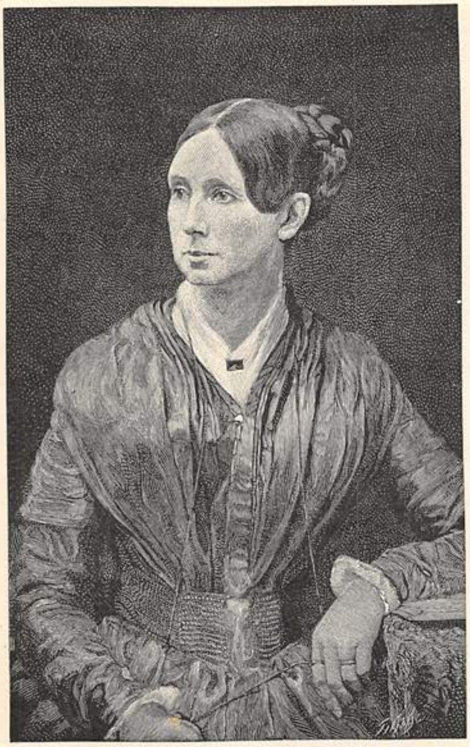
DOROTHEA DIX.



ENGRAVED BY R. G. TIETZE.

DOROTHEA L. DIX.

THE passion for self-effacement cherished by Dorothea Dix had, and continues to have, its effect on her fame. During the period of her journeys up and down the civilized regions of the world, her name became indeed a household word; but beyond the circle of those with whom she dealt directly, few knew aught of her achievements, save that she labored especially for the amelioration of the condition of the insane. The five closing years of her life were passed in retirement, and she slipped out of this mortal existence as quietly as she had labored in it. Not above half a dozen of her closer friends gathered at the open grave of her who was considered by one of them the most useful and distinguished woman America has produced. Nor since the appearance, a year or more ago, of Francis Tiffany's sympathetic and in every way admirable biography, does the general interest in her seem to have increased. Here, Silence has her fame in ward, while one can but believe that,

> Somewhere out of human view,
> Whate'er her hands are set to do
> Is wrought with tumult of acclaim.

Yet she is one of the half-dozen women to whom the Republic owes deep gratitude and lasting recognition. Her record of direct achievement transcends that of any other philanthropist. But she regarded popularity, in the ordinary sense of the word, as a degradation. A thorough aristocrat in loftiness of spirit, she was averse to it, though she prized the competent judgment of the few on her works. Self-contained, austere, proud with a pride such as commands admiration, she stands apart in the American Valhalla, even from the friends who loved her — men such as Channing, Sumner, Whittier, Dr. Howe, and others of her contemporaries of eminence.

Her distinctive vocation contributed to this aloofness. In its realms both sufferers and succorers are beyond the pale of the ordinary world-life. Their experience is not blazoned by newspaper head-lines. They live in a kind of Hades, a shadow-land, separate from the world of bodily sickness and health, and from the affairs which occupy the mass of mankind. The most capable and devoted specialist, entering the portal of this Hades, leaves no name behind, save in his medical fraternity. And, as would appear from the record of Miss Dix, the most eminent philanthropist, in entering that realm, invites a similar fate. In both cases the renunciation is absolute.

The force of her character asserted itself distinctly in her fourteenth year. Burdened with the prospect of the support and education of herself and of her two brothers, both much younger than herself, she opened, at that age, a school for young children. To give herself an adult appearance, she lengthened her sleeves and her skirts. But her imposing beauty, her air of command, her seriousness, needed no externals to enhance their impressing effect. The children recognized in the larger child a teacher not to be trifled with; a teacher who, though little older than themselves, could inspire an awe that commanded their obedience by placing a mortgage on their reverence. At nineteen she was girl-principal of a day- and boarding-school, and exercising the same severe, if also beneficent, moral power. During a period of ill health she served as governess to Dr. Channing's daughters, one of whom describes her discipline as inflexible; an iron will, from which it was hopeless to appeal; a will as unchangeable as the Mœræ themselves.

But her character, like that of all strong personalities, was composed of contrasts which manifested themselves as occasion demanded, under the control of tender intuitions and sound judgment. With the rigor of a Puritan, she had also the Puritan's warmth of affection, and was "full of heart-break" for the closer ties of love. Menaced with an early death, she could not bear the thought of leaving her little brother, to whom she was sister-mother. All through her life she suffered from hunger for love. One of her last words uttered, or put on paper, was "Darling!" addressed to one of her lifelong friends.

