

The Sketcher.

A TRAVELLER'S IMPRESSIONS ON VISITING THE DUNEDIN IN- DUSTRIAL SCHOOL.

BY EMMA HARDINGE BRITTEN.

On the afternoon of Wednesday, May 14th, I set out in company with three friends to visit the Dunedin Industrial School.

I have had the privilege of going over scores of such institutions in other places, and no anticipations of novelty or entertainment prompted me on this occasion.

I simply accompanied my kind conductors, the Lady Mayoress and her friends, in accordance with their desire of taking me a pleasant drive, and making me familiar with the institutions of my temporary place of sojourn. Despite the cheerless influence of a drizzling rainy day, and the very qualified expectations with which I entered upon my tour of inspection, there was so much to fix the attention of a stranger, and suggest comparisons with other scenes of a similar kind, that I am induced to record my impressions thus publicly, even at the risk of re-opening

a well-worn, and doubtless, an all-familiar subject, to the residents of Dunedin.

We were received at the entrance to the house by the superintendent, Mr Titchner, with one of those cheery smiles which seemed to give an initiatory idea of the entire scene we were to witness. I need scarcely describe to those who have doubtless become sufficiently acquainted with such details already, what admirable provision for dining, cooking, washing, and working, the house displays; what interminable lengths of neat, sweet, finely ventilated dormitories the visitor traverses; how white pillows, pretty coverlids, scrupulously clean floors, walls, and passages all match, and what suggestions of real home comfort and parental care are manifested in every part of the house. Callous indeed must be the observer whose sympathies are not stirred at the sight of the nests provided for the very wee things—mites, who would be lost in the ample single beds which, arranged in long rows, are allotted to the elder boys and girls, and so these tiny beings are placed three together in a wide capacious berth, where their chubby faces rest on the clean bolsters side by side, like a triad of cabbage rose.

Not one of the least suggestive features of our long ramble, was the multitude of pictures that adorned the walls everywhere, and these arranged with remarkable taste, and in some of the rooms interspersed with simple toys, shells, and other childish treasures, spread

an air of refinement, and even grace around, which I am confident must have its effect upon the poor waifs, whose wretched antecedents would so inevitably shut out the

purifying elements of art and beauty from their blighted lives. Again and again I felt the home influence of these resting places, causing me to linger over the motley groups of pictures on the walls, always pleasant to see, generally instructive, and particularly suggestive of the aphorisms which teach us "the use of beauty," and "the beauty of use." In the culinary department we stopped to note the huge chunks of bread and butter being prepared by a lad, whose rosy cheeks and jolly physique, testified to the effect which similar luxuries have produced on himself. The quality of the bread, the excellent meat, strong good clothes, and above all, the routine of industry assigned to every child, so carefully and judiciously arranged, as to imply work without toil, and useful art without penitential labour, all were carefully scrutinised by me, and noted with an interest of which I am quite sure Mr Fitchener and his good wife were not aware at the time. On complimenting these excellent persons in regard to the liberality combined with prudence, displayed in the accommodations, &c., I found what I was not at first aware of, namely, that the Institution was a Governmental one, and that the State itself stood in the relation of father and mother to the waifs around me, although the executive functions of these noble relations had been well entrusted to the present superintendents. Perhaps the majesty of Governmental functionaries would not deem such a humble tribute of praise as I could render worth notice. Still I record it, and that more confidently from the fact that I have seen so many institutions equally excellent in design and parental in intention,

utterly fail for want of the large liberality which Governmental resources alone can dispense. I have in my mind's eye now, two institutions designed to rescue the most helpless and hapless of beings, from the pangs of famine, and the shame of criminal surroundings, and yet their support, dependant as they are on the entirely insufficient resources of individual charity and meagre endowments—becomes a perpetual subject of embarrassment and pain to their kind patrons; in fact, nothing short of a continual system of beggary, and recourse to all sorts of expedients to obtain supplies, could keep the flame of charity alive, and enable noble-hearted persons to perform services to the nation, which no power short of the nation itself could fairly accomplish. Not to any private association or public corporation, but to the generous and unstinted liberality of the New Zealand Government, then, did my heart go up in thankfulness, for the home which sheltered and redeemed from worse than death, the two hundred and thirty children, who at this present hour of writing, are inmates of the home, which has sheltered and redeemed so many besides themselves.

At the close of our rambles through the domestic departments of the establishment, we were received by a tremendous demonstration of a musical character, in the school room, where a band of boys, apparently all under twelve years of age, were performing a vigorous symphony, which, by aid of piccolos, triangles, cimbals, and drums, executed with tip-top force, and thoroughly *con amore*, sounded out a greeting of the most pronounced nature. In the midst of the orchestra stood the bandmaster, an artist of

probably some eight or nine summers, who, with baton in hand, marshalled his subordinates with a precision of tone and rythm, that would not have disgraced a Jullien or a Costa. The boys played well, making the most of their instruments, and evidently enjoying their performance as much as if they had attained to the skill of a classical Quartett Society.

