

## OPEN LETTERS

### Women's Work for Women and Children.

THE State of Massachusetts now has by legislation given to women a place on each board of trustees of the State charitable and reformatory institutions and on the Prison Commission. Women also have served on the State Board of Lunacy and Charity since 1880, by appointments of successive governors, though there is no statute which makes this obligatory. How have women gained these privileges, or, rather, have been allowed to perform these responsible duties? It has been said by ardent woman suffragists that «a sop» has been thrown to them in this way, as a partial compensation for their deprivation of the ballot.

Such, however, is not the case. It is a curious and interesting object-lesson to review the past, and to learn how women have been gradually introduced into the offices formerly held by men alone. The Prison Commission was established in 1870. To the legislature of that year a memorial was presented by two private charitable corporations who had been for some years engaged in the attempted reformation of discharged female prisoners. It was signed by a large number of prominent men and women concurring with the petitioners, and asked for a separate prison for women, and for a reformatory discipline in existing prisons. At the hearings before the Prison Committee of the legislature, there were various speeches on the subject. Men of high standing advocated the measure, and a few women found courage to tell the story of their experiences, and to give reasons for their request.

In answer to this petition, the legislature of that year established a Prison Commission. It consisted of three men and a secretary, the latter alone to receive compensation, and an «advisory board» of three women, who had no power whatever but the right to inspect prisons.

The prison for women was not provided; but the persons interested in its establishment continued to work for it, and at every legislature came forward to ask for it. At the suggestion of Mary Carpenter, the English philanthropist, when in Boston in 1873, a «Woman's League» was formed, which extended all over the State, and which sent in large petitions from men and women of high standing for a reformatory prison for women, under the management of women. Such a prison was built and opened in 1877, and has been in successful operation ever since.

Now this is an important thing to notice: these women who carried their measure at last, in spite of most discouraging obstacles, had no *political power*, and no personal end to gain.

They were perfectly acquainted with the matter in hand, and knew exactly what was needed for the class of persons which they desired to benefit. Their plans were founded on their own experiences in private charitable organizations. They could prove by the result of

years of labor in these that there was good reason to expect success in the prison management of women by their own sex, and also that the work of reform should begin in prison. Long after the first hearings before the Prison Committee of the legislature, a well-known politician, chairman of the committee, said to a political friend: «I remember, when those ladies first came before us, and pleaded earnestly for something to be done for outcast women, I whispered to B—— [a member of the committee], and I said, «I tell you, B——, there ain't any *politics* in all this.»»

In 1887 certain women who were dissatisfied with the working of the State almshouse and the State primary school—the latter an institution for children especially, and for training them to self-support—quietly induced two benevolent members of the legislature to introduce a bill for the appointment of a board of three women visitors to those institutions, which was enacted. They asked for no power except the right freely to inspect them, and to make an annual report to the legislature. This board merely plowed the ground; but so thorough was the plowing, and so evident was their capacity to manage charitable work, that in 1879, when the legislature reconstructed the charity laws of the State, they put two women trustees on each board of control of the State almshouse, State workhouse, State primary and reform schools, and also on the Prison Commission, giving them equal powers with their male associates. In 1884 the State Board of Lunacy and Charity recommended, in their annual report, that two women trustees should be added to each board of control of the State lunatic hospitals, and a woman physician to the medical staff of each. This was enacted by the legislature of that year, and the result has been satisfactory.

Before women had attained to their present standing on State boards, Miss Elizabeth Putnam of Boston, who had been for years working among neglected girls, had seen the value, as many others elsewhere have done, of personal friendly relations with individuals among them. She felt that the employment of paid male agents to place and visit the minor wards of the State was not the best method for *girls and young children*. She proposed to the official at the head of that department of the State board that he should avail himself of the services of women in this important work.

After several conferences with him, a plan was formed, which was carried out, and has been in operation ever since. Miss Putnam, with the assistance of two or three others, found in every county of Massachusetts certain women who were willing to perform the required service. There has now been since 1878 a corps of «auxiliary visitors», as they are termed, at present eighty-one in number. Some of these are living in other States adjoining Massachusetts, where homes are found for dependent children. They have no legal status, and no pay; but their traveling expenses necessary to the per-



formance of their duties are reimbursed quarterly from a State appropriation. They are simply private individuals acting as advisers to the State official at the head of that department. Boys over ten years old are still placed and visited by paid male agents; but girls of all classes, except the very young children who are boarded in families at State expense, come under the care of the voluntary and unpaid women visitors. The result has been excellent. Whenever Mr. Wrightington receives an application for a child to adopt, or a girl to assist in domestic work, he sends it to the visitor for that district. She visits the family, and ascertains whether the home is a suitable one. Her decision is final. She reports her reasons for disapproval, if any, to Mr. Wrightington—of course in strict confidence. She is required to find out not only whether the members of the family are of good character and able to support a child, but whether they are such persons as will train her to virtue and usefulness, and make her reasonably happy.

