

AL / 1884

Bedford College

~~The~~ 23. Mar. 1884

My dearest Mother

The chief thing there is to write about to-day, is the Debate, which went off astonishingly well.

Tea was laid out in the Hall at 7.0 o'clock, & thither we boarders descended, - 13 of us. The Vice President Miss James, ^{and her} ~~with~~ ^{two} friends, were the only others who appeared till about 20 minutes past. We had our tea, & then waited & despaired - kept rushing to the door & cloak room in the deluding hope that somebody might come. Presently

the bell began to ring at intervals & by 25 minutes to seven right, a dozen had arrived. This was not encouraging especially as most of the outsiders were a very stupid lot, however as the debate had been announced for half past seven prompt, we thought we had better begin. So we streamed into the class. room & after some preliminary & informal chaffing, the Vice President who occupied the chair, called on the ~~Pres~~ Secretary to read the minutes, & these having been passed, she called on herself to read the first paper.

Miss James is a tall big girl kind intelligent & pleasant with a fearful Cockney accent. Her paper was carefully prepared & was more revolutionary than I expected.

She began by attributing most of the Poverty to the Land question & strongly advocated Land Nationalization, which

though she scarcely explained what she meant thereby. But she said that land belonged to everybody as much as sunshine, & that people might as well claim all the sunshine in a certain street & make everyone who went through pay a rent for it.

What she seemed to advocate was that all the land should belong to the State that each man should hold at a fixed rent as much as he could use, & that he should be forbidden to sub-let it.

Passing on to private charity she advocated organization, & praised the "much-maligned" Charity Orgⁿ: "society".

Next she had "a fling at the poor-laws" as she said; saying that England is the only country that has taken the grave responsibility of ~~saying~~ ^{announcing} that any man may be supported by the community, if he is too idle to work: she implied that abroad there is ~~not~~ ^{nothing} nothing to take the place of these laws I think: but I wish

I understood more about that subject. Her last point was Education, want of which is the cause of Intemperance dirt & crime.

When she sat down there was a silence for some minutes, ~~was~~ broken by Miss Lee an old student, & assistant teacher of Mathematics who began, "It seems to me that ~~the chief~~ nothing much can be done to remedy the state of things till the rich are swept off the face of the earth." She did not continue all the time that style, but made a little speech, about poverty causing Drunkenness as much as the other way, & upholding outdoor relief, which Miss James had specially condemned.

Next I held forth in a paper I had prepared with much anxiety & difficulty & which was so silly that I dared not read it all. I chiefly went in for personal mixing of classes, - ~~and~~ & for Totalism. I also supported what had been said about Technical Education,

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Then arose Miss Young, one of two sisters, who go by the name of the "Inevitables" or the "Irish Members". She ~~is~~ said that there must always be poor, - that if you divided up ~~the~~ all the money & all the land equally, some of the people would next week be as poor as ever, - I couldn't see that proved anything. She also said it was ridiculous to attribute it all to any one cause, - ~~circumstances~~ such as the land question, - or intemperance, saying that there ~~are~~ ^{are} countries where all the conditions are different & yet there is not poverty, - not a bad speech, perhaps, but apt to be illogical.

Then Miss Adamson, a nice intelligent girl whom we have been trying to persuade into Totalism for a long time, ran down the "Blue Ribbon" (which is commonly used as a synonym for Totalism) & ask if its advocates would wish to sweep alcohol off the face of the earth, where to I answered "yes" in a loud voice

to the amusement of the meeting. Then she was great on cleanliness, that people must be clean, - & that education ought to make them so; no one could deliberately prefer dirt to cleanliness (I doubt that, in the case of little boys). Ah, I forgot, her point about drink was that these men have literally nowhere to go to except public houses, - nowhere to talk & what is going on, so she said coffee-houses ought to be made as pleasant & attractive as the public.

She spoke ~~of~~ in favour of Compulsory Insurance, & of Provident Clubs, instancing Bath (of all places!) as an example of the good work of the latter. In conclusion she held that the people could not really be so poor as was made out because they had the money to spend on drink!!

Miss Ada James, not a student, with a worse Cockney accent than her sister made a few sensible remarks in favour of penny readings, complaining that they

were often far above the heads of the people they were intended for, & were attended only by the friends of the performers. She said the girls ought to learn domestic work more than they do, - that there is plenty of work for good servants if only they could be trained, & also advocated Gymnasiums & recreation grounds.

