

HOW WE MANAGED OUR GIRLS' GUILD.

By ONE WHO HELPED.



OUR busy, dirty, manufacturing city simply swarms with girls—in mills, in factories, in warerooms, in shops, everywhere. To stand in one of the large thoroughfares at breakfast or dinner-hour, and see the sharp, saucy, prematurely hard faces of the "mill-workers," almost makes one wonder where girlish modesty has betaken itself. Only the other day a little stunted mite, as young as the Factory Act allows, was strolling homewards with the inevitable ragged faded shawl for a wrap. A tall, grave clergyman took the curb rather than elbow a place through the crowd of girls bent on jostling him. This one planted herself directly in front of him, and with calm assurance ejaculated, "I say, is it cold up there?"

Stimulated by much that we had seen and been told in Edinburgh, a few of us girls resolved to set about forming a Girls' Guild, for our own mutual help, comfort, and consolation in the first place. Then, we thought, if things went well, some outside work would surely come to hand.

Our minister encouraged us, kindly gave us the use of the lecture hall, and made a few practical suggestions. The idea seemed to be popular. The first dozen or so that we asked to join agreed warmly, and we formed our Committee, choosing President, Vice-President, and Treasurer from those who were out of their teens, and so had a little wider experience. Some simple rules were framed, and after a few pleasant meetings the question came up, "Now what are we to do?"

Naturally, we looked round to see whom we could benefit. The small annual subscription expected from each member made a respectable amount, speedily augmented as it was by voluntary gifts from outside sympathisers. Near the church which we all attend is a Home for Waifs and Strays, who, after training of all kinds, are drafted off, generally to Canada. It was proposed to give these outcasts a Christmas tree and an evening which they would remember pleasantly long years after. We decorated the lecture room, invited the thirty little inmates then in the Home, warmed and filled them with kindly words and a plentiful tea. We played games until we were almost footsore, though the children seemed as fresh as ever. Then we had singing, and a short address from our minister, who, fortunately, has the happy knack of making himself young again whenever that is desirable. After that, every child took from the tree a gay-coloured, long muslin purse filled with sweets, a suitable card for hanging at the head of each bed, and

an orange for after consumption. The satisfaction of the poor little lonely children was really almost too deep for words. They were safely conveyed back, tired by this time, but happy too. So were we.

Some of our rules might be mentioned as helping to explain our plan of working. We meet once a fortnight during the winter months. Each meeting the President or other official opens and closes with a short prayer. Every member is expected to contribute at least sixpence a year to our funds. A record of every subscriber is entered in our minute-book, but the sum is never set down: the total only of whatever may be paid in at any Guild meeting is recorded. So no girl is kept away from fear of demands upon a slender purse; while any who have largeness of means as well as heart can benefit our funds. As yet, every year has closed with a balance on the right side.

Every member is bound to take an active interest in some distinct work for others. Sunday-school teaching, hospital visitation, reading to some sick poor, a certain amount of time weekly consecrated to Dorcas work—all are open for selection. Materials to be made up at home are purchased from the Guild funds, and then sold to such poor people as bear a good character, at about two-thirds of the cost price, the labour of course being given into the bargain. Our girls take a real pride in doing our work well, and the pretty little frocks which some of our handy members can devise from a remnant or a cast-off dress of Mrs. Blank, are bought up as soon as finished. Thanks to the industry of our members we have been able to have three sales of clothing, and at each we have achieved the pleasant results of empty tables, warmly appreciative buyers, and a return of money for future purchases of material, quite sufficient to set us all busily at work again.

Close to our church is a very poor neighbourhood—our mission district, in fact. The idea was mooted of trying a meeting once a month, in the room down there where a missionary gathers what is almost a ragged school every Sunday, and has organised a Band of Hope and other similar agencies. None of us felt quite able "to give an address," even to girls; yet we could not gather them merely to sit and look at one another.

Again some Scotch experiences solved our difficulty, and with grave doubt as to our powers, we resolved to try a cooking class. A gas stove was hired, which, with the necessary tubing, only costs the Guild about 6s. each winter. A few slips were printed, and several of us undertook to distribute them through the district.

From the first the interest and attendance have steadily increased. Some older—and generally married—lady kindly gives the lesson, but the Guild are gaining confidence, and will soon be able to dispense with such crutches.

On a large blackboard we write down from the dictation of our "demonstrator," the dishes which have been chosen for the evening lesson, the quantity and price of each article required, and the time necessary for cooking, as nearly as may be; for stoves and hands do differ so very much, we find. Then one of us cleans saucepan, frying-pan, or baking-dish, as may be wanted; another chops suet, or washes vegetables, thus saving the time of the demonstrator, who mixes and makes, explaining each part of the process, and giving the reasons for it. It is amusing to see all the note books and pencils which are brought

into use, and most gratifying to find out afterwards from some voluble, kindly soul, that "Betsy tried that dish you had at the cooking class last time, miss, and the boys didn't leave a pick in the dish!"

Of course sometimes our youth and inexperience make us slip. One night a brand new spoon was left too long in a saucepan of boiling rice, and when remembered only the handle and a bit of the bowl remained. But we flatter ourselves that on the whole, we have presented a very respectable front to our certainly critical but increasingly kindly constituency.

One meat and one sweet dish—pudding or cake—is made on each night; and we find that a "sweet tooth" is by no means confined to children. If the meat dish cannot be sufficiently cooked in the time at our disposal, we say clearly how much additional must be given at home; for we sell every viand at the close of the lesson at the price of the materials, which, as all is clearly written down on the blackboard, anyone present can easily calculate. If the result is satisfactory, the competition for its possession is often amusingly keen.

The dishes, bowls, etc., of course have to go home with their contents. To the credit of the district, it should be added, that in no case has any article so lent been lost or injured. All come back at the next lesson clean and in good order.

Twice we have persuaded ladies skilled in nursing, to come and give a very mild ambulance lesson. The poor people are so very ignorant what to do when any one faints, or meets with what is unhappily very frequent, with so much machinery in the mills—a severe cut. Bread and linseed poultices were made; the use of cotton wool with mustard sprinkled between two thin folds in place of the ordinary mustard poultice; the mode of bandaging arm, wrist, or leg, all shown clearly. Our Guild members were intensely interested, and made valuable notes; but the other girls rather shrank from what they seemed to look upon as "horrors," and we are doubtful about repeating the experiment.

Many of the Guild are communicants, and one of our rules is, that all who have that privilege should avail themselves of it at each partaking of the Sacrament. We do not absent ourselves without grave reason. Also, in cases of sickness, the Guild deposes two members to visit and enquire.

During last summer it was resolved to create some interest in missions, and to arrange for a sale of useful and fancy articles as early in the winter as might be found practicable. Each member kindly undertook both to work and beg, and this first effort resulted in over £22 being paid to our treasurer for missions. We object altogether either to balloting or raffling. We charged 3d. only for admission, and we only made or asked for articles which could be justly sold under 5s. each.

One thing remains to be added; a very serious source of disquietude to those on whom the management mainly depends. An alarming and wide-spreading epidemic of matrimony has broken out among the members! Perhaps after all it may be regarded as a valuable outside testimony to the actual efficiency of the Guild, but as our married girls pass from our ranks, and become "honorary members," some of us regard that increasing list with very doubtful satisfaction.

If our experience should be helpful to other girls similarly anxious for united work, we shall be glad that we have made it public.