

## THE MISSED MISSION.



HE Missed Mission, or the Mission for Misses!" To what innumerable guesses this idiotic title gives rise! We think of all the various callings and professions that have not yet been carried by feminine assault;

one reviews all the May meetings at Exeter Hall and all the innumerable missionary reports to see if in Africa, or the Spice Islands, or the New Hebrides, or the North Pole, there still exists anywhere a mission where woman has not penetrated. In vain! "The trail of the —," that is to say "the beneficent influence of woman" is over them all. There are therefore many missions it is obvious that woman has not missed. At the present moment in this favoured country there are eight million female workers engaged in over three hundred different employments, and one-fifth of the number are domestic servants. The other day there were eleven subordinate posts thrown open to women in the Civil Service. For these there were over two thousand educated candidates. No, taken as a whole, woman cannot be said to be blind to the opportunities that are afforded her. She has found that work is not a degradation, but a moral power, that although the market is sadly overcrowded everywhere, and women can never earn on the average the same wages as men, still an increasing number of avenues for useful employment are being opened each day; and that for a girl who has the grit to master a subject thoroughly there is always a chance of remunerative work. A girl should not drift into work, but should choose it, and then carefully prepare herself for it. No one is so hopeless and helpless as a girl who can do anything. Maids-of-all-work never rank high anywhere, but are usually classed with "jack-of-all-trades."

Thrilling stories could be told of noble girls who at the call of duty, having suddenly to support themselves or aged relatives dependent on them, have laid aside the luxury and the congenial pursuits in which they have been brought up, and buckled on the armour of determination and faced drudgery itself. I recall one case of a young lady delicately brought up amidst the most delightful surroundings, where she could indulge her literary taste to the full, being suddenly deprived of all; and who, having thrust upon her the care of others more helpless than herself, turned herself round, and in a very short time became head bookkeeper in a large shop, where she continued as brisk, as bright, and as happy as in her palmiest days.

Women indeed are penetrating everywhere. Only the other day I heard of one an architect, another a sanitary inspector, another an office boy, and another a large cab proprietor. But the missed mission is surely none of these, for the word "missed" implies that it would do well to be sought for by the bulk of women, that it is for women as women, and not an out-of-the-way calling for the few.

Is it as leaders, warriors, statesmen, that woman should excel? There was an heroic age of women when Penelope, Andromache, and Boadicea flourished, and the story of Antigone was told. Is it that women are seeking too much to be servants of all, when they might lead, and guide, and govern. I think with Paul, this mission is only for those pre-ordained to it. We have such women now, but it is not a mission to be sought, but rather one that is thrust upon the ones fitted for it.

It surely cannot be matrimony. That cannot

yet be called "a missed mission," or if it be, it is not the fault of women, for there are undoubtedly thousands for whom it is already beyond hope, though they would gladly accept it had they a chance. Those that look at it and voluntarily pass by on the other side are not yet a numerous sisterhood.

It is said that there are several factors that cause the matrimonial exchange to be so flat.

The increasing employment of women acts in two ways. By supplanting men it makes numbers still less able to marry, and by removing the contrasts that form the attraction of the gentler sex it renders them less marriageable. Too much familiarity often breeds contempt, and a girl is much less likely to marry a man with whom she is associated in the friction of business all day long than one who knows her less. A girl too who works for money necessarily thinks more of herself and her independency, and is in many cases averse to matrimony. In Boston it is said that girls with spectacles quite commonly refuse marriage on these grounds.

And yet the wife and mother are the highest products of the universe up to now, and the higher the civilisation the more devoted is the woman to home and maternity.

The potential self-sacrificing power of motherhood is an immense force, even in the lives of those who never marry; and much of the unselfish love of woman in altruistic labour is merely the mother's love directed into other channels.

