a dreary uniformity of experience, it affords scope for great diversity of operations and for the development of individual gifts.

"But these sisterhoods are more or less exotic among us. The Church of England, instead of applying correction and direction, suppressed the religious orders at the Reformation. 'No fact in modern history is more deeply to be deplored,' says Mr. Lecky, who is not to be suspected of any ecclesiastical bias."

May God bless and reward all these good ladies, who try to help the poor and suffering of all classes, respecting the faith of any poor Catholics they encounter. But we shall be pardoned for taking a special interest in our own Catholic institutions. Let us, therefore, give some extracts from Miss Mulholland's paper, which, however, is not confined to Catholic work. Here is her account of the Blind Asylum at Merrion near Dublin.

"One hundred and sixty blind inmates, from mites of three years to grandmothers of eighty, receive the constant care of the sisters, and form a large and happy household. They are taught all that it is possible to teach the blind, and their tasks are so pleasantly mingled with recreation and amusement that, having spent some time among them, one is inclined to wonder if blindness be a great affliction under such circumstances. There is an air of refinement and a gentle mirth about them all, especially remarkable in the little children. These small creatures receive the visitor with a tender confidence which shows how they are accustomed to carresses, and come waving their little arms towards one, with that peculiar and piteous movement of a sightless child, asking with their soft and musical voices for permission to "see" the stranger. The music cultivated by the blind women and girls is delightful. Several harps and pianos stand at the end of a great hall, with the aid of which really fine musical entertainments are given. All who have voices sing over their knitting and sewing, others tell stories or recite poetry in the intervals of lively conversation. There remains on my memory one pathetic face, a blind face at the organ in the chapel. A girl was there, solitary, practising sacred music; she could not see us come in, and thought herself alone. It was a grey face, with no beauty but the expression, which told how the soul in darkness was thrilled and comforted by the solemn strains evoked by her hands. Another sight to remember was that of three blind women walking quickly, arm in arm, with their heads bent down—walking in the dark along a path in the light. Their peculiar swift movement of three as one, gave them the look of being driven along by a wind. These sightless scholars are taught reading and writing in the Braille characters, history, grammar, geography, type-writing, needlework; and music, vocal and of many instruments. Under the same roof the Sisters have an industrial school, a training school for girls from sixteen to eighteen years old, a hand-sewing industry where exquisite underclothing for ladies is made up; in all a family of four hundred souls. The Sisters of Charity also maintain, near Cork, a similar institution for the blind."

"We must conclude with the "touching account" to which the Baroness Burdett Coutts referred in a former quotation—the Hospice for the Dying at Harold's Cross, Dublin.

"It is not a hospital, for no one comes here expecting to be cured, nor is it a

home for incurables, as the patients do not look forward to spending years in the place. It is simply a 'hospice,' where those are received who have very soon to die, and who know not where to lay their weary heads. The low, red tiled passages and corridors of the old house have suggestions under their broad-beamed roof, quite unlike Mr. Henley's abode of suffering—

"Cold, naked, clean, half-workhouse and half-jail."

"Walking, through the pleasantly coloured wards and rooms, one cannot but think that any creature might desire the boon of dying here; but the Irish poor, whose spiritual yearnings are so intense, and who are in this place surrounded by religious consolations, find in it a foretaste to heaven. 'I had been,' says a visitor to the hospice, 'for some minutes kneeling in the beautiful mortuary chapel, where fresh flowers are always blooming, before I perceived two figures extended on marble rests on either side of the altar, as the effigies of that have lain so for centuries. Yet no sculpture ever possessed the beauty and sweetness of the figures I here saw: a man in the full maturity of youth, with dark hair and brown beard and handsome stately features; a little girl whose deep-fringed eyelids were closed over eyes that shone blue through the covering. Both had the same ineffable smile on their features, the look of having learned the secret of happiness, and of knowing themselves safe with God.' A charity which concerns itself with the dying appeals almost more than any other to the naked human heart—the heart of man stripped of all its conventional surroundings, and surprised behind all its barricades. Living poverty and suffering may be kept out of sight, but death comes to all, and no one can feel sure of what his circumstances and needs will be in his own supreme hour. Sympathy that springs from a sense of nature that makes the whole world kin is shown by the gifts that drop in to help this completely foundationless and in one sense, unprovided charity, which looks for its manna direct from the heavens. Bequests from those who, in the straits of their own soul's passage, remember this pathetic labour of the Sisters of Charity, help occasionally, like the back-reaching of friendly hands; and the poor themselves often contribute a mite to the work, feeling that should destitution overtake them in the end, they may yet hope to lie in the Nun's Chapel before the earth receives them; ere Nature begins to weave her veils of grass and dew over the weary heart's undisturbable slumber."

There is many a touching Charity Sermon lying latent (and not very latent) between the covers of this splendid volume. The benevolent lady to whom we owe it is dear to Ireland for her long-continued exertions on behalf of the poor fishermen of Cape Clear and Baltimore. She has surely derived more happiness from such investments of her inherited wealth than if she had wasted it on selfish amusements or the silly extravagance of fashion. Her present work will reveal to many of her sex that "woman's mission" embraces many better things than the eternal dressing, visiting, gossiping, tennis-playing, tea-drinking, and all the implacable swarm of "devoirs parasites qui pullulent autour de nos tasses de thé."—*M. R., in Irish Monthly.*

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Affection acts like the wind upon the trees, making them take deeper root; it is the mowing of the grass that it may shoot up thicker and greener; it is the shaking of the torch that it may burn brighter.—*Goethe.*

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