By patient submission to discipline she softened her proud spirit with the gentle arts of tact and persuasion. Terrible in rebuke, feared by the incompetent or the guilty, she yet exercised a tender constraining power, a winning patience, not to be resisted, a veritable patience of the saints. "Yours is a goodness that never tires, a benevolence that never wearies," wrote President Fillmore to her. "I wonder at your patience and equanimity."

This blending of virile force with womanly sweetness, the fusion of austere and winning elements, rendered her at times angelic and irresistible. Her record is marked with successes gained by her power over individuals, inexplicable save by these harmonized contrasting elements. For example, early in her philanthropic career she wished to enlarge a small asylum for the insane, in Providence, Rhode Island, and to that end she appealed to a millionaire, devoted to money-making and with no special fondness for benevolence. In anticipation, the task was thought by her friends to be like drawing milk out of a stone. In the interview the rich man began by keeping her at a distance with prolonged conversation on commonplace generalities, a conversation which she humored for a time; but at last, rising, with commanding dignity, she announced her errand. She gave an array of facts that described the sufferings of men and women who were his townspeople and fellow-citizens; she spoke as though in all the world there were no beings but these children of sorrow, the man she was addressing, and the God who avenges the sufferings of the neglected, the cruelly afflicted. Her auditor listened, more and more constrained by her low-voiced eloquence, and, when she ended, asked what she would have him do. She said that she wanted fifty thousand dollars for the enlargement of the asylum, the only one in the city; and he then and there promised her the money. Inasmuch as such a sum is a prospective million in hands that can turn it to advantage, its surrender from such a man was creditable to the giver not less than to the pleader. But who can instruct us in the magic used by the gentle, invalid school-teacher to roll away the stone from the long-sealed sepulcher in which the money-getter's heart had lain unstirred by any pulse of sympathy, and in the power of cogent statement and impassioned fervor that loosened the rooted habit of a lifetime?

Again, having obtained an appropriation from Congress for a hospital at Washington, D. C., for the insane of the army and the navy, a desirable site for the building was discovered, a homestead owned by a Mr. Blagden, who refused to sell it, the estate being greatly prized by his wife and daughters, and valued at $40,000, while the appropriation for a site allowed only $25,000. Her friend, Dr. Nichols, having exhausted his eloquence unavailingly upon the owner, said: "There is nothing more to be done. We shall have to give the matter up; and it is the finest site for a hospital in the world." Miss Dix replied in her usual quiet tone, "We must try what can be done." She procured an interview with the owner of the place, and so movingly represented to him the good that could be accomplished for hundreds of sufferers, if he would surrender his home, that he was persuaded to yield it, to his considerable personal loss, for the sum specified by the bill. None the less the parting with it cost him a fearful wrench; for when Dr. Nichols called next day, with the requisite papers to sign, the good man was walking the room to and fro, weeping, and wringing his hands in a half-hysteric condition. "I don't want to part with it," he reiterated. "It is dear to me and dear to my family; but I won't break my word to Miss Dix; I won't break my word! I told her she should have it, and she shall have it."

In besieging a State for suitable provision for its indigent insane,—and she achieved her self-appointed task in twenty of the great States,—her first step was the visiting of every jail and almshouse in it, taking ample notes at each station, and accumulating thus a mass of eye-witness testimony from which she drew up her memorials. These were written with a reserve force, a pathos, and a power, coupled with judgment, that elicited tributes of praise from some of the most eminent judicial officials of the land. For, as necessary to her work, she studied the art of statement and of vital appeal till she had made herself mistress of the forces of her native speech. "She studied language as the soldier grinds his sword, to make it cut." Born to the royalty of leadership, she had an infallible instinct for discovering a like capacity in others, and for attaching to her cause the directors of the social and political world. Her memorial ready for presentation, she confided it to men of high character and ability, cognizant of every appliance likely to be used by the party of opposition. But as the sentiment of humanity to the insane was one that had to be created in the early part of her career, and, in some quarters of the Union, in all periods of her career, she had to educate many of her public helpers up to it by conversations, editorials, and all the other enginery of the spoken and written word. During the session of a legislature she received evenings, in her parlor, from fifteen to twenty of the leading members, with whom she discoursed for one, two, and three hours. In the morning she was up before the sun writing articles for the local press. "You cannot imagine the labor of conversing and converting," she wrote to a friend. She grew familiar with political types, and for many men of accredited influence she entertained a quiet, prudently disguised contempt. Abhorrent indeed was it to her proud and ardent spirit to descend to the level of the demagogue battening in the sties of the proletariate. But she turned that spirit to patience and sweetness with all sorts of men, in the service whereto she was called; and however rude or low were the natures she wrought on, if they held anything of good she could make it manifest and utilize it. In the tact and patience that achieved these continual individual victories lay the hiding-place of her power.