But what is the missed mission? Is it the proper training and educating of children? To educate and bring up one's children aright is to render the highest possible service to God, to the State, and to humanity; and the highest department of the education of women is to teach them to bring up their own children well. There is no doubt this is a sadly missed mission. It is well-nigh incredible that the closing years of this century should witness the state of things that still prevails in England. If the year were 94 instead of 1894, and the country Lapland instead of England, matters could hardly be worse. Every week you see in the ladies' papers rows of faces more or less beautiful to whom has been committed, in the most solemn way by the most impressive ordinance, duties and responsibilities, the right discharge of which involves the whole future prosperity of this realm; and yet as you look at those sweet, fair, young faces, many of them marked with high intelligence, you cannot but remember that it is probable—one might almost say, absolutely—certain that the majority have never devoted one hour in a serious study how to discharge the duties they have so lightly undertaken. They have not the faintest idea of the training of children. They have no knowledge of their care, physically, mentally or morally. They have carefully studied all sorts of subjects that can be of no possible use to them in after-life; such as chemistry, physical geography, ancient history, and so on. Indeed it would almost appear that the less useful a subject is likely to prove the more eagerly is it studied. Is this then the missed mission. Not exactly. It can hardly be described as "the mission for misses," unless the last word is spelt differently; but it touches on it so nearly that we must now at the risk of bathos, after all this preamble, say what the missed mission is. *It is the knowledge and practice of personal and domestic hygiene, or the "science of prevention."*

I can imagine the disgusted face of the fair reader at this point at anything so banal, so tame, being introduced with such a flourish of trumpets. Read on to the end, at any rate even with a face of disgust, and pronounce not the verdict till you have heard the pleading

in favour of the great missed mission. But why is this specially "the mission for misses," or at any rate of women? Why not for men?

What have the other sex done that they should be left to perish of disease? the answer is obvious. It is not that men should love the goddess Hygiea less, but that women should love her more. It is impossible for men to know too much of the laws of health, but it is dangerous for women to know too little. They are the ones, after all, who live in our houses in which the menkind often are but visitors; they are the ones who manage the children, and the servants, and the housekeeping, and the schooling, the man being in all things the paymaster.

There are many men in our larger houses who do not know their way to their own kitchens; while as to the sleeping-rooms of their servants, or the state of the scullery sink their mind is vacuous.

In the so-called dark ages women were enlightened in these subjects in a way they are not now.

Whatever was known in mediæval times of the modern sciences of "hygiene" and "prophylactics," as well as most details of the "Art of cure," was in the hands of the women and "noble ladies" of the period, and it is certain that since the great illumination of the present century they have lost this place, and so far from their relative position in these matters advancing, it has most distinctly retrograded.

In most other departments of science and art we find women *rushing to the front* and often ousting their former masters. Sir Crichton Browne's theories, backed as they are by experiments on idiots, are all very well; but however the impulsive hinder lobes of the brain may still preponderate in women over the reasoning frontal lobes, there is no doubt that before long the balance may be better adjusted.

We are certainly not inclined to carp at the rate at which women are advancing in professional careers, nor even to regard adversely with jealousy their inclusion in the "license to (kill or) cure" that is coveted by so many of them to-day; but perhaps we may be permitted to point out that the hackneyed phrase, "Prevention is better than cure," must as yet be imperfectly understood, when we see the same women eager to undergo a five years' course of "cure"—teaching, or crowding in hundreds to bandage each other's arms and legs in our ambulance classes, who at the same time show a stolid indifference to the science of "prevention" as comprehended in the one word "hygiene." And yet how easy to learn the one, how difficult to learn the other. The art of locking the door after the steed is stolen takes five years to acquire; to prevent the theft, but a few weeks' careful study. To be able to set a man's broken thigh requires long and arduous work and great learning; to kick away the orange peel that produced it only the exercise of a little common or uncommon sense. Women are always ready for reforms; all they need is to be convinced of its necessity. In this instance this is not hard to prove. Some time ago a crusade was set on foot to substitute wool for flax as the material for ladies' underwear. It was heavily handicapped, for wool was not so comfortable, not so clean, not so cheap, not so pretty as flaxen material. Moreover, being for underwear fashion had not much to say, as she principally concerns herself with the outward appearance; and yet, such is the sagacity of women, that once they were really convinced of its superiority, they took to it in such deadly earnest that it would be more difficult now to

