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THE



WOMAN'S

A Weekly Record and Review devoted to the interests of Women in the Home and in the Wider World.

Edited by

MRS. FENWICK MILLER.



SIGNAL

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Every Thursday, ONE PENNY WEEKLY.

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THE WOMAN'S SIGNAL

A WEEKLY RECORD AND REVIEW FOR LADIES.

Vol. VIII., No. 184.] JULY 8, 1897. One Penny Weekly.

WOMEN'S PICTURES AT THE VICTORIAN EXHIBITION, EARL'S COURT.

INTERVIEW WITH HENRIETTA RAE.

THE Victorian Exhibition at Earl's Court makes a very interesting show, though, taken as a whole, it cannot be justly said to be a fair and full representation of the progress of the nation during the Queen's reign. It was hardly to be expected that this could be the case, when it was a matter of private enterprise undertaken in the hope of profit and without any subvention or State assistance. To produce an exhibition worthy of being considered a full representation of the progress of the last 60 years would mean an enormous expenditure, and one that it would be impossible to obtain a return upon, from the purely business point of view. While therefore Earl's Court makes a very interesting show and assists towards an understanding of the progress of the era, it cannot be for one moment taken as adequate or convincing. For example, the room dedicated to women's philanthropic work is smaller than an average board-school classroom, and contains in it only two or three show cases, which practically amount to nothing at all. The nursing section is not to be compared either in size or in interest with the exhibition gathered together by Mrs. Bedford Fenwick at St. Martin's Town Hall last year, and the display of women's industrial capacities is confined to a few lace-workers and the like whose performances are amusing to watch. This is not, of course, to be complained of or wondered at—the object of the promoters was to make an interesting show, and in that they have undoubtedly succeeded.

When to all the varied exhibits within the numerous and extensive buildings you have added two or three good bands and well laid out gardens, it is obvious that here is an ideal place of entertainment ready for the summer months, and we must gratefully accept such instruction and information as we can obtain inside without complaining that it is not what it could not possibly be under the circumstances.

There is one section, however, which could not possibly have been better done within its limits and size, and which hardly needs to be wished to be even more extensive than it is, that is, the display of women's art. Such a show has never been gathered together before. There have been, it is true, a considerable number of lady artists' exhibitions under various titles, but in the nature of the case these have only received the work which was not likely to obtain admission to the more important exhibitions, such as the Royal Academy, the New Gallery, or the Society or Institute of Water Colour Painters. These great exhibitions, which are nominally opened on equal terms to the work of artists of either sex, and which are visited by all persons interested in seeing the new pictures of the year, as a matter of course have commanded the best work of the best women artists whose pictures were scattered over the walls in more or less fair competition with those of the men. The so-called exhibitions of ladies'

pictures, therefore, have been quite misleading. This is the first time that a genuine display has been available of the best work that is being done by leading women artists. It seems to be quite a revelation not only to the public at large, but even to a great many of the artists themselves, and should certainly be visited by everyone who cares either to know what women are doing, or to see a good picture show.

The women's work section, of which this is the only adequate portion, was arranged by a committee of ladies of title; the only name of a really working woman upon the committee was that of the distinguished woman artist, Henrietta Rae, whose special undertaking was the organisation and the hanging of the women's pictures. The exhibition speaks for itself as to the honourable manner in which she has carried out her task, giving the fullest possible display to the work of others, and choosing with equal



Mrs. HENRIETTA RAE.

conscientiousness and generosity the leading women artists to invite to contribute. Most of these pictures, of course, have had to be borrowed from purchasers, so that the artists very finest work was not always to be had; and in a few cases, notably in that of Mrs. Jopling, the artist does not appear to be so strongly seen as her talent would have led one to expect; but generally speaking, the leading women artists are all represented here, and represented by works so good and so various as to make one feel that in art, just as in literature, it is now possible to claim that women have justified a demand to have their work judged as work, and not as Mrs. Browning puts it, "as women's work, expressing the comparative respect which means the absolute scorn."

Henrietta Rae is one of the women, now becoming numerous, who have had the sense to retain after their marriage the maiden name which they had made more or less famous. She is the wife of another well-known artist, Mr.

