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OUR BLIND CONTRIBUTOR—ALICE KING.

WRITTEN BY HERSELF.

THE few words that I am going to say in this paper about myself are intended to be partly a comfort to those who have dear relations and friends that have lost their sight, and who are sorrowing over what they deem an irremediable affliction for those they love, and partly as an encouragement for those who are themselves blind, or who are burdened with any other infirmity which seems to make hopeless their chance of getting forward in the race of life. If I can succeed in either of these points I shall indeed be happy and thankful.

I was not born blind, but my sight was always so very imperfect that it scarcely deserved the name of sight at all. I could distinguish no object clearly, not even when placed close to my eyes, so that all my descriptions of places and scenery in my writings can in no way have originated from any dim, scattered memories of those early days. When I was about seven my little glimmer of sight became darkened entirely, and since then I have been completely blind.

But though I am blind, it often gives me a

sort of surprised feeling to hear myself talked of as such; I have such a keen, intense consciousness of knowing all about, and seeing, everyone and everything around me. When strangers speak to me for the first time, I at once create, from their voice, a distinct picture of what they are like. When I am driving or walking through a beautiful country, the sound of waving trees and murmuring water instantly brings me a vision of wondrous picturesqueness. When I enter a room I have never been in before, I quickly know all about



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MISS ALICE KING SURROUNDED BY MEMBERS OF HER BIBLE-CLASS.

its size and the way in which the furniture in it is placed by listening to such sounds as the closing of a door or window or the moving of a chair or sofa. Another thing which makes me never able to realise that I am blind is that I have always a brilliant light before my eyes, so that I seem to myself continually wrapped round with a radiant cloud. Into this light I can call up at will any colour that I think of intently for a few moments, so that frequently I am gazing into a gorgeous red or blue or green incandescent mass, that appears to be scintillating close to me and glowing like a living fire.

God in His love and mercy has also given me other abnormal faculties, which take the place of, and in some cases almost more than take the place of, sight. I can frequently tell when someone is in a distant part of the house by certain peculiarities, which my ear recognises, in their way of closing a door or performing some other insignificant but audible act. I have my especial manner of distinguishing my friends before they speak, when they enter the room, by the sound of their breathing or the fashion in which they move about. I can always tell when anyone is looking at me with peculiar feelings of interest, or affection, or dislike; I have a kind of indescribable burning sensation that pervades my whole frame. I can sometimes tell, when I am holding a person's hand, what is passing in their mind. This latter faculty has, under God, occasionally been of inestimable help to me in dealing with the working men and lads, of my work among whom I shall speak by-and-by. It increases in no small degree my influence over a man when he finds that I know of a wavering resolve for good or a secret thought of sin that is lurking in his heart.

I have also at times certain intuitions which make me able to foresee coming events. This power is, however, most capricious in its coming and going, and I have not myself the slightest control over it; I can never by my own will bring it to bear on any point that I wish; but it will often give me a prescient flash of light about some circumstance which is of comparatively little interest to me. I can give no account of its origin, and cannot define its exact way of working in my mind.

As a child I received no education especially suited and intended for the blind. I was entirely educated by my mother, a woman of great intellectual ability. She taught me much as other children are taught, except that she did her utmost to strengthen my memory by making me learn a great deal of poetry by heart. She gave me a correct knowledge of geography, which has remained with me all my life, without the help of any raised maps, such as are now used in blind schools, simply by making me describe in words the shape of each country, or island, or lake, and the position of each province with respect to another. I learned geography so thoroughly in this manner that in my schoolroom days I could have told any other girl how to draw a map of any country with the utmost accuracy.

I have learned seven languages through my ears—French, German, Italian, Spanish, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. I can hardly tell how I acquired them. I first learned the grammar by heart with my mother and sister, who were always, one or the other of them, my fellow-students, and then the faculty of understanding the different languages came with more or less facility. My practised, delicate sense of hearing has, no doubt, rendered me peculiarly quick in catching the pronunciation of foreign tongues, and this may have made the acquirement of them easier to me than it otherwise would have been.