A rural New Jersey member who had announced in the House that the wants and sufferings of the insane of the State "were all humbug," went to her parlor to silence her with his arguments, but was constrained by her gentle force to listen to hers. At the end of an hour and a half he moved into the middle of the room, and thus delivered himself: "Ma'am, I bid you good night. I do not want, for my part, to hear anything more; the others can stay if they want to, *I am convinced;* you 've conquered me out and out; I shall vote for the hospital. If you 'll come to the House and talk there as you 've done here, no man that is n't a brute can stand you; and so, when a man 's convinced, that 's enough. The Lord bless you!" Thereupon he took his departure.

The great and, for a time, crushing affliction of her life was the veto President Pierce put upon a bill for the passage of which in Congress she had given the arduous labors of six years. The first form of the bill was a petition for 5,000,000 acres of the public lands, to be apportioned among the States, for provision, in the form of a perpetual fund, for the care of the insane. This bill had a partial success during the first two years of its urging; but the opposition it excited led Miss Dix, to whom opposition was ever a tonic, to enlarge it by a request for 12,225,000 acres—about 20,000 square miles—for the same purpose, allowing the odd 225,000 for provision for the deaf and dumb. By sustained and most strenuous exertions on her part, the bill thus enlarged passed the Senate, in 1854, by a more than two-thirds majority, and the House by a plurality of fourteen; one of the signal moral achievements of history. The President had evinced a personal interest in the progress of this effort; but his attitude toward slavery, the burning question of the period, affected his perception of the real or prospective rights of others held in bonds, and of the various phases of human suffering. The reasons he gave for resisting "the deep sympathies of his heart" were ably answered in the Senate; but a veto altereth not. No one anticipated this bolt out of a clear sky, yet it seems certain that could Miss Dix have had warning of it, the President himself might have been led to doubt the reasonableness of the principles on which he grounded his action.

To collect her spent and scattered energies she went across the seas. But there was no escape from the attestations of her affections, nor her ruling passion. Almost immediately she set about the remodeling of the lunacy laws of Scotland. The high officials resented her intrusion; when they obstructed her way, she left for London, getting the start of the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, who went also, to contravene her. She was introduced by Lord Shaftesbury to the Duke of Argyle, and to Sir George Gray, the Home Secretary, with whom she had one of those soul-searching interviews recorded in no book save that of the divine Recorder. She had a similar one with the Lord Advocate, with the result of an appointment, by order of the Queen, of two commissions of investigation, and two years later of an act of Parliament, passed without serious opposition, for the remodeling of the laws referred to. The swiftness of this achievement of an invalid woman, an "invader," whose labors were compressed within a period of two months, contrasts with a defeat along the same lines, nine years before, when Lord Rutherford, who at that time was Lord Advocate, and Sir George Gray failed to secure the passage of a similar bill. Again and again did the friends of our American philanthropist, in Scotland, express their astonishment at her power to impress persons of influence, and urge her presence as essential to the completion of the reform she had begun.