find a lady who wears linen next her skin than it would before to find one who wore wool. Well, the need of this missed mission is a greater question than the wearing of wool, simply because the whole of hygiene is greater than its part (the wearing of wool). It is computed that over 200,000 needless deaths occur annually in this country, and over 6,000,000 preventible sick beds. Consider the enormous waste of life represented here, consider the mountain of suffering, consider the weight of shame that lies on a nation that supinely permits it. Herbert Spencer says:—

"If anyone doubts the importance of our acquaintance with the principles of physiology (or hygiene), let him look around and see how many men and women he can find in middle or later life who are thoroughly well. Only occasionally do we meet with an example of vigorous health continued to old age; hourly do we meet with examples of acute disorder, chronic ailment, general debility, premature decrepitude . . . So profound an ignorance is there of the laws of life, that though Nature has provided efficient safeguards to health, lack of knowledge makes them in a great measure useless."

We infer that as vigorous health and its accompanying high spirits are larger elements of happiness than any other things whatever, the teaching how to maintain them is a teaching that yields in moment to no other whatever. And, therefore, we assert that such a course of physiology as is needful for the comprehension of its general truths and their bearings in daily conduct is an all-essential part of a rational education. Strange that such an assertion should need making! Stranger still that it should need defending! Yet there are not a few by whom such a proposition will be received with derision. So overwhelming is the influence of established routine! So terribly in our education does the ornamental override the useful! Well may we call this "the missed mission." Ordinary arguments seem insufficient to rouse us from our apathy on the great subject. We need scares and shocks to teach us the importance of hygiene. If the cholera came here in force once a year, perhaps women would learn what was the first essential of education to them. Indeed, as it is, cholera is the best friend of health. By the scare it causes it introduces more sanitary reform than anything else. It is not as if these laws of health, these principles of prevention were hard to learn.

They are simple, they are but five in number: cleanliness, good air, good food, good clothing, suited exercise and rest. On these five foundations the whole of hygiene rests.

We have now a triple line of defence erected against disease, the public, the professional, and the private. The first is most advanced, and by its beneficent operation in our health-laws saves some 80,000 lives annually that otherwise would have died. The professional line of doctors still know little about prevention, though much about cure. The private line consists of yourselves, the women of this country, with regard to the knowledge of hygiene by whom Lord Derby says is of more importance than all the Public Health Acts that were ever passed. Women should be the health-officers of the world; their opportunities are unrivalled, their natural qualifications of quickness, shrewdness, patience, ingenuity, sympathy, and intelligence are all so many points in their favour. And then no one, not even the most rabid defender of the good old days, can find fault with this mission for women. It is so womanly, so needed, so indispensable, so saving of human life and suffering, so easily learnt, that the wonder is that every mother has not long ago insisted that whatever else her daughter is deficient in, at least she shall have a thorough knowledge of personal and domestic hygiene.

One lady of influence who has waked up to the importance of this "missed mission," and who is now working hard at it amongst her tenantry, wrote to me a little time ago as follows: "How sadly could I add my testimony as to preventible deaths! For the dear ones whom I have lost in my own family might have been saved, all were lost to me through preventible illnesses; and how many a mother has gone through the same agony, which might have been prevented had such knowledge been given her. Would that we could open the eyes of those who are careless on these subjects to the mistake they are making, and to the importance and necessity of instruction in these matters. Were people thoroughly aroused and convinced that their ignorance on this subject of hygiene is positively culpable, I believe they would flock anywhere and everywhere to learn all they could. What is more pitiable than to see an intelligent girl, that knows no fear, paralysed by ignorance at the moment of supreme need?" And is not such ignorance in the present day, as Lady M— says, "positively culpable?"

