

which Miss Portal, at the recent Glasgow Conference of Women Workers, gave such an admirable description. "Can you tell me," we asked a little group of women, "where St. Margaret's House is?"

"Right up there, my dear, past those trees, against the public-house," replied one, pointing good humouredly in the right direction. And, sure enough, we soon came upon the house, though the close proximity of the public-house was not so obvious as the tiny grass plot, the porch, the spotless white curtains, and the clean windows, all wide open and commanding a view of the green upon which has been built a church and the Bethnal Green Museum.

Having been introduced to Miss Harington, the Head of the House, we were shown over the various apartments, including the bedrooms of the resident ladies as well as the club-rooms in the rear. What the house was originally no one seems to know, but that it enjoyed a respectable youth, as it is now enjoying a respectable age, seems certain. At the back of the house, on the spot that was once a large garden, there has been erected a two-storeyed kind of warehouse, which has served, with the house, the purposes of a boot factory. Needless to say, no trace of its former use is now to be seen. Every room and every corner have been made as pretty as deft fingers, directed by artistic taste, could make them; and the two huge bare workshops at the rear have, by means of a few curtains and pictures, been turned into cosy club-rooms, filled every night with girls of all ages, from those still at school to those of 19 or 20 years of age. And there is plenty of variety of occupation for them—singing, dancing, drilling, dressmaking, drawing, lectures, magic lantern, and games of all kinds.

But the lady residents at St. Margaret's do not limit their energies to evening clubs. They endeavour to link their life on to that of the people of the district. Having themselves learned their duties towards their neighbours, poor as well as rich, to those living in the East End as well as the West, their aim and object is to teach the people, among whom they have cast their lot, the great duty they owe to one another; to remember that they form part of a great community; to realise that no man can live his own life alone; that, whether he be high or low, his life at every point touches the lives of hundreds of other people—in short, "that no man liveth or dieth unto himself."

As to the inmates of St. Margaret's House, some of them are permanent residents, and some only stay for a few months; but it is scarcely necessary to say that they thoroughly enjoy their work. Their lives are full; they can find every day and every hour somebody needing encouragement; some factory girl pining for a cheery word of sympathy in a life of self-sacrifice; some mother requiring advice as to her baby, or the girl leaving school. Then there are the workhouse and hospital wards to visit, taking nourishment to those who need nursing, and the holding of mothers' meetings. In the very work itself, there is the pleasure that comes from doing one's utmost, and doing it well, though the results be apparent to no one's eyes. But if these ladies look for recompense they find it all around. They find it in the improved tone, the higher motives, the *esprit de corps* springing up in the characters of the girls they endeavour to make their friends. And as for the lady residents, their communal life must be fraught with the very greatest benefits to themselves—cheerfulness, sym-

pathy, forbearance, personal unselfishness, being flowers that find their fullest development in the family or in family-like relationships.

As we have said, this Settlement is worked on the lines of the Christian Social Union. They are undoubtedly practical in that they require a man to carry his religion into the everyday practical affairs of life. "To claim for the Christian Law the ultimate authority to rule social practice" is its first object. As Miss Portal has said in her Paper at Glasgow: "There is, perhaps, nothing that startles and saddens us so much in considering those amongst whom we live, in whatever rank in life, as the glaring disparity between their religious principles and their social practice. A sense of duty towards individuals comes to birth long before the sense of duty towards a community. People whose religious and ethical principles are clear and lofty, only too often do not apply them to their commercial and social dealings with their fellow-men." But "duty to God and Humanity is one duty, extending to every aspect of life, and including all our dealings with our fellows." This is a lesson kept constantly in view by the workers at St. Margaret's House, for if it applies with force to the wealthy and to employers of labour, it applies with no less force to the employed in their relations to their fellow-men.

The second object of the C.S.U. is "To study in common how to apply the moral truths and principles of Christianity to the social and economic difficulties of the present time." The subject of citizenship is being everywhere discussed—in the lecture, the pulpit, the novel, the essay; and it is indeed gratifying to learn that the various branches of the C.S.U. definitely encourage, by means of reading unions, discussions, and monthly meetings, real earnest study of the social and economic questions of the day.

"It is hoped," says Miss Portal, "that even in the busy life of East London, time may be found to study those fundamental questions, the results of which are daily before our eyes as we go about the streets of Bethnal Green."

"To present Christ, in practical life, as the living Master and King, the enemy of wrong and selfishness, the power of righteousness and love," is the third object of the C.S.U. And how does the St. Margaret's House try to carry this out? By endeavouring to teach the girl workers that they must stand or fall together, that if one member suffer all must suffer, that the harmony of the whole body depends upon each member; in short, that they each form part of a great sisterhood; that each one is dependent upon the uprightness of the other.

If this spirit of comradeship is needed by anyone, it is needed by women and girls who have not yet learnt the lesson, grasped by their brothers centuries ago, that "Union is strength." Their work is wretchedly paid; they rush in to do labour at a price which will barely keep themselves alive, to say nothing of supporting a family. It is, therefore, with pleasure that we learn from Miss Portal that the girls they have come into contact with at St. Margaret's House are learning to take the highest and the most unselfish view, and though this may result in a loss to the individual, there have been those who have refused to connive at the fraudulent practices and underhand methods of their employers. "I know a girl," says Miss Portal, "who gave up good employment because an awakened conscience forbade her to go on pasting

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)