As a child I was peculiarly bold and fearless; indeed, my blindness seemed to make me braver than others of my age. I grew to know any new house I was in with remarkable

quickness, and ran merrily all over it. I did not fear darkness, because I needed no light. I learned to ride on horseback, and was a bold horsewoman, sitting in my saddle with as much ease and confidence as if I was in an armchair. The roads over the hills of West Somerset, in the neighbourhood of Exmoor, where I was born, are such as would make most riders, however practised, feel very much more inclined to trust to their own legs than to those of their horse; yet up and down these steep ways, which are often nothing better than cataracts of rolling stones, I used to ride, feeling quite as happy as a young lady sauntering about on velvet turf in a sunny garden. I had a real affection for the animals on which I rode. Beautiful creatures they were, half-bred between horse and Exmoor pony, and endowed with wondrous intelligence. They fully returned my regard, and understood quite well that they had to take more care of me than of any other rider.

I can do work of many kinds with great ease and much pleasure. My power of feeling lies chiefly in the forefinger and the thumb, the skin and muscles of which have been trained to great delicacy of touch. I can knit the finest silk, can do canvas-work, and have lately been acquiring skill in macramé lace. I have not learned these different sorts of work in a moment, but have gained my proficiency in them with incessant practice and resolute determination not to fail. In this, as in everything throughout my life, the grand secret of my success has been unweariness, patient perseverance. I can confidently tell all those who are suffering under any physical disability, that if they will take this weapon—patient perseverance—in hand, and use it resolutely to carve their road, they will succeed.

My capacity for writing began to develop at a very early age, and broke out into little ripples of verse almost as soon as I could speak. It seemed to come naturally to me, like song to a young thrush. My first appearance in print was in a volume of sacred poems entitled "The Lays of Palestine," which was brought out by my father, and in which were put two hymns written by me before I was twelve years old.

My first book, "Forest-Keep," was written when I was about twenty. I have been often asked how it is that, without ever having seen a tree or a green field, or looked into the face of man or woman or child, I can describe vividly scenery, or beauty of feature, or expression in a human countenance. I can only reply that every description I write tells exactly what I see with visionary eyes. The moment I try with real, earnest intensity of imagination and thought to get a distinct idea of anything I want to paint in words, I see the scene or the face clearly before me, and then I write down what I have seen. This process requires no great mental effort; it came naturally to me, quite uncalled for, the moment I began to write.

I have learned how to write English fluently, partly through my parents, from my earliest days, reading out loud to me all the masterpieces of English literature. I have continued this practice of listening to well-written books all my life, and my ears have helped me in catching a good style of composition. When I was a child, my father, who at that period was translating into English verse the "Æneid" of Virgil, used to tell me the meaning of a Latin line or two in simple English words, and then bid me turn it into poetry. This mental exercise no doubt helped me in after years to find command of language easy.

In the first years of my literary career I always wrote with an amanuensis. She was generally a girl from the village school, with a mind not too well instructed as to grammar and orthography. I used to have to write

out every sentence first thoroughly in my head, getting up thus, perhaps, half a chapter by heart, and considering well how each paragraph sounded, and how any specially long words were spelt; then I set to work with my amanuensis to get it all on to paper; and laborious the task often was for both her and myself. Here again, however, patience and perseverance stood me in good stead.

At length came the, for me, happy days when that wonderful and beautiful machine, the type-writer, was brought to England from America. I resolved, the moment I heard of it, that I would learn it and make it useful in my literary work. I had two changes made in the machine to suit my blindness; one was having the letters, etc., carved upon the keys, the other was having every tenth degree marked at the top in a way that I could feel. Before, however, I could make carved letters useful to me, I had to learn what letters were like; this I did by feeling constantly round and round the letters upon the edge of a little tin plate. Yet with all the various helps which I devised to make the type-writer acquirable by me, it seemed to me, at first, that it would be simply a matter of impossibility that I could ever learn to write with it. I well recollect the heart-sinking with which I used to sit down at the machine; even when I had been labouring at it for four hours, till every muscle in my arms and shoulders ached, I got up feeling that I had made no way at all. Now I can write with the type-writer quicker than most people with the pen, and it is one of the blessings and comforts of my life. There is now no need for elaborate preparation beforehand when I write, for my thoughts flash in a moment from my brain on to the key-board.