Ernest Normand, and it was in the large studio which they share on the heights of Sydenham, surrounded by artistic hangings, models in clay and plaster, photographs, including a huge one of the ceiling of Sistine Chapel, and canvases of both husband and wife in various stages of completion, while the green trees coming close up to the large windows looked in upon us, that I sat to cross-examine her both about how this exhibition had been produced, and about her own past work.

There is one very large picture in the exhibition of a procession in mediæval Italy, painted by a lady whose name is quite unknown. This, Mrs. Rae told me, was painted about thirty years ago, and was work so much stronger and more powerful than was then considered proper for a woman to do, that it was abused and jeered at to such an extent that the artist lost her courage and never painted anything again. One wonders how many such tragedies there have been in the past history of women!

"How did you find it?" I asked her, and she told me that Mr. Graves, the picture dealer, had specially sent to her to ask her attention to it.

"And on what principle," I enquired, "did you gather together the rest of the pictures?"

"They were all invitations; we made our list of women whose work certainly ought to be there, and invited them to send. In some cases I asked for a particular work; in others I left it to the artist herself. Some were very pleased with the idea; others, from whom one would have expected better things, took no notice of the application until I got the Duchess of Devonshire, the President of our Committee, to kindly write in her own name, and this invariably brought a satisfactory response. Some expressed their strong objection to showing their pictures in an exhibition of women's work alone, but this I had provided against by stipulating before I undertook the task of selection and hanging that the men's and women's sections should be entirely distinct, so that no women's pictures should be hung in the men's gallery; therefore the ladies who objected had to choose between being in our gallery or not being in the exhibition at all, so they came round."

"That was a very wise decision of yours," said the interviewer. "I congratulate you upon having so much foresight. If you had not made that stipulation all the best pictures would have been sent to the other section, and you would have been left, as exhibitions of lady artists' work generally are, with 'the leavings' of the general exhibition, which would do more discredit than credit to us. Then no one finally declined?"

"No," said Mrs. Rae. "If you look at the list of names that we have got I do not think you will find many at any rate left out—many which a good judge would think should have been included. There are the three Misses Montalbas, Mrs. Alma Tadema, Lady Butler, Mrs. Murray Cooksley, Miss Jessie Macgregor, Miss Ethel Wright, Miss Maud Earl, Mrs. Stokes, Mrs.

occupation than supplying songs and pianoforte pieces; while the little lassie kept "pegging away" till she got very near to the place where there is always room. If some more of our gifted young people can be helped out of the ruts, they will probably have cause for thankfulness, and find there is a charming variety, and that the taking up of a new instrument gives a colour to their lives as well as to the music in the performance of which they join.

The question may arise in the mind of one of my readers: "This is all very well, but how is the beginning to be made?" Let me say how I began. When I was a very poor lad, someone gave me a flute with one key. I thought I should like to play it, and I tried with small success until I saw a sixpenny instruction book, which I found a considerable help, and in time I learnt all it could teach me. Music was very dear then, and I was glad to borrow and copy out the pieces I wanted. It was a great help to me when the owner of a book of duets not only lent it, but invited me to come and play them with him. Presently I heard of a society that wanted a clarinet player, and would lend an instrument to anyone willing to study it. I applied, and with the help of a shilling "tutor," was soon able to play most of the music performed by the society, and from that moment my path has been a plain one. Bearing in mind that I was not a born musician—I don't know that any of my forbears could play or sing—I can only say that what I did anyone with a fair ear and sufficient perseverance may do. But if I could have afforded it I might have saved a great deal of time and trouble by taking lessons. They were much more costly then than now, and in small towns not always to be had. It was not till many years after that I could afford a teacher, and that was when I took up an instrument of an entirely different nature, the difficulty of which to a beginner is almost insurmountable without the help of a teacher.

To any one living in London the advantages offered to students of every branch of music by the "Royal Academy," "The Royal College," and "The Guildhall School," are very great, and at the last-named institution the cost of learning any one instrument is very small. There are very few towns in which a teacher of one or other of the instruments I have named cannot be found, and there is certainly no lack of first books of instruction by which any one in earnest could get a considerable amount of information, and even make some degree of progress. I may mention one work which I have found of great use, "Curwen's Reed Band Book." For one and fourpence the student of to-day may become possessed of knowledge that would have cost pounds a

few years ago—knowledge that it took me years of hard work to gain. I remember when that book came out I almost cried with vexation to think that I should have spent so much time in working out what was made so clear in its pages.