When the girl is placed, the visitor must see her as often as is necessary, report at least quarterly upon her condition and treatment, oftener if there is anything peculiar in the case. As some of these girls have been sentenced for petty offenses, are immoral, ill-tempered, and perverse, great patience is necessary in guiding and influencing them. Some require several changes of place before the right one is found. Volumes could be filled with the interesting details of the work. There are tragic episodes, and very funny ones. Of course the visitors are not equally zealous or efficient, but they have been, on the whole, excellent.

The Massachusetts reform schools for boys and girls are under one board of trustees, and the legislature of 1895 gave to this board increased powers. They now can find homes in suitable families for the inmates of the reform schools, and visit them personally or by agents. The two women trustees have devoted (unpaid) nearly their whole time to this new work, with excellent results.

The State primary school for children at Monson formerly contained about four hundred inmates. This institution has been abolished, owing to the boarding-out system having become general; and the Board of Lunacy and Charity now employ several paid women agents in addition to the auxiliary visitors to carry on this additional work caused by the closing of the school.

It is often said, in regard to the security of investments, that "everything depends on their management." There are in the world born leaders, of clear sight and organizing ability in business undertakings. So it is with benevolent labors. We have only to look at the noble work achieved by Charles L. Brace for destitute children in New York to see what one man can accomplish. Mrs. Lowell's long life of charitable work, and that of Miss Louise Schuyler, in the same city, also show what leading spirits, faithful and unwearied, have done for humanity. In Mr. Brace's most interesting biography, just published, we find him forty-five years ago lamenting the supineness and selfish ease of the majority of persons at that date, and pointing out the great field untilled, where noxious weeds were daily springing up to poison society in the future. Mrs. Nassau Senior's report to Parliament, in or about 1870, on the condition of workhouse children, led to the boarding-out system for young children in England. This has been

copied in Massachusetts. Beginning in 1870 with the placing in families of foundlings and deserted infants, under medical supervision by the Board of Lunacy and Charity, with great saving of life from this method, it has been extended to older children in charge of that board. Not only are children far better in every way reared in domestic life than in the best-managed institution, but they become useful and self-supporting at an earlier age.

It is sad to read the long columns of our metropolitan journals which describe the doings of women,—hospitality perverted into ostentatious display, wholesome recreation sunk into a life of pleasure-seeking, women's clubs uttering a great deal of frothy nonsense and mutual admiration,—and to contrast this with the depths below of misery, vice, and ignorance—a turbid stream beneath these bubbles on the surface of society.

There is an army of women of leisure in this country who have the ability to transform our wretched slums into abodes of comparative peace and comfort, had they the unselfish spirit of Octavia Hill in England, and Mr. Brace, Mrs. Lowell, and others in this country. It is a curious fact, however, that women of leisure have not been the only or chief workers for the unfortunate and degraded classes. Mothers of families, some of them of narrow means and many cares, have done much service—the more efficient because the care of a family is an excellent training-school. Mothers of children, if they are true mothers, should best understand the needs of all children.

To sum up: The flood of immigration has brought to us an army of homeless, ignorant, neglected children. The experience of the most successful workers among them has proved that removal from large cities, and introduction into rural domestic life, is the true way to make them good citizens and virtuous men and women. Also that institution life for children should be only a temporary makeshift, because it cripples their faculties, besides exposing them to the contaminating influences of the more vicious ones. That personal, friendly influence, especially of women, is necessary to them as individuals; and that personal knowledge and visitation of children placed out in families is essential to their safety and protection from ill-usage. That the legislation necessary to the improvement of public charitable methods can be influenced by women without the ballot better than with it, as it comes through the efforts of non-partisans who have no personal ends to gain.

*Clara Temple Leonard.*

#### Rest and Exercise, and Pulmonary Consumption.

FROM rather an extended study of the subject of pulmonary consumption, I feel quite sure that very few opinions are more widely diffused than the one that sufferers from this disease must have an abundance of physical exercise before they can get well. So tenaciously is this notion held that consumptives persist in being up and in walking about until the last vestige of their strength is gone, and they are compelled to exemplify the pathetic but truthful saying that "a consumptive never goes to bed of his own free will unless it is to die." No one will, I think, be rash enough to assert that exercise has no place in the treatment of