

The Queen's Poor.

LIFE AS THEY FIND IT IN TOWN AND COUNTRY.

Many books are written descriptive of the lives and work of nurses, but most are from the pens of those who have but scant acquaintance with the conditions of which they write. A book therefore by one who has an intimate knowledge of nursing is the more welcome, and such is the work now under consideration by Miss M. Loane, until recently Superintendent of Queen's Nurses at Portsmouth, where she has had an opportunity for much insight into the lives of the poor, an opportunity of which she has availed herself to the full. She tells of those amongst whom she has lived with a sympathetic pen, of their methods of life and their views on various matters.

The book is published by Mr. Edward Arnold, 41, Maddox Street, Bond Street, W., price 6s., and is likely to be widely read, not only by nurses, but by all who are interested in the backbone of the nation, the labouring classes.

Our readers are already acquainted with Miss Loane through this journal, for many papers by her have appeared in it, from which some paragraphs are included in the book under consideration. Two of the chapters, those entitled "Husband and Wife Among the Poor" and "The Religion of the Respectable Poor," have already appeared in substance in the *Contemporary Review*.

HUSBAND AND WIFE.

Does anyone think that amongst the respectable poor the wife is nothing but a household drudge? So does not the nurse who works amongst them. It is the wife who is Chancellor of the Exchequer and general domestic manager. Thus Miss Loane tells that "money matters are left entirely to the wife; it is she who decides whether an increased rent can be paid or an article of furniture bought, whether a boy shall be apprenticed or must take what work he can find, and what insurance clubs, &c., shall be joined. The custom of leaving the management of the money to the wife is so deeply rooted, that children always speak of the family income as belonging entirely to her, and will constantly tell you 'Mother has to pay so and so for rent,' 'Mother is going to try and afford father this or that,' 'Mother isn't going to let father work for Mr. — any more, she says the wages isn't worth the hours.' Again, 'Mother let's father keep all his overtime money,' I was told by an agricultural labourer's daughter. It sounded an unusually liberal allowance until I learnt that he was expected to 'find hisself in boots,' and to buy two young pigs at a cost of about a guinea each, and pay for all the meal required as soon as fattening time began." "Talk of the subjection of women," says Miss Loane, "I doubt if the bare idea of fathers being equal to mothers in rank and authority ever enters the mind of any cottage child under sixteen. From their conversation all my little friends might be fatherless, except for an occasional dramatic recital of how dad 'went and did' something that mother said he 'hadn't ought to' and the disastrous results of this untimely rebellion. Father is generally regarded in the light of mother's eldest child, and disobedience in *him* is far more heinous a crime than in *them*, because 'he'd ought to know better than not to do what mother says.' Fathers are, as a rule, perfectly satisfied with this

position, not minding in the least when the youngest born publicly raises a note of warning, 'Mother said as you *wasn't* to do that, dad!'"

THE RELIGION OF THE POOR.

Of the religion of the respectable poor the writer says that "many years' experience of the poorest of the respectable poor have convinced me that deep and true religion is commonly found among them, the chief tenets of which are 'The existence of a Supreme Being intimately concerned with the life of men, and best served by loving faithfulness to the homeliest duties; the spiritual efficacy of prayer, and triumphant faith in the immortality of the soul.'"

The reason Miss Loane gives for the rarity of the fear of death among the poor is pathetic. "It is rather the certain hope of death that makes life tolerable to them, both in its bitterest moments and in its long-drawn-out struggles, weakness, poverty, ill-health, and sin. Often what is called their callousness to the sight of death should rather be traced to envy of those who are dead and at peace. Have they shed few tears? For themselves they wish none to fall."

Is it not a reproach on our citizenship that the lives of the poor—not, be it noted, of the lowest amongst them, but of the respectable poor—are so drear, so hard, and so bitter that, as Faber also tells us,

"They only long to go,

To take to God their over-weighted hearts.

Conceive the conditions of the life in which their greatest alleviation is to look forward to the advent of "Death, the Consoler." Surely we may well pause and ask what is wrong with the civilisation of which we are proud, when it lays upon the shoulders of men, women and little children, burdens which are so heavy to bear.

THE CHILDREN.

Who does not know how swiftly the burdens and cares of life fall upon the children of the poor? A child of my acquaintance, aged about three, who lived in a London slum, and picked up the language and some of the manners of the street, which was her only playground, said to her mother, after spending an hour with a friend of my own, "If I were always with that lady I should be a nice little girl." Poor child! At five years of age she was sobered down, nursing the third baby while her mother was at work. "She's got to," said the mother, "she do say it makes her back ache holding the baby so long, but she's quite useful." The boisterous child is now quite a sober and matronly little woman. Quite recently I was told by a lady who visits an East End common lodging-house where forty rough men are accommodated, that she asked a little girl of five, who was sitting on the doorstep, why she was not at school. The child replied: "Mother's out, and her and me can't leave the place at the same time."

So Miss Loane says: "A child exists not for the very poor as any object of dalliance; it is only another mouth to be fed, a pair of little hands to be betimes inured to labour. It is the rival till it can be the co-operator for food with the parent. . . . The children of the poor have no young times. It makes the very heart bleed to overhear the casual talk between a poor woman and her little girl. . . . It is of mangling and clear-starching, of the price of coals or of potatoes. The questions of the child, that should be the very outpourings of curiosity in idleness, are marked with forecast and melancholy providence. It has come to be a woman before it was a child."

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