I shall be glad if what I have said leads any one to the study of an unduly neglected family of instruments. I can assure them they will be amply repaid for their trouble, and will find that they not only gain a great deal of pleasure, but presently will help to confer it.

If, by the Editor's permission, I can advise as to any particular instrument, cost, or maker, or suggest nearest teaching help, I shall be most happy to do so.

A FEW WORDS ON SERVANTS.

By CHRISTINE HERRICK.

FOR the cause of faulty domestic service we must seek something further back than the conduct of the mistresses to the maids.

There is rarely an assemblage of housekeepers where the "vexed question" is not discussed, and such a discussion is pretty sure, first or last, to resolve itself into a testimony meeting, at which, however, there is seldom the oneness of testimony that marks similar meetings of a less secular character. One sister will relate her happy experience with a pleasant, good-natured servant, while another must bewail her sad case in having taken into her employ a girl who is untidy, untruthful, and light-fingered. But they would none of them discharge a servant without giving her a written reference that would enable her to secure another place.

Here then, at least, one lays one's finger upon the chief cause of the incapability of the domestic servant. It is not because she is treated with positive unkindness or passive lack of consideration by her mistress; it is not because her hours are long, her work monotonous, her pleasures few; it is because housekeepers in their references place incompetence on a par with competence, laziness with industry, untidiness with neatness, and with that fine lack of logic so generally characteristic of their sex display the perverted loyalty of defending their employees at the expense of their own class.

We are all familiar with the argument these good women use to support their position. "I could not sleep at night if I thought any word of mine had prevented a poor girl finding a place," exclaims one, virtuously. No, dear madame! And yet you are not troubled with insomnia because you have condemned a sister housekeeper, unwarned, to the annoyances you yourself found unendurable.

"Perhaps the girl may do better somewhere else than she did with me," is the plea of another. True, she may. But what right have you to make another mistress the victim of such an experiment without hinting to her what is in store for her?

Give the girl a reference, by all means. But let it be just. Say that she is honest, obliging, and kind-hearted, although a poor cook who cannot follow a recipe. Or that the maid who has lived with you as waitress and housemaid is neat and quick, but has a hasty temper, and is careless in handling china and glass.

The answer to this is ready. "But such a reference as this might lose her a place." It is not likely. Servants are all too scarce now, and mistresses will put up with many faults for the sake of a few virtues. And if such a reference did make it more difficult for its owner to find a place? What then?

I myself have been blessed in the maid-servant within my gates. It is for the sake of others like her that I wish incompetence could be rebuked and conscientious service rewarded. Now, the two are on an equal footing as regards wages, privileges, and references. And by whose fault? That of the housekeepers at large, whose consideration, like the gentle dew of heaven, droppeth alike on the just and unjust—so long as these are of the employed class.

A woman who has given much thought to the perennial servant problem turned to her maid for light. The latter, an unusually intelligent girl, after suggesting several causes for the distrust that so generally exists between the classes of the domestic employer and employed, summed up the matter to her own satisfaction in the words: "Well, there are poor mistresses and poor maids. It's a pity the two don't always get together."

That they often fail to "get together" will scarcely be denied by the most optimistic. One of the many falsehoods crystallised into proverb form is contained in the saying: "Like mistress, like maid." Given good raw material, a wise mistress may convert an incompetent "greenhorn" into a well-trained servant, but she must have the good material to begin with. In a disheartening number of cases she will find, as does the mother with the child, that the education should have been begun a century before birth. It is rarely possible to uproot in a few months, or even in a few years, the faults and failings of generations. Example and training, advice and judicious reproof, alike fail to turn the tree from the shape into which it was bent while a twig.