Again, as wives of working men, how much health might be secured, how much drunkenness saved, how much happiness increased did such know the laws of hygiene. It is grievous to think what a helpless, useless, ignorant creature the working man's wife is compared to what she might be, had she supplemented her school-board education (so largely useless) by a school of domestic economy, where all

principles of household management and laws of health were practically taught.

As mothers we touch the point that led us to disclose what this missed mission was. It is in the care and bringing up of children, perhaps, that the modern educated girl mostly displays her ignorance. The darkness of her mind on these subjects is so intense it may absolutely be felt. Nothing is more pathetic than to see a young mother with her ailing baby, not knowing, poor soul, despite all her education, how to feed, clothe, or treat her child, ignorant of the first principles of child-rearing, without the instinct of an animal, because, endowed with reason, which is useless alas! because she has never been trained or taught the first rudiments of nursery hygiene.

The effect of this crass maternal ignorance on the rising generation is seen everywhere in dwarfed and stunted bodies, in weak chests and want of stamina, in ill-balanced minds, in diversified and stunted intellects—for hygiene extends to the whole threefold being of the human creation.

What shall we say about mistresses? A young girl marries and becomes head of a self-contained colony of human beings, surrounded with deadly poisons in drains and sewers, in dirt of all kinds in the air, in the water, in the milk, with about as much idea of their danger, or how to combat them as a Hottentot. Her advanced civilisation has partly created these ills, which has alas! failed in teaching her how to meet them. What does she know about water-seals, about gully-traps, about ventilating-shafts? and yet on these, maybe, her very life depends.

Then as nurses, as governesses, as missionaries or district-visitors, indeed in every sphere proper to women, how essential is this knowledge, what power it gives, what additional value. Surely I am not wrong in calling this "the missed mission." Nowhere have women so missed their way as in neglecting this great subject. Nowhere have they displayed such apathy. They will compass land and sea to find a new amusement, they will hunt high and low to discover a new vocation, but this that lies at the very doors of every woman they will not see. They will study for hours the cut of a dress or the set of a mantle, but the weightier matters of the law—life, health, and happiness—they heed not. Shall we blame the age in which we live? shall we blame the parents who allowed them to grow up in ignorance so dense? or shall we blame the modern girl for her blindness to a mission so obvious, so natural, so easy to enter, so overwhelming in its claims? We know not; one thing we do know—that this, and none other, is "the missed mission" of women.

## A PLANT PARTNERSHIP.

By H. B. M. BUCHANAN, B.A.

A TERRIBLE fight is constantly being waged in the vegetable world. Tree fights with tree, bush with bush, wayside weed with wayside weed for space to grow, for light and air; some prey upon and oppress others, and in the dire struggle the poor weakling has to succumb to the more robust. This is the uglier and sadder side of the shield.

But others will support and protect their neighbours, and not infrequently different species will join together to give one another mutual assistance. This is the lovelier and brighter side of the shield.

I am of a firm belief that as scientific knowledge grows from more to more, the uglier and sadder side of things will slowly give place to the

lovelier and brighter, till the universe becomes to man's vision wholly good and beautiful.

The lichen is an example of two distinct forms of vegetable meeting and joining forces, and thus helping each other the better to live; the minute green cells of the algæ, which sometimes clothe with green trees, cliffs, stones or earth, becoming dry and powdery, are blown over hill and dale by the great wind distributor. If at any suitable spot the little algæ cell groups meet the spores belonging to the fungi, the fungi spores embrace and enmesh the algæ cells, and thus is produced a lichen.

The partnership is worked on the most approved business principles, each partner

doing the work it is most fitted to do, and not interfering with the duties of the other.

The fungus makes fast to the spot where it intends taking up its abode, and proceeds at once to gather nutriment from its external surroundings. This nutriment wants preparation before it is of use as food, and is therefore passed on to the algæ partner, which, in its green cells, under the influence of the sunlight, converts this raw material into the prepared organic food for the whole plant. By this means the algæ multiplies the number of its cells, in other words, grows, and at the same time yields to its fungi partner so much of the prepared food as is necessary to enable it to keep pace with its growth.