



WORK FOR SQUIRES' DAUGHTERS.

By BARRETT KNOX.

I WAS asked some time ago "what work can the squires' daughters do in a parish?" The question set me thinking, that perhaps our experiences might be helpful to other girls, who want to do more than they have hitherto attempted amongst their neighbours, girls who would like to know their people better, and who would like to carry sunshine into other lives, if they only had an idea how to set to work.

I am writing to the "squires' daughters" simply in distinction to "clergymens' daughters," because the latter have their work, as it were, cut out for them, with church choir, schools, and mothers' meetings. In our parish these things are managed by the rector's wife and others; and we could choose what we liked to do, always taking care that our work did not clash with other people's. In a small parish endless would be the middle if all did not work together *au fond*.

Our first attempt was a Saturday class for the girls who liked to come to us, for two hours in the afternoon, once a fortnight. We found a weekly meeting did not answer well, as the mothers could not spare their daughters regularly, and it worked better to have a fixed fortnightly meeting; which turned out to be such a pleasure to the girls, that the parents soon arranged to do their own marketing, etc., on alternate Saturdays; and thus be at home to mind small sisters and brothers, and set the elders free.

We began our meetings with ten minutes' singing of hymns; then one of us read some portion of the Bible, explaining it; and then the whole class did needle-work while one of us read aloud. The work was generally for charity, the girls liking to make frocks for other poor children, or to hem sheets for emigrants in whom they were interested. We found that our alternate Saturday mornings had to be devoted to preparing the work and cutting it out. We sometimes took a walk through the conservatory.

Our class has now been going on for six years, and we have started a Scripture Union, to which all the girls belong, so that I keep in touch with those who have gone out to service; and we write to each other at Christmas, or when they leave their places.

This year we are teaching crochet instead of needle-work; not ornamental, but useful

crochet, namely, Cardigan vests. Each girl began by making a pair of warm cuffs, which they took home to give away with much pride; and now they are getting well forward with their warm vests for this winter's presents, for sick, and old people, or for small brothers.

Our girls' class being in good working order, I was staying with friends, who begged me to try to get hold of some of the young men in our parish. I can honestly say my heart failed me at such a prospect. But we talked it over with my father, and he thought it would be as well to try. Some of the men we knew slightly, as their parents had lived for many years in the village, others we knew very well by sight as they had been born in the place, and we had often spoken to them; but it was a very different thing to discuss the weather, or a local cricket match with one or two men, to having a roomful to interest.

We took counsel from friends who, having started with two men, now held classes of about sixty in number; and we moulded their ideas to ours. For you will find that what is liked in one place does not give pleasure in another. My sister and I went round the village, and told any men we found at home (and their womenkind if the men were out) that we proposed holding a Sunday evening class for all unmarried men above fourteen years old, in our house, at half-past five o'clock. We had a very small number at first, but gradually we increased, until after five years we generally numbered twenty or twenty-two lads. Our room is small, so we cannot admit married men who have their own homes to stay in; while many of the ploughmen who come to us, being only "lodgers," are not wanted in the one sitting-room every evening, and so it is important to get hold of them, and keep them from the public house. We limit the age to over fourteen, as if the lads are younger they do not understand what interests the older men, and you cannot get a mixed class of little boys and men to be successful. After trying several plans we find the following to be most approved of.

We start our class in the autumn, as soon as afternoon service is held instead of evening church.

We cease to hold our meetings in April,

when the evening service is recommenced, for the men can go to evening church, but are unable to attend in the afternoon as they have their horses and animals to feed, etc.

We begin at five-thirty, with three-quarters of an hour's singing—Moody and Sankey's hymns—then I read a chapter or portion out of the Bible, and give them as interesting a lecture upon it as I can. Then we read the evening Psalms aloud, standing for the Gloria; then kneel down and have short prayers. Then books are laid aside and for the last half hour I read a story-book aloud; such as Cobb's *Watchers on the Longships* or *Martin Archer*.

We then have a little chat, give bottles of cough mixture to those who, alas, too often need it in the winter, find out how invalids are at home; and if it is a very cold or snowy night, hot coffee is served out all round. We find not only do the men continue coming year after year, but they bring their friends and the new hands; and both married men and those in neighbouring villages want to join. This our lack of space forbids.

We are a small parish with only about twenty-five unmarried labourers in it. Last year we begged the men to join our Bible-reading club—giving them some weeks to think it over, and try it in before joining—and to our great joy, they all gave in their names; and now we have over forty men and seventy girls who belong to our daily Bible-reading club.

The men soon told us that they wanted "books to read," so we started a "book-bag club." We made twenty-six strong holland bags, and into each we put four books of "sorts," each bag being numbered and having a list of its contents sewn inside.

These books we left at the cottages, where our men live, and once a month we change them, each bag moving on a house. By this means we visit every house in the village once a month, and, believe me, one ought to go as often, for when the days come round, each "house frau" seems to want to see one, to tell her own particular history; and so one gets to know one's neighbours better, and to feel that a small village community is like a large family circle.

There are some rules one has to make, and keep as strictly as possible.

Always prepare the men's Sunday lesson

beforehand, getting up the subject thoroughly. I try and write my lesson on Friday; it takes about two hours, for one has to master the subject by heart, so as to be able to watch the men while talking to them. Oh! the wonderful feeling as one sits opposite that double row of eager faces. Not one word do they speak; but I can read directly they are moved, or understand what I say, as their feelings sway with the words of the "old, old story." It is like playing on a dumb piano, the music of which is only heard in heaven.

Another rule is, try and lead the higher life yourself, that you would show to your men. How can you preach of the better way to them, if you do not love it yourself?

We find our lives so much more interesting and fuller, since we worked for so many round us. The girls and men know we really care about what they do and what they are.

They bring us flowers and queer gifts. One wet night two boys brought me a "bat-mouse," with a warning, "not to let it bite me." Poor little bat! I soon set it free. Another man found a beautiful flint arrow-head while ploughing, after a lesson on "stones;" a third tramped miles round to pass our house, to tell me he was doing well as a navy, when I had lost sight of him for many months. Another, enlisted in a crack regiment, writes that "he keeps on with the Bible-reading at nights," and I know that means a struggle. Another sends me drawings he has done. Another begs me to bring the camera, and "take his team of horses," while a friend of his assures me "it 'd make a pretty pictur'," and so it does, in the early morning light, as the sower stands up against the pale sky. One can give so much pleasure to lives that are rather dull. I have had a message early one morning from the forge by the river, "Would miss please come down, the old grey mare's bein' shod." Down I went with my camera-bearer, to find a scene worthy of Landseer, and to be offered early breakfast at one of the cottages, of home-made ginger-beer and ham!

Be careful never to repeat in one cottage what is told you in another, and never listen to stories of or against neighbours. This is a difficult rule to enforce at first, but it is soon quite easy to keep. I am of course writing of a very small village, and what is possible for us might be impossible in a larger parish; but to girls who, like ourselves, are poor, as far as money is concerned, and who are not very strong, I would say, do not be discouraged. There is so much you can do. Get hold of the children, let them come to you. Get hold of the young men, and you will find that the more truly in touch you want to get with them all, the tighter hold you must keep on yourself. One cannot preach to others, and be oneself a castaway. Your words have no more weight than thistle-down, if the men cannot respect you. If only women knew how much they throw away when they so lightly cast aside that "self-reverence, self-knowledge, and self-control," which makes the "perfect woman nobly planned," they would oftener check themselves, and their hasty actions.

Do not say you have nothing to give, if you have any time, any kindness, any sympathy to bestow. Try what such alms are worth.



IN THE CONSERVATORY.