The other "Inevitable" ran down most of what had been said, but especially laud nationalization but had an ingenious plan of her own for regulating land possession by paying a ^{land} succession duty.

Miss Clay - I don't know how to describe her, - wished to ask Miss Wilson what was the exact use of the Blue Ribbon, - she did not see that if she saw some one in the street with a blue ribbon she should be moved to put one on; she made one or two remarks about the wrong way of visiting the poor. Then I answered, first repudiating strongly, - I was afterwards told too strongly - the identification of Sectotalism with Blue Ribbon, & then said that the strongest reason for wearing it was the encouragement of those who were tempted.

I omitted that Miss Clay also inveighed against over-education, & spoke of a carpenter's son whose children she knew, who were at a Board School, - the boy used to weep every evening over his "Alfils"; & the girl came home one day with the announcement that "Teacher said she was to have a pi-an-o."

This produced a protest from Marian Sherratt, the book-worm of the boarding house, who said she did not see why a servant would be the worse for knowing the "pian-o" or other musical instrument.

After a speech from a stranger, - which was like a very second-rate sermon, the meeting concluded by the reading of a paper which had been sent by Miss Bart, the History teacher, - who could not be present.

It was the best & most practical thing of the evening, - & consisted of an account of some of the things that are being done & in which help is wanted. Her are some of them.

An old Girtonian, - a mathematical teacher has taken rooms in Edgware Road

where she has a number of poor girls to whom she teaches needlework as well as more general subjects, one evening a week; she hopes to increase have them more often, & ultimately to form them into a Co-operative needlework association. She wants help from older girls, & also orders for work.

Several ladies have begun the practise of having little Board-School children to play at their houses on Saturday afternoons, - to be taught, told stories, & played with. She herself is going to have them once a month, & would oftener if some of her "young friends" would come & help to entertain them.

Somewhere not far from the College are ^{some} almshouses for old women, where a visit from young people or a gift of a few flowers is most acceptable.

To begin as near home as possible, - servants are often much neglected; we don't realize how monotonous their lives are.

It would do them a great deal of good if we would take them out sometimes to the British Museum or some such place; with a little help & explanation they would enjoy it very much. If we can't take them, we ought to make it easy for them to go.

For those who can give money but not time she spoke of the Coffee Trucks which have been started at the Docks for the men who flock thither from there in the morning to get the first chance of being engaged. They are supplied with coffee & bread for a halfpenny, & this is not self-supporting.

There, I think I have told you most of what was said. Somewhere there came in a good deal of talk about Sunday opening of picture galleries &c, which nearly all were in favour of. There was also an account of some of

the new settlements of workmen's houses, conveniently built, with open spaces, a little way out of London; but the difficulty is said to be that the Railway Companies give no facilities for this. The Midland is the only Company that issues Third Class Season Tickets & those not for less than three months.

You see we looked at a great many sides of the subject, & discussed it pretty freely. As a debate it was a great success, - if only twice the number had been present. As for practical results, it has made us all think, & some are going to try to help in the ways suggested.

This morning I went to Westminster Meeting again. We had rather a nice discourse from Bevan Braithwaite; who then a man got up proclaiming "Babylon must fall! the mysterious Babylon must fall!"

God can conquer the Beast by his own might, but he asks for the help of men & women." He went on a good while about Babylon & the Beast, "which he meant "all the Rantism about us." "I need not tell you the names of those who are deluding the people & leading them astray, from the Pope on his throne, to the American Ranters & the Army Ranters." He sighed for "the Quakers of the olden time, the followers of Joz, St Paul, & Barclay," all interspersed with repetitions of "Babylon must fall!"

After meeting I spoke to Mrs. Hutchinson: she was very nice but all she could suggest at present was that I should take her daughter's class during the Easter holidays, which naturally I could not do. What they mostly want is help for a Women's Adult school, - which I should not be equal to, I'm sure, - & she asked if I could do house-to-house visiting to ask people to the meetings, - but here I should not be allowed.

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However she expects to find some
work for me next term,

I am very sorry to hear that
Alice is in such a state as to be ordered
to the country, but I hope Godstone
will do him good. I am very much
afraid I shall not be able to meet
him to-morrow, as Monday is
a very busy day.

I suppose you don't want
~~to~~ to bring any more photographs
or things of that sort? I am going
to get some of those little pots of ferns
Father admired so.

I shall be delighted to see
you all in ten days. I am going
to travel home with the "Lowood".

Your loving daughter
Helen M. Wilson.
Love to Father, Oliver, "Sessie".