



Our Foreign Letter.

THE ROYAL INSTITUTE FOR THE BLIND IN COPENHAGEN.

IF want of sight were the only abnormal feature Institutions for the blind had to consider in the training of blind children, their work would be comparatively easy. "But," as the experienced Superintendent of the Royal Institute remarked, "in a majority of cases blindness is the result of disease. Except in cases of accident it is the outcome of a constitutional delicacy requiring infinite patience of treatment and the perfection of sanitary surroundings. Even then it often baffles us, for the causes that lead to blindness curse our nation with other physical afflictions, and are in their results among the most disheartening that science has to battle against."

"I tell you this," he continued, "before we go our round of the Institute, for these physical considerations are far greater obstacles than the actual moral and mental training, which, in a normal, healthy blind child, can be conducted as methodically and successfully as in the case of a child endowed with all its senses."

We were standing in the pretty garden of the Royal Institute. All around us were shady seats occupied by groups of the pupils. They were of various ages—from little children to half-grown men and women. By far the greater number were chatty and sociable, and a credit to the authorities of the Institute, who, while fully realising the dangers and difficulties of their charges' state, in no wise inculcate or encourage a tendency to self-pity or weak indulgence. On the contrary, the whole system of the Institute revolves round the principle, that the pupils shall not regard their deficiency as an excuse for inaction or moping or slipshod work. Kindly and systematically they are trained to feel that to each his existence is given for a purpose, justified by his work, gladdened and dignified by his own energy and courage.

"We want," said the kindly Superintendent, "our pupils to feel that they must learn to do their special work as well as it can be done. Wherever health and circumstances allow, their trade or talent is to support them honourably."

The value of fresh air is fully recognised, and the long corridors and well-ventilated apartments give the inmates plenty of breathing room. In fact, for 100 pupils and their staff, the size of the entire building, standing in its well-kept garden, is more than ample.

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You can tell it by its Delicious Aroma.

"In all domestic arrangements," said my guide, "girls and boys are strictly separated. Their dormitories are in different wings, and in every case connected with a charge-teacher's cubicle. But socially we consider a judicious amount of intercourse wholesome—and, at our balls——"

"Balls!"

"Yes, balls. We have dancing lessons and balls here. On festive occasions boys and girls are allowed to dance together. And they have their favourites here as elsewhere. The sound of a voice, the touch of a hand, can have as much influence in deciding sympathy and antipathy as the sight of a face."

"Yet such balls must be a melancholy sight," I thought—and somehow thought aloud, for the Superintendent exclaimed decidedly: "Melancholy! I wish you could see our children enjoy themselves. They look forward to their treats like other children. Long before Christmas, for instance, they are full of pleasurable expectation. Each child is allowed to express a wish that is fulfilled on Christmas Eve. Besides this there are many other surprises prepared for them, and a Christmas ball to wind up with."

The scene we entered now was the chapel of the Institute. I do not think that the impressions I received there will easily fade from my memory, for I heard such excellent organ-playing that there seems little doubt the boyish performer is destined for future success. I forgot he was a blind boy altogether, he sunk his individuality so perfectly. With the power of the true artist, his art conjured up nature: Now the wind swept over a lonely moor—now waves beat restlessly against a rock—now voices were blended in a burst of thanksgiving that needed no words. "We thank Thee for Our Creation" was their import, as they rolled grandly forth from under the fingers of the sightless child.

The boy was simple and modest enough as he turned to face us after his performance, blushing at a few words of praise, like the child he was. His young companion, who had worked the stops, was a singularly handsome lad, with no visible sign of blindness, and, as the two strode easily and gracefully towards the door, moving as boys move whose limbs are trained by gymnastics, they made a pleasant picture.

I expressed admiration not only of the talent the boy had shown, but also of the technique he employed.

"Surely he must have been most excellently taught," I said.

"Yes," was the answer; "whenever our pupils show talent for music, the training they receive is of the best; but, in cases of poverty, the State pays the entire expense of first-rate training. Our school is a Government school, and the funds are mainly found by Government. There is to be no stinting intellectually or physically. By that maxim we work."

I thought to myself it would be well if many Government Institutions of various nations would follow out the same broad-minded rule.

"But come," he added, "you shall see our class-work."

We entered a cheerful, well-ventilated schoolroom, where a singing-lesson was in full swing. Boys and girls are taught together; the former grouped to the right, the latter to the left of their master, who is seated at a piano. The whole party looks delightfully friendly and informal. I am introduced as a lady from England, and then the whole class rise, and I am treated to "God Save the Queen," as a compliment

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