

of local Councils, which are of course, tributary to the central or National Council. All Associations working for philanthropic, social, or temperance reforms, may be affiliated to the National Council, which also takes in any Society representing arts, crafts, industries, literature, enfranchisement of women, &c., so that every side of the *human* life may be represented in one large Council which has for its aim the best interests and the advancement of all women. These National Councils are, in their turn, affiliated to the International Council of Women, of which Lady Aberdeen is President. Her Secretary, Miss Wilson, has been making a round of the various National Councils of Women with a view to bringing Lady Aberdeen into personal touch with their progress, and it is hoped that the information thus gained, and the cordiality which in this way will be established, will tend materially towards assisting the success of the International Meeting which is to take place in 1898.

Our portrait shows Lady Aberdeen's striking and charming personality, but it cannot present the tact and graciousness of manner which has made Lady Aberdeen so popular, and which has marked her as one of our few Stateswomen. We propose, as space permits, to submit to our readers the portraits and historettes of the four remaining Hon. Officers of the International Council of Women—Mrs. Wright-Sewall, of the United States, Vice-President; The Baroness Alexandra Von Grippenbergh, of Finland, Treasurer; Mrs. Eva McLaren, England, the Corresponding Secretary; and Mde. Maria Martin, of France, the Recording Secretary.

A Book of the Week.

"A SELF-DENYING ORDINANCE."*

I AM rather disappointed to see that the principal reviews, such as the *Spectator*, do not recognise the merit of this engaging novel. They speak of it as being amateurish, inconsequent and impossible. Now I beg to commence this notice by recording at once my robust dissent from their opinions, for to my mind the book is full of human interest, is brightly written, and contains at least one character that lives in the memory, and in which the authoress shows a subtle knowledge of a young, unsophisticated girl's peculiarities and temptations. Moreover, the novel has the distinction of being decidedly interesting, I could not lay it aside till I had finished it, and I read so many novels in the way of business that my appetite for fiction gets somewhat fastidious. Joanna Conway is an Irish girl, living in an out-of-the-way district in Ireland; life at Ballylone is not exciting, and the only dissipation consists of prayer meetings and Zenana meetings. One day a certain wild, and truth to tell, dissipated young Guardsman, Sir Nicholas Osbourne, arrives to take up his abode in the village in order to recover from his debts and hide from his gambling creditors. He falls in love with Joanna (having nothing else to do), and she, after a while, comes to care very deeply for him. Her egotistic father and Methodist mother make no objection, and it is arranged that

Joanna shall go over to England with her baronet *fiancé* and stay with his sister in a smart country house. This is where the interest of the story begins. Now nearly all the reviews that I have seen of this book say that the "goings on" in this wild house are impossible, and they therefore condemn the book on this ground finally and without any qualification. But incredible as it may seem to many people, there is no doubt that these terrible "goings on" are not impossible, but that on the contrary, such things do take place in so-called "smart houses," and that jests, practical jokes, and escapades occur very much in the manner that is described in the novel, where Lady Hildas and Hon. Misses conduct themselves in a manner more befitting the lowest class of barmaid than as members of the upper classes. I do not for a moment wish to hint that such "goings on" are usual in smart circles, only there is, unfortunately, a certain class of our over-moned, over-leisured population, where such things are allowed by the hostess to occur in the manner that is described in these apparently incredible pages. The country-bred Joanna is naturally amazed at the manners and customs of her *fiancé's* aristocratic relations, and also greatly scandalised, but the description of the balls and pranks, the astounding (so called), practical jokes and all the rest of the strange and uncomfortable experiences that Joanna went through during her visit to Lord and Lady Meredith I must leave for curious readers to discover for themselves. The result of it all is that the unstable Sir Osbourne runs away with a married lady friend, and leaves the poor little Irish girl all forlorn.

The record of her life after she returns to her uncongenial home is full of pathos, and I think that the growth and development of her character under trial is powerfully and convincingly described. I greatly relished, for instance, the account of her lessons in wood-carving, and her brave efforts to renew her interest in her flowers and bees. She lives along bravely, but somewhat wearily, till one day, to the astonishment and shocking of the whole village, Sir Nicholas and Lady Florence (to whom he is not married), arrive with a baby to take up their abode in Ballylone. Lady Florence pines for gaieties and loathes the poor little house and dull little village to which Sir Nicholas is reduced to bringing her, having spent all his money travelling with her for some months abroad. Nemesis overtakes the guilty pair in the most complete manner imaginable, and Joanna beholds Sir Nicholas reduced to despair and poverty, with an ether-drinking woman companion and a superfluous baby. After a while Lady Florence leaves him, and, bribed by a small income settled on her by relations, she consents to expatriate herself abroad for the rest of her life. I will not spoil the novel reader's interest by revealing the somewhat surprising end of the tale. It was quite different to what one might naturally expect, and yet, having regard to Joanna's nature, the reader is forced to own that however much he may disapprove of her decision from an ethical point of view, it was at any rate perfectly consistent with the character of the girl round whom the whole interest of the tale, from first to last, centres.

Mrs. Conway, the querulous mother of Joanna, wants actuality, she does not live in these pages, and her father is also a somewhat colourless individual; but Elizabeth, the sister who lives at home, who has divorced her husband, and having an entirely empty

* "A Self-Denying Ordinance." By M. Hamilton. 6s. (Heinemann, 1896.)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)