The other great work of my life, which God has put it into my hands to do, besides my literary work, is that of teaching and influencing working men and boys. The parish of Cutcombe, where I was born, and where my father is clergyman, is a large, straggling, hill-country village, very much out of the world, and very old-fashioned, at the time of which I am writing, in all its ideas. The men and lads of the place had had few softening, up-lifting influences at work among them, and the evil spirit of drink was walking abroad in great power and strength through the midst of them, as it always has done throughout West Somerset. When I first opened my Bible class, almost all the men fought very shy of it and of me; they had never heard of such a thing as a lady busying herself about, and interesting herself in, working men and their belongings, and my first class had some four or five members, who seemed a little ashamed of what they were doing, even when they came in to take the word of God in their hands and hear about it. The prejudice against the Bible class, however, passed gradually away as Sunday after Sunday I persevered in it, and my numbers soon were doubled, while the Bible class began to be acknowledged as a power for good in the parish.

Now my Bible class counts some seventy members of all ages, from grandfathers of threescore years and ten, to bright lads just entering their teens; and everyone of these is, under God, more or less subject to my influence. The men will do more at my voice than at any voice in the world, and my blindness only seems one power the more to make them regard my womanhood with chivalrous reverence; it awakens up all the tender chords deep down under their rough exteriors. They will confess everything to me, and let me lead them almost anywhere. I keep up my influence over them by often having short private interviews with each man alone, besides meeting them at the Bible class.

The Bible class is not the only thing I have

established for my working men and lads. I have started for them a reading-room, in which they have all kinds of papers, books, and games; a temperance refreshment room, and a brass band. I have also grounded in the village flourishing branches of the Church Temperance and Church Purity Societies. But yet more than for anything else that God has let me do among my men do I rejoice with thanksgiving over the Sabbath mornings, when the members of the Bible class come thronging up to the Table of the Lord.

My vast amount of work of different kinds makes it very necessary for me to economise my time, therefore nothing was more wanted

by me than a watch, and I set about thinking how I could have one made that I could feel. Opposite each figure on the dial-plate I had a little knob placed; the hour-hand also had a tiny excrescence put upon it; the minute hand was made very thick, and screwed so high that it would pass over the knobs without catching, and thus I had a watch by which I could tell the time to a minute. I have described my watch thus minutely, that my plan may be useful to others with darkened or failing sight.

I am no proficient in music, but listening to it is one of my greatest pleasures; indeed, those with sight have probably no conception

of what all sweet sounds, such as the melody of the wind, or the chime of the waves, are to those whose sense of hearing has been refined by blindness. I delight in walking through a picture gallery, and in having the pictures described to me. I take great interest in all natural history, and am never tired of tracing out with my fingers the delicate formation of a flower, or a leaf, or an insect's wing, if either of these is put into my hand.

Thus it will be seen that there are few things from which my blindness shuts me out; and that God's love, though it has closed for me one window, has opened for me many others.

"SHE COULDN'T BOIL A POTATO;"

OR,

THE IGNORANT HOUSEKEEPER, AND HOW SHE ACQUIRED KNOWLEDGE.

By DORA HOPE.



As the days lengthened and the weather grew warmer, Mrs. Wilson began to have a craving for a sight of the sea. She had not been regaining her strength as quickly as she had hoped, and, having reached a certain stage of convalescence, it seemed impossible to get any further. All Ella's coaxing could not tempt her outside the garden, and the most appetising dishes which Ella's and Mrs. Moore's united genius

could invent failed to win back her capricious appetite.

Ella was beginning to get disheartened, and to think that it was no use trying any more, as her aunt had evidently settled down into being a permanent invalid, when someone suggested trying the invigorating effect of sea air. The mere thought of the fresh sea breezes seemed to give Mrs. Wilson new vigour, and, to Ella's surprise, she declared herself quite strong enough for the journey, and was reluctant even to take the precaution of asking the doctor's advice before making her arrangements.

His consent was easily obtained, with the addition of a great deal of practical advice and help to Ella, who was not a little dismayed at the responsibility of removing her patient from the safe shelter of home, surrounded as she was there by friends willing to help in any difficulty.

