



THE NEEDLEWORK GUILD.

I.

By H.R.H. PRINCESS MARY ADELAIDE, DUCHESS OF TECK.¹



WHAT, another Guild! I fancy I hear my readers saying. Yes, I reply, another, but one not altogether unknown, for it has for nearly eight years been doing good work in our land. From a little band of sewers gathered together in 1882, dealing with a very limited space, we have in seven years grown into an army of workers, firmly established in almost every county in England. The object of this paper therefore is not to introduce the readers of *The English Illustrated Magazine* to a new society, but by explaining its origin, object, and organization, to some who may be unaware of its existence, to add to the number of workers.

Our origin was simple enough. A demand from the matron of Lady Wolverton's Orphanage at Iwerne, in Dorsetshire, for a large supply of jerseys and socks, to be completed in a month or so, brought such ready help from the ladies who happened just at the time to be staying at Iwerne Minster, that not only was the order executed, but the idea of the possibility of organizing a Needlework Guild at once suggested itself to the hostess, and was quickly acted upon, with the happy result that in response to the invitation issued, we have now enrolled in our ranks thousands upon thousands of workers, and there is every reason to hope that we shall be able yet further to increase our numbers and extend our borders.

Unity is strength. Without unity little or nothing can be done. Combination has in our case already accomplished much, and organization overcome many difficulties. In forming ourselves into a Union or Guild, we had no desire to take away from individual effort. All we wished was to provide the hundreds of women in England, hitherto working aimlessly, and many uselessly, with an object to work for, and to secure clothes for the thousands of men, women, and children wanting them.

The luxury of giving is so often confined to the rich, that an additional charm is lent to this Society by the fact that in it all classes are working together with the one object of assisting the poor and the needy in all ranks of life, according to the means at their command.

We are not bound by rules and regulations to the acceptance of assistance only from persons belonging to the Church of England. We welcome into our midst all sorts and conditions of men and women, irrespective of creed. And here perhaps I should point out that although hitherto our Society has been confined to female members, it is now proposed to extend its sphere of usefulness in order to provide tailor-made clothing for indigent men and boys, and boots for both sexes and all ages, and to this end we ask men to join our Guild as honorary associates.

The only stipulation we make is that each member should supply the Society with two or more articles of clothing annually, and that the articles be given over to the executive or presidents, to be dealt with in whatever manner they think proper. As with the members of the Guild, so with the recipients: all destitute people are alike considered, irrespective of creed.

¹ Patron of the Needlework Guild.

Due care is taken to see that only the deserving are assisted. In order to guard against imposition, as well as to minimize any chance of favour being shown, we do not distribute the articles ourselves, but send them for distribution to individuals approved by the committee, whose calling and position give them an intimate knowledge of the poor among whom they dwell.

We hear of schemes for the better housing of the working classes, and of many efforts for the improvement of their moral condition. Surely nothing can be a greater help in this direction than the substituting for the discarded flimsy finery which alone seems within their reach, the simple, clean, suitable, well-made clothing which the Guild supplies. And to this end we invite every man and woman in this country who has the welfare of his or her poorer brethren at heart to aid us still further in carrying on our work.

I will now leave it to the Founder to give some particulars of the organization of our Guild.

II.

BY THE LADY WOLVERTON.

THERE is no denying the fact, we are the plain members of a large family of beautiful "needle works": we write no "art" or "fancy" before our name, we fill our needles with no lovely silks in all the "newest" or "oldest" shades, whichever chances to be the fashion, our material is not furnished by the looms of Lyons or Spitalfields; we use only Horrocks's stoutest calico and the roughest Welsh homespun, and thread our needles with Coates's "No. 40, best six cord"; we are unpoetical and inartistic, but, like the plain member of the family, we are essentially useful—indeed I think to many we have become indispensable.

We have sent forth this year over 200,000 articles of good useful clothing for distribution in the poorest parishes, homes, hospitals, and missions in England. We work away quietly, very perseveringly, and only once a year make a little splutter in the world as to our doings. Then we are spoken of in the newspapers, and we allow ourselves a momentary spasm of self-satisfaction at the results of our year's work, before settling down to begin for the next.

