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O-89-1

LADY COLIN CAMPBELL

SHE OFFERS A LETTER ON WOMEN'S
WORK IN ENGLAND.

The Inspiring Hand of Lady Sandhurst.
Mrs. Besant and the Lucifer Match
Makers—The Trades Unions—Society of
Lady Artists—The Thimble League.

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LONDON, June 5.—On reading the daily press of England one would almost be inclined to suppose that the women of Great Britain had little to do with public life. With a fashionable wedding or a grand ball, according to the newspaper report, the sphere of woman would seem to end. But if we seek out facts and honestly chronicle them we must adopt quite another conclusion. Indeed, such a harvest of societies, leagues and associations do we gather in that a selection from among them becomes difficult. Almost each month brings a new crop of some sort of associated effort on the part of women, and the field is becoming crowded indeed, for the old societies continue with a vigor ever perennial. Among the most important societies formed this last year is one in which Lady Sandhurst has been the inspiring and guiding hand.

For a long time the working women of London have felt their lack of organization whenever a dispute arose between them and their masters. A little over a year ago, when the girls employed by Bryant & May, the leading match manufacturers in the metropolis, struck for higher wages, little regard would they have received had it not been for the instant and efficient help of Mrs. Besant. This lady is a born organizer and leader, and she soon had brought the chaotic ranks of these match girls into line, so they could cope advantageously with their employers. This strike, with its disorderly beginning and successful close, was a splendid object lesson for the working women of London.

Realizing their power when united they are now ready to work in with Lady Sandhurst's idea of forming a great trades union of all the women wage earners in the metropolis. Of course the object of this work could be more efficiently accomplished if the trades unions among men were to open their doors to women, and demand that all should have equal pay for equal work and all a fair day's wage. But unfortunately John Bull's brain moves slowly. The men do not yet see that they must carry women with them into the promised land or be barred out themselves by having women usurp their places in the onward march, and underbid them in every labor market. So, since the British unions have not adopted the broad and wise demands which I understand the Farmers' Alliance and the Knights of Labor in America have embodied in their programme, enfranchisement for women and equal pay for equal work—must welcome as a timely departure the society inaugurated this winter by Lady Sandhurst.

It is pleasant to turn from more commonplace subjects sometimes to the world of art. But all is not "sweetness and light" even here. Just as I think the union of men and women in trade societies or in government is necessary if the most thorough reform is to be accomplished, so I deprecate any separation of men and women artists. I am opposed to either sex drawing aside and forming an exclusive association. The "Society of Lady Artists" is, I feel sure, a tactical error from all points of view. Women are already far too apt to make studies of flowers and fruits and portraits of characterless babies. It is to their own interest, then, not to cut themselves off from the criticism of their brother artists, not to forego the valuable lesson of comparing their work with that of men who have won their artistic laurels in the eyes of the world. It is really the women outside the "Society of Lady Artists" who are making their names famous. Countess Feodore Gleichen, the sisters Monta, Mrs. Rae, Lady Butler—these are artists to whom the world accords high praise. Countess Feodore Gleichen shows a thorough application of form in the busts and statues she exhibits in the academy, and Mrs. Rae has shown both courage and ability in dealing with the nude figure. Lady Butler's battle pictures and the varied work of the Misses Monta also hold their own—aye, and more than hold their own—in the open competition on the walls of the Royal Academy. If a picture cannot do this, whether it be by man or woman, the artist has clearly mistaken his or her vocation, and no amount of exhibitions of hole and corner societies, where membership replaces talent as a reason for the hanging of certain pictures, will convey the smallest honor or kudos to the painter who cannot face the open competition of the world of art. Before the great question of art all distinctions of sex should vanish. The true artist is an artist before everything. The mere fact of being a man or a woman is a question of detail with which the world at large has nothing at all to do. "By their works ye shall know them" is true in all branches of art, painting, music, sculpture, literature. If the work is good, so much the more praise if a woman, one of a class of beings whose mental development may be said as yet to be only in leading strings, should have accomplished it. If the work is bad, no plea of sex should save it from condemnation. Therefore I look upon such societies as that of the "Lady Artists" as a deliberate step backward in art education, and the sooner it is disbanded and its members merged into the innumerable societies of their brother workers in art the better it will be for those women painters who look upon their vocation seriously.

I have recently received the yearly report of an excellent society founded by women. Its coat of arms, appearing at the head of each notice, fully explains its field of work and is suggestive of domesticity and all manner of womanly offices. The charge on the field of the escutcheon is very clear; for the bend is

a pair of scissors, the bend sinister a headed needle, and at the fess point a determined looking little thimble; on the scroll is emblazoned the words "Thimble League." The object of this society is to bring in the matter of sewing the consumer and worker together, and to do away with the middleman and his huge profits and sweating system. The Dowager Countess of Winchilsea deserves high praise for the businesslike manner in which she has carried out the ideas of the society. Centers have been established all over London, and all those who desire sewing done can feel sure that the Thimble league will get it done in the best and speediest manner, that the seamstress will get a fair wage and that the work will go to those who most sorely need it. There has been a movement in America, I understand, just as there has been here, urging upon ladies the duty of giving their sewing into the hands of some deserving woman, and refusing to buy the ready made garments at shops, or even to order underclothes made by large firms. The reason given is undoubtedly a legitimate one; i. e., that most shops cut their workwomen down to starvation wages. But I hear on all hands, in America and England, complaints of the inefficiency of that same "deserving woman." It is a perfect vexation of spirit to try to get even the simplest garment made outside the shops. It would almost seem as if the large firms had monopolized all the competent workwomen. So to those who have conscientious scruples as to wearing things made by some poor, overworked, underpaid soul, and at the same time have not time nor patience to take the "deserving woman" in hand, the Thimble league, with its assurance that any garment ordered will be properly made on the shortest notice, and that the worker will get a fair wage, is a veritable blessing.

While we are on this question of sewing let me point out one department of the Lady Guides association which fills a wide gap in domestic economy. To many a busy wife the family mending is a perfect nightmare. With the many calls upon her she has rarely not had to darn the holes and rents of the entire household. From the Lady Guides she can get a competent woman to come and put all thoroughly to rights. This useful association not only makes us whole again, but it sends out ladies to pilot strangers through the mazes of London, to conduct them to all its wonders, to advise and direct them in shopping matters. As they have employees who can speak any language, they are ready and competent to enlighten foreigners from all parts of the world as to the arts and outs of metropolitan life.

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