The first point to consider was where they should go; but, happily, the doctor had very decided opinions as to which places would suit Mrs. Wilson, so that matter was easily settled. After a good deal of discussion, it was decided that Ella must go and take lodgings a few days beforehand, as Mrs. Wilson was not in a fit state to bear the fatigue of driving round the town while she looked for apartments. By going very early in the morning, she could spend several hours at Wyck, and still be home before dark. As Mrs. Wilson would not hear of her going alone, and no other companion seemed available, it was decided that she should take the young maid Sarah, partly as escort, and partly to give her a little

holiday, as a reward for her unwearied attention to her mistress through the winter. She had never been more than a few miles away from her native town before, and the prospect of seeing the real sea drove her so nearly wild with excitement that she was good for nothing at all during the next few days.

Ella felt very anxious at the responsibility of taking lodgings; she had never even been consulted in such matters, and was entirely ignorant of everything connected with them. Mrs. Wilson herself could not tell her very much, for she had always spent her holidays in travelling, and knew very little about the usual arrangements in lodgings. Mrs. Moberly, as usual, came to the rescue, and gave Ella a list of the chief points to be considered. She must have a dining-room suite—that is to say, a sitting-room on the ground-floor with, at any rate, one bedroom behind, so that Mrs. Wilson need not go up and down any stairs; and the sitting-room must be facing the sea, so that she might have the sight and the sound of it without leaving her sofa. It must be comfortably furnished, too, for invalids need luxuries that can be dispensed with by people in health; and in inquiring the price, Ella must be sure to ask what extras there would be.

"I have learnt that lesson by sad experience," Mrs. Moberly said: "for I once offered to engage rooms for some friends who could not well afford extravagant charges, and was very pleased to find just what I wanted at a reasonable rate. But you can imagine my mortification when they showed me their first week's bill. I had forgotten to ask what extras I must add to my estimate of the cost, and now there was a formidable array of additional figures—kitchen fire, hall gas, gas on landing, dining-room gas, use of cruet, washing bed and table linen, and cleaning boots; making altogether nearly a pound a week more than I had calculated—a very serious difference to people in rather straitened circumstances. So you must be warned by my mistake, and be sure to find out what the entire charge is likely to be, or when you come to pay your bills, you will feel all the time as if you were being cheated."

The doctor, too, gave Ella some very serious advice. He was a kind old man, who was always ready, by suggestions and hints, to relieve Ella as much as possible of anxiety about her patient, and he, too, like Mrs. Moberly, had learnt a lesson from the experience of others. One of his patients, he told Ella, had gone to the seaside with her children early in the summer, and had taken very clean and

comfortable lodgings; but they had hardly been settled in them for a week before one of the children seemed unwell, then another, and a third, and in a short time they all three were seriously ill. The doctor who was called said immediately that the house was full of infection, and there was no doubt the children had caught it. The landlady, finding it was no use to deny it, acknowledged that her own children had been ill, but they had been out and quite well for the last fortnight, and as she had well aired the rooms, and even had the carpets up and scrubbed the floors, she thought it was quite safe to let the apartments, forgetting how the germs of disease cling to the furniture, the hangings, and even to the paper on the walls. Happily, the children all recovered, but one, at least, was for some time in imminent danger; and the doctor warned Ella to make strict inquiries, as in Mrs. Wilson's enfeebled state she would be particularly susceptible to any infection, and would be quite unable to throw off any attack.

This idea so frightened Ella that she felt inclined to refuse the responsibility altogether. She was extremely severe in her remarks on the wickedness of lodging-house keepers who could allow such risk, and also of the makers of the law who could fail to punish them for doing it.

"You must remember, my dear Miss Ella," interrupted the doctor, "that the lodging-house keepers themselves are very often the victims of the carelessness—I might indeed call it criminal carelessness—of people who ought to know better, who having children not yet free from infectious diseases, do not hesitate to take them to seaside lodgings, without having even the common honesty to warn the proprietors of the state of the case, although they must know the risk they run of spreading the disease through the neighbourhood, and although they themselves would probably be amongst the most severe in denouncing those who exposed their own children to such risks. And on the other hand, the law does what it can to protect people from infection, though they seldom take advantage of it. There is an act, called the Public Health Act, under which any landlord can be prosecuted who takes lodgers, or even shows his rooms with a view to letting them, while his house is in an infectious state."

"But, doctor!" exclaimed Ella, "I do not see that it is much good to prosecute the landlord after one has caught diphtheria or