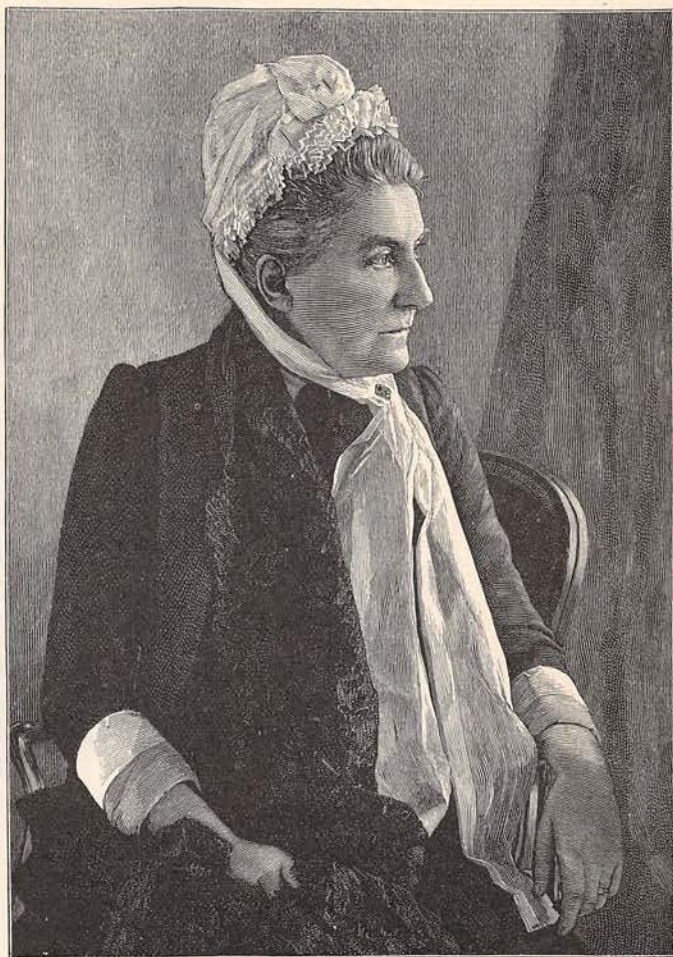
Our primary object is to bring waste and want to each other's relief; there are thousands who waste, many more thousands who want; the Needlework Guild bridges over the separation of these two islands, and pours what was waste into the lap of want. *Want* there must always be; waste now need never be if only every woman in England joined our Guild; it gives an object to all. Some have *never* worked with one before—oh, how dull that work must be!—some have only filled what I call the "white elephant" drawers and cupboards existing in most houses. Now they can fill cupboards always, like *Oliver Twist*, "asking for more," and can work on and on all the year and every year with the same delightful certainty that the best use will be found for the article, whatever it be. Human beings are ever on the increase—there are more babies every day to clothe, more little feet calling out for socks, more children wanting tidy things before they dare present themselves at school, more men and boys to whom good shirts and vests are an untold boon, more poor hard-worked mothers—I put them last, because they come last on the list in their own estimation—to whom the petticoats and shawls and all underclothing which falls to their share comes as an unexpected godsend. There is the want; now for the waste. It is, perhaps, best represented by what *is* under the Guild's beneficent shadow, and figures are the best proof. London, Birmingham, Surrey and Liverpool, sent between them this year in round numbers, 83,000 articles of clothing to their respective centres. This large amount of time and material in some part represents the waste that was—for the Guild is a supplement to all other existing work, it supersedes none, it is the basketful of fragments gathered up after the feast, it represents saved minutes, saved scraps, saved pennies, minute things saved instead of wasted.

Our system is exceedingly simple. We subdivide the work of organization, so that there is hardly any one, however delicate or however busy, that cannot find time or strength to join us—if *they will*. That is the first essential, they must will heartily, must persevere, and then really almost fabulous results follow. In less than six

months after starting, Liverpool contributed 5,000 articles. Nothing but will and energy could accomplish that. The three divisions in our organization are—President, Vice-President, and Associate. One "Group" contains one president, five (or more) vice-presidents, ten (or more) associates. It *must* contain the smaller number; it may increase, but at any rate every "Group" must consist of fifty-six members, and as each member must contribute two articles, a "Group" can be *relied upon*—this is an immense point—to send in 112 articles. As a fact they generally send in more. Out of eighty-two "Groups" in London this year, two sent in over 2,000, four over 1,000, and only twenty-six were under 200.

Objections in a way strengthen vitality, they either make one see and remedy defects, or they strengthen what exists by showing that the suggested defects were but shadows. We have met with many on our way, generally easily disposed of, often most contradictory, but perhaps the most original came from an old lady living in the far west. I was told she was one of those excellent people who are always knitting, and was likely to be taken with the idea of a new outlet for her industry. I wrote with great confidence to her, not tentatively as to the uncertain, and enclosed a pamphlet giving a history of the first year's work, and hoped she would join us herself and persuade others to do the same. By return of post came a furiously indignant letter, returning the pamphlet, "I can have nothing to do with any one or any work at all connected with one who was an enemy to Protestantism and persecuted Protestants in his day"—all this, because at the end of the book

I had quoted one of St. François de Sale's pithy sayings. He would have been the first to be amused by such a verdict. The chief objection we encounter is made to our giving away so many things. Our answer is, that the things being freely given us, we freely grant them to our applicants—with them rests the responsibility of seeing that a proper use is made of the gifts. We are a society to supplement, not to supersede, what has hitherto existed; we are a society for emergencies, whether on a large scale—as when at Birmingham during an epidemic 2,000 articles were sent to the hospitals within a fortnight—or on a smaller scale to supply the immediate need constantly arising in parishes. The Guild articles are not meant to hang on Christmas-trees and so save some pocket that hitherto had provided the presents, nor are they intended to be frittered away by district visitors, here a little pinafore, there a little shirt. If such things are done it is against the spirit of the Guild, and the people to blame are those who do not see when they have a grant that it is properly used. The heads of



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LADY WOLVERTON.

parishes and missions are at liberty to sell, instead of giving away, if they deem it wiser, but not to have a "Sale of Work," or to furnish a bazaar stall with Guild articles. I am sure that if this intention were fully understood and carefully acted upon, there could be no objection to the way the Guild articles are given.

We are sanguine enough to hope that many more will join us ; we shall welcome you gladly, from whatever class you come, or whatever age you may be, only on joining think first of the good you will get, then of the good you will do. We are not without our ambitions ; personally I have one, that is, to see the Needlework Guild recommended as a panacea to the listless, unhappy, idle heroines of the three volume novel. It would be a new idea, and a much more wholesome cure for the poor creatures than many hitherto suggested. Another is to be able this year to call our Guild the "All England," we only want six counties to join us to make it so. Will any one help on this ambition ? Durham, Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Rutland, Huntingdon, and Wiltshire, are the only counties in which, to my knowledge, no branch of our Guild exists. Six energetic presidents would do it. Who will hold up their hand ?





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