The fact is indisputable that the influence of the mistress over the ordinary maid is of the slightest. The long-established class tradition

places the servant always on the defensive. The word of a fellow-servant, who is nothing to her, will outweigh that of a mistress who has been uniformly kind to her for years. In like manner, example has little force, whether it be that offered in dress, speech, or behaviour. Moreover, this class-distrust is so deep-seated that by its influence the servant's vision has become jaundiced. She cannot understand that her mistress has her welfare at heart in teaching and training her. Always her mental query is, "What does she (the mistress) expect to make by it?"

It is idle to compare the work a mistress does in training a servant to that performed by a merchant with his office-boy. The latter enters a business house on a small salary, and gains an increase of wages by an increase of duties and responsibilities. If at the end of a period of years he leaves his employer for a place that promises better, there are plenty of other clerks, or book-keepers, or salesmen quite as competent as he waiting to step into the shoes he has left vacant. It is hardly necessary to remark that a totally different state of affairs prevails in domestic service.

The housekeepers are few and far between who reduce a servant's wages one-third or one-half when all or part of the family are away from home for one, two, or three months, and the maid is left with diminished duties or, as during the summer outing, with practically nothing to do. If she is ill for a week, and the mistress has to nurse her and either do the work of the sick girl herself, or hire a woman to do it, that week's wages are not commonly deducted from the maid's stipend. If common humanity did not stay her, she would be checked by the thought of the obloquy that would be bestowed upon her by all who learned of her heartless treatment of the poor working woman.

This is no attempt to belittle the calling or virtues of the domestic servant. The former is

honourable, the latter are many. But it is useless to expect that the millenium can be brought about in our kitchens without a radical change in the maids as well as in the mistresses, if it can be done then.

The material conditions surrounding most servants are certainly not such as to prejudice them against their avocation. There are, doubtless, unkind mistresses who show no more consideration for their employees than if the latter belonged to that most desirable body of automatic attendants of which we read in "The Coming Race." But the majority of housekeepers are kindly, thoughtful, helpful. Possibly many follow the golden rule from selfish motives, for the terror lest the servant should leave if not cared for and indulged is a constant menace. Whatever the motive, the treatment is the same. The employer does what she can to make the servant comfortable.

It is safe to deny any implication that because of the attitude of the employers domestic service is considered degrading by any class of the community. No self-respecting woman of the so-called upper classes who possesses ordinary common sense perceives a caste distinction between the shopwoman or factory girl and the house servant. Among these themselves is it that such social distinctions exist. The first and second classes named consider themselves many rungs higher on the ladder of position than the "servant girl." They will not hesitate to acknowledge it.

A girl's club was nearly broken up a few years ago because an intelligent, well-bred Scotch girl who was in service was admitted through a misunderstanding. To save the club, composed chiefly of shop-girls, she had to go. Another potent influence against domestic service is the disesteem in which it is held by many young men of the mechanic class who have themselves risen a little in the world, and who openly declare their aversion to marrying anyone who is only a "common servant."

There is little hope that a better class of girls will enter service until these conditions are changed and the servants and their friends respect the work.

PERSONAL SKETCH OF QUEEN VICTORIA.

THE heart of gold, the will of iron, the royal temper of steel, the pride, the patriotism, and the deep piety of Victoria, have been enshrined in a small but vigorous frame, the *mignonette* aspect of which especially strikes those who behold her for the first time in these her "chair-days."

It was reported how, when Prince Albert was dying, he roused himself from a period of wandering to turn with ineffable love to his spouse and sovereign, saying to her with a kiss, "Good little wife!" And when the Prince Consort was actually passing away, after those twenty-one years of wedded happiness, it was told how the Queen bent over him and whispered, "It is your little wife," at which last words the Angel of Death stayed his hand while once again the dead eyes opened, and the dying lips smiled.

But though this be so, no one who has been honoured by near approach to Her Majesty, or has ever tarried in her presence, will fail to testify to the extreme majesty of her bearing, mingled always with the most perfect grace and gentleness. Her voice has, moreover, always been pleasant and musical to hear, and is so now. The hand which holds the sceptre of the seas is the softest that can be touched; the eyes which have grown dim with labours of State for England, and with too frequent tears, are the kindest that can be seen.—*Sir Edwin Arnold.*

PEACE.—Happy are they who have set their hearts on the one thing which is in their own power—being better than they are, and doing better than they do.—*C. Kingsley.*

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