

## OUR CONTRIBUTORS.

### THE ANCIENT ORDER OF DEACONESSES.

REVIVAL AT KAISERSWERTH, BY FLIEDNER.

All who take an interest in Christian work and who are in the habit of reading religious publications, must be familiar with the names of Kaiserswerth and Pastor Fliedner. Kaiserswerth is a small town on the right bank of the Rhine, a little below Dusseldorf, of which Dr. Fliedner was the Protestant pastor for a large portion of the first half of the present century. The fame acquired by both arises from the fact that Pastor Fliedner was the first to revive the ancient order of Deaconesses, and that the town of Kaiserswerth contains the Mother House from which has gone forth into all parts of the world a multitude of Daughters who have consecrated their lives to fight against the effects of sin and misery and vice. A short account, therefore, of the origin and growth of this remarkable movement, and of the kindred works of benevolence which have grouped themselves around it may interest the readers of THE PRESBYTERIAN. Pastor Disselhoff, the present Director of the "Deaconess Institution of Rhenish Westphalia," which is the name by which it is known in Germany, in a recent report has entered very fully into particulars regarding the origin of this institution, and its fields of labour; and from this report I take, in an abbreviated form, the facts which this letter contains, though I have visited several of the branch Societies in Germany, and have seen their working there and elsewhere.

#### THE ORIGIN

of the Kaiserswerth Deaconess Institution, the name by which it is known in England, is due to the following simple incident: On the 17th of September, 1833, there came to Kaiserswerth from Werden, a discharged prisoner named Minna. Oppressed with a sense of loneliness and needing sympathy, she found her way to the manse of Theodore Fliedner. This good man had been known to take a great interest in discharged prisoners, and for the purpose of giving them opportunities of returning to a proper moral and social position, had founded in 1826, the Rhenish Westphalian Prisoners' Aid Society, the first known in Germany. Experience had taught him that although many persons in the position of Minna, really desired to live honestly, they had no means of doing so. For all such Pastor Fliedner felt the need of a refuge where they might acquire confidence, from seeing that there were some who sympathized with them, and thus be better prepared to undertake anew the duties of life. He was poor, but still he was willing to do what he could. In the manse garden stood a small summer-house, twelve feet square, a picture of which is now before me. This he fitted up as a refuge for Minna, and soon after a second applicant appeared who was also taken in. The summer-house now served as a sitting room by day, and at night a small garret was converted into a sleeping apartment. At bed time, a ladder was placed against the attic window, by which Minna and her companion mounted, when the ladder was removed until the next morning. This little harbour of refuge continued to be the first and only asylum and penitentiary in Germany, until Mr. Fliedner rented a neighbouring house, which he ultimately bought, and altered to suit his purpose.

This briefly is the history of the foundation and development of the first institution at Kaiserswerth and is a type of the origin of all the others. The growth of all of them was a gradual one, depending on the need that existed, and the means at the disposal of the worthy pastor. And to this modest beginning the Kaiserswerth Deaconess Institution owes its being. "The state of the sick poor had long weighed heavily on our hearts," says Fliedner. "How often have I seen them fading away like autumn leaves in their unhealthy rooms, lonely and ill cared for, physically and spiritually utterly neglected! How many towns, even populous ones, were without hospitals! And what hospitals they were, even where they did exist! I had seen many in my travels through Holland, Brabant, England and Scotland. I have not unfrequently found the gates adorned with marble when the nursing within was bad. The medical staff complained bitterly of the hiring attendants, of their carelessness by day and by night, of their drunkenness and other immoralities. And what can I say of the spiritual ministrations? Little thought was given to that. Hospital

chaplains were unknown in many cases, hospital chapels in still more. And should we deem our evangelical Christian women incapable or unwilling to undertake the task of Christian nursing? Had not numbers of them done wonders of self-sacrificing love in the military hospitals during the war of liberation of 1813-1815? If, again, the Church of Apostolic days made use of their powers for the relief of its suffering members and organized them into a recognized body under the title of Deaconesses, and if for many centuries the Church had continued to appoint such Deaconesses, why should we longer delay the revival of such an order of handmaids devoted of the service of their Lord? 'The disposition to active compassion for the sufferings of others,' says Luther, 'is stronger in women than in men.' Women who love godliness have often peculiar gifts of comforting others and alleviating their sufferings." These reflections left the good pastor no peace, and his wife shared all his anxiety and possessed even greater courage.

The necessity for such an institution being settled, the next question that troubled the worthy pair was

#### THE LOCALITY

in which it should be placed. Kaiserswerth was small, the majority of the population were Roman Catholics. There were no rich men who could contribute largely to the funds which would be required. In these circumstances, Fliedner visited his clerical brethren at Dusseldorf, Creffield, Barmen, etc., and urged them to begin such a work. But they all refused, saying that his experience gained by travel, his comparative leisure from the smallness of his flock, the quietness of Kaiserswerth, etc., all pointed him out as the proper person, and his town as a suitable place to begin and carry on such an institution, adding, that God would provide the means, as well as the sick people and the nurses. At last he felt compelled to undertake the task, and his wife heartily seconded him. Just when he had so decided, the largest and best house in the town came into the market. The price was 2,300 thalers, and though he had no money, he bought it on the 20th of April, 1836. On the 30th of May, the statutes of a Deaconess Society for Rhenish Westphalia were signed in Count Anthony Stolberg's house in Dusseldorf. On the 22nd of October, the ground floor of the newly-bought house was arranged for patients, "very scantily," says Fliedner, "one table, some chairs with half-broken arms, a few worn knives, forks with only two prongs, worm-eaten bedsteads and other similar furniture, which had been given to us—in such humble guise did we begin our task, but with great joy and thankfulness."

