

GIRLS AS NEEDLEWORKERS FOR THE POOR.

By H.R.H. THE PRINCESS MARY ADELAIDE, DUCHESS OF TECK.

I AM glad at this opportunity of explaining the working of the London Needlework Guild to the readers of THE GIRL'S OWN PAPER. I want to point out its extreme simplicity, so that, should any reader wish to join us, she may do so without delay. So little is asked of anyone, that all classes, all ages—even the very busy invalids—can enroll themselves as Associates. All that is required of a member is, to send in yearly two articles of good, useful clothing. And let me here anticipate a question which is generally asked, namely, "Is an Associate bound to do the work herself?" Having undertaken to send two articles of work, I should say decidedly she is bound to do those two articles herself, if capable. Should she wish to contribute more things to the Guild, she is at perfect liberty to have them made elsewhere and send them with her own.

What makes the success of the Guild (I measure its success by its usefulness) is the small efforts of the many—we must have the many, or we could not do much. Perhaps it will astonish you to hear that the result of these little efforts last year produced in England alone 250,000 articles.

Now there are five points to which I should like to call your attention, for I think they will interest you in the work.

- 1st. How did it originate?
- 2nd. How is it managed?
- 3rd. What are its objects?
- 4th. What shall I make?
- 5th. What becomes of the work?

1st. The Guild originated in Dorsetshire, from the following simple circumstance. Lady Wolverton was asked by the matron of her Orphanage to do, within a given time, an impossible number of knitted articles for the boys. It occurred to her to ask co-operation of people staying with her; which proved so successful, that the idea of co-operation on a larger scale resulted in starting the Needlework Guild in Dorsetshire, London and Birmingham soon following—London not vigorously till 1885, since when it has increased steadily.

Two things are always present in life—*Waste* and *Want*; in a way they act upon one another. "Waste makes want." *Want*, we know, will never cease to exist in some measure; but *Waste* depends upon ourselves; there is no necessity for it. Idleness is waste of time; extravagance is waste of material. The Guild is meant to make use of this double waste for the relief of want. It begins with time; instead of folded hands it encourages busy fingers. A friend not long ago wrote: "You will never know how many people the Guild has made industrious;" and one of our Vice-Presidents, now never idle, owned that before joining the Guild she never did a "stitch of work." Having accomplished the redemption of time, now let us see as to material. Every year teaches me more the value of those despised things, "scraps," which include not only our own individual odds and ends, but the patterns sent us from shops. Provided a Guild article is well made, strong, and plain, the number of pieces in it does not matter at all. Of course, if you buy special material, buy enough; but if you have odds and ends, use them. You will get so ingenious in time, you will think it commonplace not to have to contrive. We now pass on to:—

2nd. How is it managed? In London and Surrey we have entirely adopted the Group system, the advantage of which is, that you can always rely on a certain number of workers and a certain number of articles. The regulation Group consists of a President, 5 Vice-Presidents, and 50 Associates, so that 56 workers and 112 articles is its smallest result. I have known a Group contribute 4,000

articles; have heard of a London Vice-President sending in 350, and one Associate 90. Every large branch of the Guild has a Secretary, who corresponds with the Presidents only. The Associates are responsible to their Vice-Presidents only, and the Vice-Presidents to their President. This sub-division of work answers admirably; nothing goes smoothly or lasts long that has not some defined rules; and rules once made must be adhered to. Our next point is:—

3rd. What are its objects? Its objects are two: first, benefit to workers; second, benefit from work. I am not sure whether the first is not the more important of the two benefits. We express it as "encouraging useful work, and giving an object to all." We all own that work is dreary that has no object; the Guild gives you one; you work with the happy certainty that your work will go where it is most wanted; the more you work the more it will interest you. Seven years' experience shows this, not only in the increased amount sent by individuals, but in increased

We now come to the last question.

5th. What becomes of the work? I know this is most interesting to us all. From the time of its leaving the Associates' hands till its final destination, it undergoes a good deal of sorting, listing, and packing; but every article is most carefully dealt with and judiciously bestowed. It may give you some idea of the amount of labour our London Guild gives, when I tell you that the things take one week to unpack and arrange; they are then on view for three days; and that over, a fortnight more is occupied in repacking and sending each parcel to its destination. A ladder is required for stacking the shirts, and the woollen petticoats, when massed, cover the space of three large wardrobes. So much for the work.

Now as to our Annual Meeting. In London we have but one meeting a year; it is held under our General President, and is attended by all Presidents of Groups, who alone form the Committee of Management. The first act is to read the amount of clothing sent in, then the application papers. Each President for every 150 articles she sends in is entitled to apply for a grant, the responsibility resting with her to ascertain that the application she makes is in all respects suitable. Having made this sure, she forwards the application paper to the Secretary. It is most important to impress upon the minds of Presidents that it is by no means certain that an application, if too often repeated, will be successful, as the most important, most urgent, cases will be first supplied. It is absolutely essential to exclude all personal feeling from the question of distribution; we all work for others, not for any special object or hobby of our own; we must freely give without a thought of return; our gifts must go where they are most needed. It is better to send a large grant to a very poor parish or mission than to subdivide it, and send help to three or four places in less actual want.

A great responsibility rests with the Committee, and the Guild will be a failure if anything of favoritism, or partiality, in fact, of self, is allowed to enter the decisions of the Presidents. Those most in want, whoever they be, wherever they be, are those we have combined to help.

The work in London goes, as we have seen before, to parishes. In some of these parishes the number of inhabitants is from 10,000 to 20,000. The power of help is very limited, and the articles sent very often enable children to go to school, and mothers to venture out, there being hundreds of people in London with no underclothing worth mentioning. Do not be alarmed by the red rag of "pauperising;" if they can pay they are allowed to pay the cost of the material, and it is better they should; but if they cannot, they cannot, and that absolutely necessary is given to them.

Only two more words; one is to the recipients of a grant. Keep it for emergencies—the Guild is a supplement, not a substitute. There are occasions when it is of immense use to have a store of clothing by you. One such occurred in Dorsetshire the other day, when a whole village was burnt down.

My last word is to men. We still appeal anxiously to them to join us—of course not as workers, but as honorary members; we ask them to contribute, either in money or kind, the wherewithal to add to our scanty supply of clothing for men and boys.

All communications relating to the work of the London Needlework Guild, on the part of those wishing to join in the useful work, should be made direct to the Hon. Secretary, Mrs. Basil Ellis, 9, Southwick Crescent, London, W., enclosing a stamped envelope for reply.



H.R.H. THE DUCHESS OF TECK.
(Photograph by Russell & Sons.)

excellence of everything: patience, perseverance, industry, sympathy, are all encouraged by the Guild. May we not, then, call it a benefit to workers?

As to benefit from work, just think of the good that must be done in London, where last year 39,046 things were divided amongst 203 parishes, hospitals, missions, homes. If you could only see some of the grateful letters, your fingers would work with increased speed. We can never send too much; every year the demand for our help increases; we wish never to have to refuse any application.

4th. "What to make?" is answered in a very few words. Make the strongest, plainest, largest articles of underclothing you can, for man, woman, or child, which include day, night, and flannel shirts and waistcoats for men and boys; shifts, aprons, gowns, night-gowns, petticoats, nightingales, etc., for women; all garments for little girls, children, and babies. Warm garments are preferred, and woollen frocks. Sheets, etc., are wanted. Shawls, petticoats, socks and stockings, comforters and crossovers, for those who prefer knitting and crochet, are always asked for in abundance.