Following upon this grand musical *coup d'etat* came the vocal part of the entertainment, in which several little girls, tiny creatures, evidently selected for their aptitude and the sweetness of their young voices, were accompanied with much taste and feeling by Mr Titchener on the harmonium. Before the opening of this, the second part of the concert, a heavy kind of marching boots was heard, the door was thrown open, and in rolled, rather than walked, two or three dozen flaxen-haired urchins, the youngest of whom—the fogleman of the party—might have been about half-past three, whilst the eldest, I should think, could scarcely have numbered more than six years of age. Ranging themselves into lines, under the guidance of their motherly directress, Mrs Titchener, the conductor, the three and half years old article above named, standing in the midst, and solemnly keeping time (exact time too, observe) with his baton, a stick about his own height by the way, these small choristers commenced their exercises, which consisted of part music, choruses sung to the solos of the little girls, together with duetts and chorales, all executed in good time, tune, and a harmony singularly pleasing from such an infantile source. Amongst the little solo

singers, I detected one or two voices of rare promise, and it was impossible to mistake the fact that the accent and style of all the vocalists, from three years old and upwards, had been trained out of the usual scholastic nasal tone into sweetness and expression. The performance of "Home, sweet Home," and the touching song, "No one to pity me, no one to save," were given with wonderful pathos from such young and unconsciously interested performers. The stealthy glance I stole at my companions, assured me the deep sympathy that filled my own heart was shared by all present. Poor little waifs!

At the close of our visit we saw the ghastly record book, in which was plainly detailed the causes which had rendered the inmates of that merciful refuge—"Fatherless, motherless!" Tales of crime and records of violence were there, proving clearly enough, the sinks of misery from which these young performers had been drawn. "The mother a hardened outcast"—"the father a felon;"—"transported;"—"in prison;"—&c., &c.;—such were some of the records attached to the dates of entry of the little ones, who had been snatched from a similar doom to become bright singers, happy musicians, and well trained aspirants for future good citizenship, under the auspices of this merciful Institution.

I shudder now, when I contrast the crimes of the parents, with the attractive simplicity of the children, and from the depths of my heart, I bless the projectors and supporters of this home, no less than the excellent and faithful superintendents who manage it, for the transformation of two hundred and

thirty incipient criminals or the worst stamp, into a band of loving happy picture and music loving children, who give the fairest promise of flowering out into useful and well-conducted men and women. At the termination of the concert we were taken to another class-room, where we saw the young people go through a combination of vocal and muscular exercises, the chief aim of which, to the superficial observer, would be the achievement of an excellent system of drill and discipline. The children, down to mere infants, with the most remarkable unity of voice and action, and yet individually manifesting huge enjoyment of the fun, sewed and stitched; hammered and sawed; mimicked the steam whistle, and the sounds of artillery, with capital effect, but in this progressive age, none can fail to discover a higher value in such exercises than the mere routine of discipline they manifest. The action thus compelled calls every muscle into play, quickens the imitative faculties, promotes the enjoyment of the little actors, and by combining healthful exercise with mirth and recreation, stimulates alike the powers of body and mind. We are at length beginning to understand the value of physical culture as an element, even in intellectual progress, and hence it is that our most advanced physiologists recognise why the sages of classical Greece made a success in the Olympian games a gauge of qualification for the exercise of political power and intellectual superiority; hence the advanced thinkers of America hail the "Swedish movement cure," and "light gymnastics," as the foundation stones of education, and preparatory methods of unfolding healthy minds through healthy bodies. The same

philosophy applies to these children's musical exercises. I have lived in many lands, can bear testimony to the fact that where song comes out of the mouth, intoxicating liquors, coarse oaths, and ribald jests, seldom accompany it. There is no education in the realm of the sciences that equals music in its elevating, purifying, and hallowing influences.

The Germans, who as a nation have attained to the highest degree of excellence in the realm of metaphysics, unanimously acknowledge the effect of music as an educator and a soul motor of the most exalting and purifying character. I could write volumes on the refining influence of music, whether it be applied collectively or individually, upon national or family characteristics; and though I scarcely think good, practical Mr Titchener has studied out this subject from its metaphysical aspects, I am confident he has intuitively perceived and practically realised the beneficial influence of music in the training of his dangerous and difficult charge.

I believe there is a growing tendency in this age to combine music, physical culture, amusement, work, imitation, and ideality, in the training of the rising generation. I am confident these are all steps in the right direction. We have too long indulged in the idea that the children of poor people should be educated in utilitarianism only, and excluded from the realms of art, science, ideality, and beauty. The introduction of pictures, music, sentiment, home love, and the culture of individuality, are glorious substitutes for the old régime, and another generation must bring forth the fruits of this

attempt to "level up," instead of the determined effort to "keep them down." If teachers and guardians would only administer their intellectual medicaments with the combined sweeteners of love and parental interest, manifested in the Dunedin Industrial School, I am confident the effect will be felt in a more gentle, orderly, thoughtful, and healthy generation, and we shall have cause to rejoice as I did, on closing my visit, that the waifs who are redeemed by national policy from the dens of infamy which disgrace our civilisation, are no longer regarded as monstrous growths, to be dealt with only through the medium of degrading penitential exercises, but are treated, as in the case under consideration, like tablets of virgin wax, upon which the hand of formative art, guided by the spirit of humanity and wisdom, can engrave the true, the beautiful, and the good in such indelible characters as will remould the mentality and morality of the rising generation. Deeply impressed with the paternal action of the New Zealand Government, and the wisdom of the choice they have made in the excellent superintendents of the Dunedin Industrial School, I left that establishment, heartily wishing I could reduplicate its living elements in every centre of civilisation throughout the world.