

## WOMEN WITH HANDS—THEIR POWER IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY.

BY MRS. MERRILL E. GATES.

Not many weeks ago a fearful cyclone passed over India. Its fiercely circling blasts uprooted trees, overturned houses, and mercilessly destroyed life. Whirling eastward to the seacoast, there it burst with deadly fury on the vessels at anchor. Sweeping on across the ocean to the shores of the Andaman Islands, where the "Enterprise," a British vessel used to carry convicts to their prisons in these islands, lay off the coast. It propelled the ship with immeasurable violence and velocity on the rocks, amid boiling breakers and black, slanting sheets of rain, just opposite the woman's prison. A number of convict women, overtaken by the sudden onset of the storm, were struggling toward shelter when they caught sight of the rolling wreck, and moved by common sympathy and a swift sense of the danger to its crew, turned to their relief. Slowly and painfully they forced their way against the storm creeping along from the shelter of one great rock to another. When they neared the shore, with incredible heroism, although the breakers at times swept above their heads, they formed a line,—a human life line,—each grasping the hand of the one next her; a line extending from the surge to the solid land. Then the one farthest out dashed still farther out, and rescued a struggling form. Aided by the long line of women, whose strength was hers, again and again she plunged into the mad wash of the sea, and saved man after man from his otherwise certain doom, she herself held in position by the long line of clasped hands, reaching far up on the shore. Eighty-three men, officers and crew, were on board. All perished but those the women saved.

It was the human-life line—the strong handclasp of women whose hearts defied danger and bled with sympathy for the imperiled, that was the simple and natural method of vital and instant help. As one reads this thrilling experience, it seems to portray, as in a picture, the awful wreckage of heathendom, the possibility of rescue, and the manner in which women are to be the rescuers. It seemed to teach most plainly how there was room in these life lines, already running out in such numbers where the dread waters of heathenism roll, for all the Christian women of our land. It almost seemed to indicate that each in the line was as important as every other, for, surely, not the one at the danger point could be spared, nor the one next, nor the one next in line; not, surely, those far up on solid ground, for they were the anchorage for the whole. So the whole line was one thing, not to be divided by the letting go of one hand if the life saving work was to be accomplished. Let us, then, not think of our work as either indirect or infinitesimal. We do not do the actual and blessed work of soul-saving in the distant field; but, humanly speaking, the rescue work could not take place without us. Are we in the woman's life line reaching from the saved and safe to the unsaved and unsafe? What a gracious, almost mysterious ordering, that we so remote, so far upon the safe shore of protected Christian womanhood, can yet reach saving hands to our poor sisters for whom our hearts bleed!

Suppose there had been so few women that they could not have held each other up firmly amid the perilous stress of the storm, or that they could not have reached beyond the shifting shelving sand up the coast to the solid, unshaken land. Then there had been no saving of the drowning ones. Our work is direct if we keep the worker at the danger point.

And the handclasp which effects such work means more than the money it so surely collects. It means the energy of a sympathy and love for souls derived from Christ; not merely human instinct, but a great God-given, impelling power of service. It means a labor springing from no selfish motives. It means a devotion as endless and absorbing, as the work is imperative and stupendous. Such labor, such sympathy, is not indirect.

Neither let us think of our work in its infinitesimal aspect.

Weak, indeed, would be the handclasp of women against the monumental, age-encrusted superstitions of India and China, or the revolting human degradations of Africa, if nothing of the Divine entered into our work. Our work would be as imponderable as the sunbeam that falls on the scale, and add as little weight, were it not for the very fact that our labor is like the sunlight,—something that proceeds from God himself, the Sun of our spiritual heavens. "Christianity makes our infinitesimal influence infinite."

But not only by the life line can the power of women's hands for good be symbolized. It is Carlyle who says: "Neither is the understanding a tool as we are apt to figure it; it is a hand which can handle any tool." So the Christian understanding, exercised on the question of how to serve our fellow-men, becomes a hand, that uses how many tools! Tools of the intellect, the heart the will,—the manifold forms of power in home, school and social life. Everything a Christian has can be brought into use for Christ, or else probably he were better off without it. Have we the spiritual power to use our advantages or disadvantages, our sufficiencies and our deficiencies, for this cause of Christ upon the earth?

Every Christian woman has the right to be a divine power in the world, by virtue of the indwelling of God's Spirit. His mysterious, irresistible power transforms her feeble but faithful efforts into mighty levers of far-reaching action.

The Spirit's gifts are:—

I. Power of suggestion. It is a fact that He gives the initial suggestion concerning every good work which he would have done. These suggestions are often communicated to us in prayer.

II. Suggestions of methods of work. These are no less real than the first, and results often prove their origin.

III. Continually supplied accessions of strength and resolution to persevere in the design. This gift to weak and fickle human nature is one of the greatest. Thus the whole will in the end appear to be God's suggestion, continuous development, and final accomplishment. Behind the effective hand lies the thinking brain; behind the brain lies the intelligent will; behind the will lies the loving heart. This is the inmost centre from which God works out His will through our wills, our brains and hands. Our wonderful enlarging accessions of positive power as Christian women, are to come through a more complete surrender of all our powers to God. He is the only source of power, and the soul most entirely joined to him is the most powerful for good. Are we willing to be the living wills, brains and hands through which the Holy Spirit can work his glorious will for the help of the lost and suffering? If it is only through believers that the Spirit can apply the work of Jesus to the souls of men, how imperative that every Christian woman should become the recipient and the impartor of the Holy Spirit!

"Ye shall receive power after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you."—*Life and Light.*