If anything could surpass these instances of her success with individuals high in place and power, it was her experience with Pius IX. In 1856 Italy was a sink of political rottenness. The Pope had been powerless during his much troubled reign to improve the condition of his public institutions; and as a result, the hospitals and prisons of the city were centers of confusion and disorder. Miss Dix found the hospitals of Constantinople supplied with more appliances of comfort than were those of Rome; and though she disapproved of much that she saw elsewhere in Italy, she regarded the institutions of the country with comparative favor after investigating those of the pontifical center. Everywhere she had not merely to convince government officers, but to make stand against the priests. An appeal to the Pope involved an incalculable amount of care, time, patience, and negotiation. How to tell the supreme pontiff of Western Christendom that, in the light of modern science and humanity, the asylum of his cathedral city was a disgrace and a scandal; to tell him not offensively, but so graciously as to win him by persuasions, and yet to tell him by the mouth of a foreign Protestant, a woman, self-elected to the mission—were even the offenseless weapons of this latter-day saint sufficient for this thing? With her wonted sagacity she gained the support of Antonelli, who, notwithstanding certain well-known shortcomings, had a large sense of humanity. When the day came for her audience, she found the Pope in benignant mood, and happily at home in English, so that an interpreter was not needed. He expressed himself as surprised and shocked at the details of her recital, and promised to make a personal examination of the hospital of the city, which he did within a day or two, unannounced, taking the officials unawares. In a second audience he acknowledged the bad condition of the institution, and thanked this audacious American Protestant Theresa. Cries of distress elsewhere called her from Rome; but it was understood in its official circles that she would return to it, if the promises made her were not early redeemed. This announcement, given with no air of menace, but carrying a weight of character behind it, procured that a physician was sent to France to study the methods of the asylums of that country; procured also the purchase of land for a suitable retreat just outside the Porta del Popolo, and ere long, the erection of a building, a refuge for the mentally afflicted of the city. A visitor to it in 1876 reports good and humane management, considering the poverty of the country, and the general status, somewhat backward, as yet, of its medical knowledge and practice.

That her remarkable personal influence was not merely of transient or occasional manifestation is attested by superintendents whose institutions were visited at frequent stated intervals by the "gentle lady" but "terrible reformer" who exercised it. "To have her suddenly arrive at your asylum, and find aught neglected or amiss, was considerably worse than an earthquake," said Dr. Ray of Providence. "Not that she said anything on the spot, but one felt something ominous suspended in the very air." Another wrote:

> Your clear and unmistakable showing of our defects is the greatest boon you could have conferred. I did not misunderstand those criticisms . . . so applicable to us. Not only has every observation been carefully treasured, but every word which could be remembered has been made the text for suggestive commentaries of my own.

And still another, with a deference rarely used by a professional man to a woman, without diploma, even though she be a woman with a record:

> I have diligently striven to do . . . what I thought you would approve—always feeling a responsibility to your prospective approbation in carrying on a work which is rightfully yours. If you can say "Well done" to what is done, I shall be glad. Your confidence and friendship are a well of pleasure, a tower of strength, to me. I think I appreciate them. I hope they are not misplaced.

"Those who heard her when she addressed the nurses and attendants of a new asylum," writes Mr. Tiffany, "say they never listened to such moving speech from human lips." Her auditory would be wrought to mingled tears and exultation, as though their call to serve the suffering had descended to them audibly out of the heavens.

It would be impossible, save in a more extended space than the limits of this paper will admit, to do anything more than refer to her visits among jails and prisons; her labors as Superintendent of Nurses during the civil war; her foresight and quickness of decision in giving warning in the hour of emergency to the one man who could bar the roads to the National capital from the armed insurgent forces whose design was to occupy it and to prevent, if need were, by the assassin's bullet, the inauguration of the President-elect; her labors as a builder of more than one of the stately structures, grants for which she had procured from the State, and of a monument for the Union soldiers who had fallen on the field, or had perished in the prison pen or the hospital ward; her procuring of libraries and of life-saving appliances for those who serve at the coast-stations for the rescue of the shipwrecked—labors any one of which would have sufficed to fill the measure of the strength, and to crown with honor a character of less large proportions than was this woman's, who gave herself to world-wide beneficence, not for emoluments, nor as a means of support, but wholly out of love for her kind, her disabled brethren and sisters of the human family.

Her voice was of a quality that controlled the rudest and the most violent; sweet, rich, low, perfect in enunciation, pervaded in every tone by love and power. Her apparel was quiet, spotlessly neat, and uniquely tasteful—

the apparel of a delicate, high-bred Friend. A plain gray dress sufficed for traveling, a black silk one was reserved for social and public occasions. A shawl or velvet mantle without ornament she reserved for occasions when she was to meet persons of high social or public position. Her waving brown hair was brought over the temples, and carried above the ears, in the fashion of the period. Her soft, brilliant, blue-gray eyes, with pupils so dilating as to cause the eyes to seem black; the bright glow of her cheeks; her shapely head set on a neck so long, flexible, and graceful as to impart an air of distinction to her carriage—all expressed the blending of dignity, force, and tenderness in her character. She was one of those who have greatness thrust upon them. She never sought nor proclaimed it, but bore herself with an endearing humility to the last, leaving the impress of a life inimitable, truly, in its proportions, but precious in its efficiency, in its absence of ostentation, and in its deep-seated but never cymbal-clanging piety.