#### THE FIRST DEACONESS,

Gertrude Reinhardt—(born 1798, died 1869), came on October 20th, 1836. She was the daughter of a physician in Ruhroxt, and for many years helped her father to nurse and attend to the sick. Such, then, was the modest beginning of the Deaconess House at Kaiserswerth, and with it, of the whole Deaconess work of modern times. This, says the Report, has increased with such rapidity that in 1881 there were fifty-three Central Deaconesses Institutions, with more than 4,800 deaconesses. These deaconesses worked at 1,500 stations; pressing to the front when help was most needed, as in times of small-pox, typhus and cholera. In 1870 and 1871 hundreds of deaconesses showed upon the battle field what weak women's hands could do towards relieving suffering. The Kaiserswerth Institution had in 1881 belonging to it, 636 deaconesses, and thirty affiliated institutions which are the property of the Rhenish Westphalia Deaconess Society. These deaconesses are employed at more than 180 stations, in all the four quarters of the globe. The number of patients nursed exceeds 50,000 annually, exclusive of sick treated in the dispensaries attached to the different hospitals.

#### ORGANIZATION.

The Rhenish Westphalian Society has for its object, according to the Constitution granted to it by an order-in-council, November 28th, 1846, "the training of Protestant Christian women as deaconesses in the Apostolic sense for the purpose of ministering to the sick, the poor, children, prisoners, released criminals, and the like; especially in the Rhenish Westphalian Provinces." The work of love of the deaconess extends to the needy of all religions, without any distinction; but it does not allow her to make proselytes of those who belong to another faith. The work of the deaconess consists (1) in nursing, and

(2) in teaching. The Society is under the jurisdiction of the Rhenish Westphalian Provincial Synod, whose secretary and treasurer are *ex-officio* members of the Board. The Board, on which one practising physician must always sit, represents the Society, and has full power of control. Under the Board, the entire superintendence of the work is vested in the Director, who is a Protestant clergyman, and the Lady Superintendent both of whom are appointed by the Board. The Director and the Superintendent called "Mother," are the parents of the Institution, to whom the deaconesses stand in the relation of daughters. Under them, the "Mother House" as well as each branch institution has its Head Sister or Matron, who is called "Sister" not "Superior," because she is only regarded as the eldest, sister in a family circle. She superintends the institution intrusted to her; and in this way a feeling of unity is fostered among the many families or branches of the institution, which are bound together to make one great whole. Only unmarried women, or widows without children, of the Protestant faith, above eighteen years of age or under forty, are eligible for the calling of deaconesses. They must be earnest Christian women. Before their election they have to undergo a

#### PERIOD OF PROBATION,

the length of which depends on their early training, disposition and capacity. Absolute freedom in the choice of a calling, and the written consent of parents or guardians, are required from every candidate. Before admission all the deaconesses present are consulted and have a veto upon each election. At her consecration to office the new deaconess promises to be true to her calling, and to live in the fear of God and according to His holy Word. No vows are taken. Should a deaconess be required to return to aged or sick parents, she can do so at any time; or she can marry. It is expected, however, that before she enters into a binding engagement she will candidly inform the "Mother" of her intentions.

Every deaconess is bound to act on the orders of the Doctor in all matters relating to medicine, surgery and diet. She gives all her services gratuitously. She receives her dress and board, and a small sum of pocket money. She is not allowed to accept presents from her patients. Every deaconess has entire control over her private fortune, which after her death goes to the proper heirs. Every two or three years she can visit her parents at the expense of the institution, if she has no means of her own.

Every deaconess accepts of her own free will the post chosen for her by the authorities. In cases of infectious diseases she is asked if she has any objection, but no instance of a refusal has so far been known. In cases of mental afflictions, only those who understand something of the special duties required, are sent; and no one is sent to the East without her own free will and the sanction of her parents. Only those specially qualified are selected for the duty of teachers.

A statement of the accounts, duly audited, is published annually. The Mother-house and all institutions in Kaiserswerth, except the asylum and penitentiary, have one fund and one account. All branch institutions outside have their own accounts. The following are the

#### BRANCH INSTITUTIONS

in Kaiserswerth, in 1881, with 87 sisters: 1. Penitentiary, commenced September 17, 1833, the number of patients daily from 22 to 25, superintended by four deaconesses. 2. Infant school, commenced May 1st, 1836, daily attendance 100; one deaconess and one assistant. 3. Hospital, commenced October, 1836, attended daily on an average by 110 patients, and served by twelve deaconesses and from twenty to twenty-six probationers. 4. Girls' Orphanage, commenced April 3rd, 1842, daily attendance 35, with four deaconesses. 5. Training College for Teachers, August 9, 1847, daily attendance 80, with five deaconesses and two teachers. 6. Asylum for the Insane, May 1st, 1852, daily average 48 to 50, superintended by twenty deaconesses. 7. Deaconess School, April 1st, 1865, daily average attendance 19, with three teachers. 8. Paul Gerhard's Home for Lonely and Invalid Women, June 7, 1877, daily attendance 20, with six deaconesses. 9. New Farm, June 3rd, 1870, with two deaconesses, besides the bailiff, gardener, servant-maids, etc.

Who, on reading the above, which is merely the work at Kaiserswerth, can withhold an expression of admiration for the "consummate ability, knowledge