

Girls' Schools of To-day.

I.—CHELTENHAM COLLEGE.

By L. T. MEADE.



IN these days when the "Woman's Question" is discussed on all sides, and when even the most prejudiced of the opposite sex are forced to admit that women are their competitors in almost every walk of life, it is interesting to trace the fact to its primary source. In this last decade of the century, women are being thoroughly educated in the broadest and fullest sense of the term. Their brains are being developed, their bodies stimulated to grow to their full dimensions—in consequence, weakness, timidity, nerves, mental cowardice, are gradually, but surely, creeping into the background, and the girls of the present day are able to hold their own with their brothers.

School life is undoubtedly at the root of this vast improvement, and my intention in this paper is to say a few words with regard to school life as it now exists for girls.

All those who know anything of girls' education will feel that the primary place amongst English schools must be given to the far-famed ladies' college at Cheltenham. Here, from the child in her kindergarten to the girl who is undergoing her examination for her London degree, is to be found the most perfect training for spirit, mind, and body.

The name of the principal, Dorothea Beale, is widely known. I have had the privilege of visiting her at Cheltenham College for the purpose of writing this paper; but, much as she told me, and much as I saw of her work, it is difficult in so short a space to give any just estimate of her modes of operation and her wonderful personality.

It would be impossible to get any just idea of the life which now goes on at Cheltenham College without knowing a little of its past history and growth—its past struggle for existence seems to accentuate and strengthen the effect of its present remarkable success.

I should like to give the story of the college in Miss Beale's own graphic words, but as the limits of a magazine paper make this impossible, I can only allude to the leading and most interesting facts.

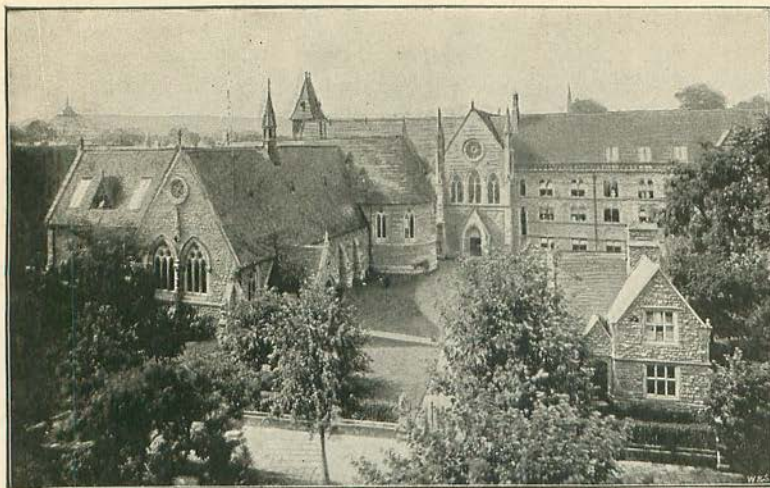
In beginning her account of the college, Miss Beale speaks of the great change which took place in the education of girls about the middle of the present century. Up to the year 1847 it was impossible, except in very rare cases, for a woman to take a high place in the intellectual world—her education generally was unsystematic, and had no thoroughness. True, there were such women as Mary Somerville, Harriet Martineau, and Caroline Cornwallis—there were also a few poets and novelists whom all the world justly holds in honour; but these were exceptional, and showed the strength of their characters when they broke through the barriers which fenced them off from the fields of intellect in which their brothers roamed at will. In those days, girls of the middle classes were usually taught at home by private governesses assisted by masters, or they were sent to small boarding schools. Most of their time was spent in learning by rote what the Schools Inquiry Commissioners call "Miserable Catechisms," "Lamentable

Catechisms," "the Noxious Brood of Catechisms." They worked from books which taught facts, such facts as the following: "State the number of houses burnt in the fire of London." No subject was taught scientifically, but merely as so much information. Mr. Fitch wrote: "I have seen girls learning by heart the terminology of the Linnæan system, to whom the very elements of the vegetable physiology were unknown—they learnt from a catechism the meaning of such words as divisibility, inertia; knowing nothing whatever of the physical facts, of which these words are the representatives."

Miss Beale says of



MISS BEALE, PRINCIPAL OF CHELTENHAM COLLEGE.
From a Photo. by County of Gloucester Studio, Cheltenham.



From a]

CHELTENHAM COLLEGE.

[Photograph.

herself: "In 1848 I was a pupil in a school in Paris, which was kept by English ladies. We were taught to perform conjuring tricks with a globe, by which we obtained answers to problems without one principle being made intelligible. We were even compelled to learn from Lindley Murray lists of prepositions, that we might be saved the trouble of thinking what part of speech it was."

In her delightful paper, which can be read in full in the college magazine, Miss Beale graphically states how this condition of things passed away, how first one college and then another was opened to women, how Professor Maurice took up the cause of girls' education, and at last how Local Examinations of the University of Cambridge were opened to women—but as this paper refers primarily to Cheltenham College, I must go on at once to speak of it.

The college, which now occupies so high a position in the educational world, was first opened in 1854, in a house which was called Cambray House, and is now an overflow school. Miss Beale gives an amusing account of the opening day. One lady, who was present at the opening, writes: "I was at the opening of the ladies' college on the thirteenth of February, 1854. Nine o'clock was the time appointed for us to assemble. I remember I was standing in the large school-room and our names being called over. The eldest of us was eighteen, and the infants' department contained some very little mites. The subjects taught at present are very different from what we had; nevertheless, we worked hard, and the teaching was very thorough. Of course, there were clever girls,

and stupid girls, and idle girls; but the tone of the college was one of work."

Another writes: "The opening of the ladies' college is so very long ago, and I was only eleven. My chief recollection of the first day is that a good many pupils brought their dogs with them, and that there was a general scrimmage among these animals—eight of

them fighting in the cloak-room. Naturally, no dogs were admitted in the future."

The number of pupils when the college was first opened was eighty-eight, and by the end of the year there were one hundred and twenty. From several causes, however, a decline in the numbers soon set in, and when Miss Beale was appointed principal in 1858, affairs were in a very critical condition. The pupils had fallen to sixty-nine, and of these about fifteen had given notice to leave. In short, the next two years were ones of extreme difficulty, and Miss Beale says that it is impossible to give an adequate idea of the hard struggle for existence which the college had to maintain, and of the minute economies they were called upon to practise. The principal says: "I was blamed for ordering prospectuses, at the cost of fifteen shillings, without leave from the secretary. Second-hand furniture was procured which would not have delighted people of æsthetic taste; curtains were dispensed with as far as possible, and it was questioned whether a carving knife was required for me in my furnished apartments. In short, society was opposed to the college.

"Cheltenham was a conservative place, and the very name 'college' frightened people. It was said 'Girls would be turned into boys if they attended the college.' The kind of education, too, was not approved; the curriculum was too advanced, though it would now be considered quite behind the age. It embraced only English studies, French, German, and a very little science; all was taught, it was true, in a somewhat thorough way. 'It is all very well,' said a mother, who withdrew her

daughter at the end of a quarter, 'for my daughter to read Shakespeare, but don't you think it is more important for her to be able to sit down at a piano and amuse her friends?'

"'I had my own opinion,' said Miss Beale, 'about the kind of amusement she would afford them.'"

Speaking of herself, she continues: "I had been for some years mathematical tutor at Queen's College, London, but I was advised that it would not do to introduce mathematics. Some objected to advanced arithmetic. 'My dear lady,' said a father, 'if my daughters were going to be bankers it would be very well to teach arithmetic as you do, but really there is no need.'"

"'No, I have not learnt fractions,' said a child, 'my governess told me they were not necessary for girls.'"

Miss Beale also speaks of the great difficulty of obtaining good teachers.

"Do you prepare your lessons?" she asked of a candidate for a vacant post.

"Oh, no"; was the answer, "I never profess to teach anything I do not understand."

One was sent to her with such excellent recommendations that she thought she had found a "black swan." She asked her to come down that she might judge for herself. This lady could teach literature, history, physiology, but Miss Beale, to her astonishment, discovered that she had literally read nothing but little text-books, and proposed to teach on the notes of the lessons she had had.

The college in those early days was not only poor, but on the verge of bankruptcy; this

want of money made itself felt in all sorts of ways. There was no library, and a grant of five pounds did not go very far. There was, besides, no lending library in the town; a few stationers lent out books, but the supply was meagre indeed. Miss Beale relates how she went into one of the two principal shops to see if she could get the "Idylls of the King," when the book came out. She was answered: "We never have had any poetical effusions in the library, and we don't think we shall begin now."

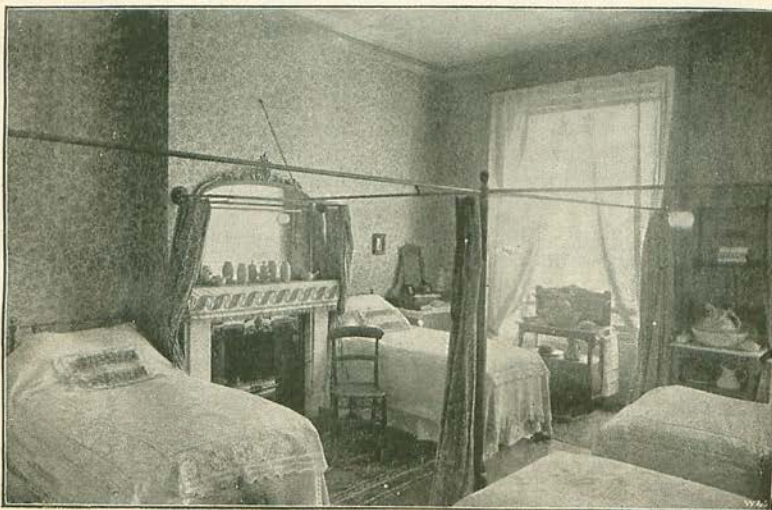
The time of trial, however, was not to be followed by defeat. The spirit of the brave principal was not to be daunted—the numbers in the school rose again to seventy-eight. Still the balance was on the wrong side of the ledger; but just then a gentleman in the town, a Mr. Brancker, was asked to be auditor. He drew up a financial scheme on altogether new lines: this was adopted, and from that hour the college entered on a new and prosperous career. This good man undertook all the duties of a secretary gratuitously. His clear judgment, his insight into character, his courage and frankness made him a most valuable adviser, and Miss Beale feels sure that had he not taken the helm at that time, the college would not have been safely steered through the rocks.

From that hour, however, prosperity attended all efforts, prejudices began to give way, and the number of pupils increased yearly.

In giving her brief history, Miss Beale considers that Cheltenham College has gone through three epochs. In the first, she includes the twenty years of its life in the

original college of Cambray. The second decade is occupied with the internal growth and consolidation of the new college. The third takes the period of external development from the foundation of the College Guild in 1883.

It was at Lady Day, 1873, that the principal and pupils took possession of the present lovely and extensive college.



From a]

STUDENTS' BEDROOM AT FAUCONBERG HOUSE, DIVIDED BY CURTAINS.

[Photograph.

Miss Beale speaks thus of the change :—

"I am sure that the change from the plain bare walls of Cambray to the beautiful and stately surroundings of our new college was not without its effect upon teacher and taught. Mr. Thring, of Uppingham, used to insist, by word and deed, that if we would have learning honoured, we should build it a fitting habitation. The greater dignity of our surroundings made us feel that our teaching must not be meagre and bare, but as perfect in its form, as attractive in its expression, as exact in its details as we were able to make it, and thus the material environment reacted upon the intellectual and spiritual: the same music is different in a concert-room and in a cathedral, where arches and vaulted roof respond to the pealing organ, and spirit answers to spirit in subtone and harmonics."

Large as the college was, however, when it was opened, it has been added to immensely from time to time until it has reached its present important dimensions, and there are, as it seems to an outsider, class-rooms of the most perfect kind, for every possible course of education which can be entered upon. The richness of the architecture of these noble rooms, the beauty of the painted windows, the intelligent and wide sympathy of the spirit which has governed and planned the whole can scarcely be described; the rooms must be seen, the kindly spirit must be felt, to make it possible to understand the vastness of the influence which has been at work.

The guild of the college was formed in the July of 1883, and thus began, as Miss Beale says, the period of external development. The guild is the means of uniting old and new members in a common interest, which does not cease with school life. It maintains a mission at Bethnal Green.

The badge is a daisy—that flower loved of poets. The open daisy is the emblem of the soul; closed, it is the pearl of flowers, the emblem of purity. "It is," writes Ruskin, "infinitely dear, as the bringer of light; ruby, white, and gold, the three colours of the day, with no hue of shade in it."

The objects of the guild are many, some articles of its creed being that it is a duty all through life to continue one's own education—that the worst thing one can do with any talent is to bury it.

Junior members are expected not only to follow a definite course of study, but also to undertake some domestic form of work. Miss Beale feels very strongly that the better trained a woman is mentally, the more

thoroughly she will attend to the minutiae of daily life, and that a knowledge of mathematics, so far from militating against home comforts, will, by the training it gives in system and effort, enable her all the better to keep the household machinery in order.

It was a bright day in the end of October when I paid my first visit to Cheltenham College. I found the principal standing on a raised platform at one end of the great hall. She received me in the heartiest and most genial manner, and told me at once she had made arrangements to give up her day to me. I can truly say that she kept her word. I arrived at the college at about half-past twelve, and from then until half-past five we went from class-room to class-room, from boarding-house to boarding-house, with only brief intervals for refreshment. While she took me round, Miss Beale explained her systems and methods of work in a clear, incisive style, peculiarly her own. There was no attempt at boasting, no trace of gratified vanity in the enormous success of the wonderful place which she has practically made. Her whole soul is in her work, but she is too great and also too simple of heart to be vain.

Viewed as a whole, the college has a colossal and almost bewildering effect upon a new-comer; but the boarding-houses, fifteen in number, strike one at once as pictures of simplicity and home comfort. Two of the houses are specially devoted to girls of limited means, where the fees are exceptionally low; but here, as in the others, there is the same delightful sympathetic housemistress, the beautifully arranged sitting-rooms, the cheerful dining-halls, and the bright, cosy bedrooms, either single, or curtained off into cubicles.

Of the many boarding-houses, St. Hilda's is probably the most perfect. It was built especially for the college, and is full of all modern beauty and contrivance. No girl is admitted to St. Hilda's under eighteen.

After going round the college and the other boarding-houses I arrived there in time for tea, and shall not soon forget the cosy effect of the charming little room into which I was ushered. Tea was ready, a fire was burning brightly, there was a sofa, some easy chairs, small tables, little bookcases, photographs, ornaments of all kinds.

"And where am I to sleep?" I asked of the girl-student who was with me.

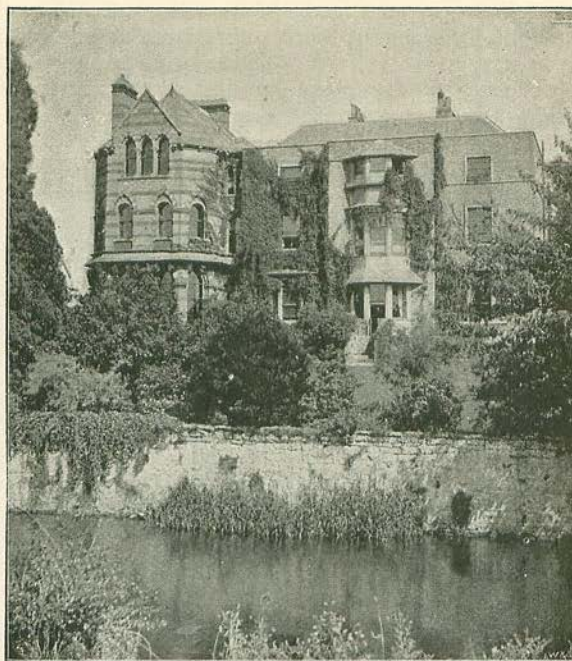
"Why, here," was the reply: "this is your bedroom."

I looked around me in some bewilderment and momentary dismay. A charming sitting-

room was all very well, but I was tired and hot, and dirty. In a moment, however, the secret of the magical room was revealed to me. When a cover was slipped off the sofa a comfortable bed appeared. When a spring was touched in the bureau a shelf dropped suddenly down, and all necessary washing apparatus came into view. That bureau is such a clever construction that it deserves a word to itself. At one side are the washing arrangements, at the other a writing-desk and chest of drawers; on the top is a cabinet with glass doors, meant to contain either books or ornaments.

I had supper at St. Hilda's, made the acquaintance of Miss Lumby, the delightful principal of the house, and afterwards saw the girls dance in the beautiful drawing-room. They all dressed for the evening, and it would have been difficult to see brighter, more interesting, or happier faces.

Early next morning I returned to the college, where I was present at what is perhaps the most impressive sight in this beautiful house of learning, morning prayers. The great hall, more than 100ft. long, 30ft. wide, and 41ft. high in the centre, with its deep gallery at the farther end, was completely filled with girls and teachers. The short service was all that was solemn, sweet, and invigorating. It was worth going to prayers to hear the singing alone. Afterwards the girls filed out, one by one, going immediately to their different class-rooms. Miss Beale took the second division in Scripture, and I had the privilege of listening to a most impressive and practical address. Afterwards she took me round the class-rooms again, and I saw teachers and pupils busily at work. There was no haste, no excitement, no undue pressure. All the work is done in the morning, the afternoons



From a]

ST. HILDA'S.

[Photograph.

being devoted to necessary preparation, and to games, walks, etc.

I have alluded already to the beautiful college buildings, but I must add a few words about the lovely stained-glass windows, which are very fine examples of the art, and are not easily forgotten by those who have seen them. The windows are given in commemoration of some special friends of the college, and the subjects are taken from the story of Britomart, in

Spenser's "Faëry Queen." Britomart gives the poet's ideal of a perfect woman. A short time ago the story of Britomart was dramatized and acted by the guild.

There are six hundred regular pupils, besides many occasional ones. Such is the completeness of the organization that each pupil is cared for as an individual, and no two girls have exactly the same time-table. There are about fifty regular teachers, besides many visiting lecturers and masters. The institution may be called an aggregate of schools. There are, in fact, seven Head Mistresses, or Heads of Departments, working with considerable independence under the Principal. There is the Vice-Principal, the Head Mistress of the second and third divisions; the Head of the London B. A. and B. Sc. class, of the Cambridge Higher and the Oxford A. A. local classes; lastly, the two Heads of the Education and Kindergarten departments. The Principal also gives a considerable share of the workings to the class-teachers, thus training up competent heads for all other schools, whilst these are able to avail themselves of her larger experience. She considers the right maxim for a ruler is: "If you want a thing done, don't do it yourself," and commends especially the old woman who set everything in motion to get the pig over the stile. As

nearly all the teachers are her own pupils and they understand one another thoroughly, the whole works most harmoniously.

The Musical Department is extremely efficient. There are thirty teachers, a special

Gymnastics are not neglected. These are taught by a Swede. There are twenty-six tennis grounds, and two fives, besides a playground of about twelve acres for games which require much space.



From a Photo. by]

PRAYERS IN THE GREAT HALL—CHELTENHAM COLLEGE.

[P. Parsons, Cheltenham.

wing is devoted to it, and about fifteen hundred lessons are given weekly.

The science department is very complete, containing a central lecture-room, two chemical laboratories for practical work, a weighing-room, one for physics, two for biology, besides a museum 70ft. by 26ft.

There is a beautiful studio 60ft. by 30ft.

The fees for the ordinary course of education at Cheltenham College for pupils over fifteen are eight guineas a term; under fifteen, six guineas; under ten, four guineas.

The fees for residence at the boarding-houses vary from fifty to seventy guineas per annum.