Mary S. Robinson.

TOPICS OF THE TIME.

The Proposed Recession of the Yosemite Valley.

NO one who has beheld the glories of the Yosemite Valley can remain indifferent to the preservation and (so far as it is possible by the work of man) the enhancement of the attractiveness of this phenomenal scenery; and it is doubtless this penetrating impression in the minds of persons of taste which has led to the numerous and continuous protests against what are, to say the least, serious errors of judgment in the official conduct of the valley.

Remembering that the total effect of this colossal scenery is not dependent merely upon the unspoiled and unspoilable natural monuments and waterfalls, but upon the harmonious relation which these bear in the mind of the beholder to the beautiful groves and fields which form the floor of the valley, one sees the necessity of providing for this concord on the highest plane of expert intelligence.

That such intelligence has been sadly wanting, and that in the past six years respectful appeals to members of the successive boards of control for a reform of the amateur system have been contemptuously disregarded, are matters of abundant record. It will be remembered by the readers of THE CENTURY that in this magazine for January, 1890, we printed three temperate statements, made after personal investigation, calling attention to the "Destructive Tendencies in the Yosemite Valley"; and without taking responsibility for any exaggerated statements that may have been made elsewhere, we called special attention editorially to the question of greatest importance—"Has the treatment of the Yosemite landscape been intrusted to skilful hands?" This publication was not made in THE CENTURY until after the attention of an influential member of the Yosemite Commission of 1889 had been personally called to the evident necessity of reform; nor were we by any means the first to take this view of the matter, for so great had been the abuses resulting from the lack of intelligent supervision that, at the original instance of Mr. Charles D. Robinson, a previous investigation of the matter had been made by a legislative committee, which revealed, at least, that the landscape management of the valley was not on the high plane demanded by the character of the scenery.

In presenting to our readers at that time photographic views showing unskilful treatment of the landscape, we said:

> Without going into the details of the alleged abuses, monopolies, rings, and persecutions, it is easy to see in the above testimony and photographs abundant confirmation of those who hold that the valley has not had the benefit of expert supervision. In saying this we are not impugning the good faith of past or present commissions or commissioners, appointed for other reasons than their skilfulness in the treatment of landscape. They are certainly to be acquitted of any intention to injure the valley: that would be unbelievable. It is no reproach to them that they are not trained foresters. Their responsibility, however, does not end there: it is, in fact, there that it begins; for, in the absence of knowledge of a professional nature, it should be their first aim to obtain the very best man or men available to do this work. No such expert is too good or too expensive, and no claim upon the budget of California should have precedence of this. If the commissioners have not money enough for this expenditure, it is part of their duty as holders of a great trust to arouse a public sentiment which shall procure the proper appropriation. The press of the country, which is never backward in such matters, would lend an effective support to the demand for funds for this most necessary expert care.

Evidence is not wanting that this and similar discussions of the subject were of use in bringing public opinion to bear upon the commissioners, and there is no doubt that in some respects the management of the valley has since been freer from causes of criticism. There is, however, no evidence of a fixed disposition on the part of the commissioners to recognize the crying need of expert supervision, and at their annual meeting held in June of the present year, a contract was let for the "underbrushing" of the valley at an expense of $3000, and to a person with no pretension to the requisite skill. At the time of our publication the intention to "cut down every tree that has sprouted within the last thirty years" had been announced by an active member of the commission, and it had been declared by Mr. Frederick Law Olmsted (who, it need hardly be said, stands at the head of the profession of landscape engineers in this country) that this policy, if it were carried out, "would eventually result in an irreparable calamity—a calamity to the civilized world."

It will thus be seen that this danger, against which we protested when it was nothing more than a threat, has now been put on the highway to realization. How far it will be carried, who shall say? The following extracts from a letter from Eugene F. Weigel, Special Land Inspector, written from San Francisco, October 3, 1892, as part of his report to the Hon. John W. Noble, Secretary of the Interior, tells its own story: