

## WOMEN AND THEIR WORK.

## PRISON OFFICIALS.

THIS year is the centenary of the death of one of the greatest philanthropists the world has ever seen, of one whose name is numbered among the "Immortelles," and who is one of the few who have survived the fate of their fellow-men, *i.e.*, oblivion. And this is so, not because he was "the victor o'er a thousand foe"; not because on blood-stained fields he received a vanquished nation's homage; not because he wrought in stone solid mementoes of his wondrous art, which shall testify of his power long after the hand which chiselled them was cold and still; not because he caused the dull canvas to glow with warm colouring, and to tell forth its story when his own lips were hushed in the deep silence of death. For not as conqueror, sculptor, artist, does he stand forth a king among his compeers, but nobler still, as the kindly benefactor of the oppressed, as the prisoners' friend. Gallant Howard, the "good," was not interred with his bones, for a truer monument has been erected to his memory than any statue, however lofty, in the well-arranged prison system prevailing throughout England. But though his first thought was of his fellow-countrymen, his colossal labours were cosmopolitan. He travelled, and that before the days of luxurious *wagon-lits*, in nearly every country in the civilised world, his mission ever a mission of mercy, his life-work the relieving of the distressed. But to turn from the thought of the prisoner to the field of labour open to women as prison warders and matrons. One of the principal reforms is that women now are so much more largely employed than formerly in attendance on female prisoners. The very idea of such work is at first repugnant, but it, like everything else, has its advantages as well as disadvantages, the principal being good salary and regular hours. Of course, like all large institutions, routine and rule are the watchwords, the pivots on which all turns. But nothing is better for health than a clock-work life, provided one has some relaxation at times. The salaries are from £50 to £65 for Assistant Matrons and Prison Warders; £70 to £85 for Matrons; and from £80 to £140 for principal Matrons; Infirmary Nurses receive from £65 to £75. Candidates must pass a Civil Service examination, but it is not difficult; reading, writing, and simple arithmetic are principally requisite. Appointments are not given at once, but only when necessity arises. Candidates (1) must not be less than twenty-three, nor more than forty years of age; (2) must not be less than five feet two inches in height *without shoes*; (3)

must be either single, or widows without children. The first on the list of qualifications runs thus:—"All candidates *must* be of unexceptionable character," &c.; (2) *must* possess activity, intelligence, good temper; (3) *must* be in good health, free from any bodily complaint, of sound constitution, and well developed physically. A good many "musts," as my readers will see. Candidates are subjected to a strict Medical examination by the Medical officers of the prison department of the Civil Service. All further particulars and forms for application can be obtained from the Clerk in Charge of Staff, Prison Department, Home Office, Whitehall, S.W.

MRS. MEREDITH'S work amongst discharged female prisoners is too well known to need "advertising" in this or any paper, but I cannot refrain, while on the subject of prisons, of saying one word about her who has been truly called the feminine Howard, and the new Elizabeth Fry. Verily, God removes the workmen, but carries on their work, only there is this difference: Mrs. Meredith's labours are outside of instead of within those prison walls. What more pitiless being can be found than a discharged female prisoner as she stands thrust out from those grim portals, forlorn, humbled, despised, in her own eyes, and in the eyes of the world, a suspicious character, a gaol-bird? How welcome then is the kindly hand held out to her in the name of One who died for *all*, who loves *all*, of Him who is the prisoner's Hope! Mrs. Meredith's work, as all true work does, began by "small things." A wave of pity—pity which converted thought to action in the case of one or two sinful, miserable women—was the germ of the immense philanthropic work now carried on by this noble and indefatigable lady, the headquarters of which are at 143, Clapham Road.

It is wonderful how long actresses manage to keep their youth, any way, on the stage. Ellen Terry, the mother of grown up sons, can still take the girl lover's part, such as Portia, Ophelia, &c. But still more curious was a jubilee, or rather diamond wedding with the stage, which a German actress lately kept in Stuttgart. Only ten years old at the time of her first appearance, this is her 75th year before the public. She played the part of Barbel in "Dorfam Stadt" on her festival night, and was enthusiastically received by the crowded house, King Charles himself congratulating at the end the aged actress, whose life has already been prolonged beyond the four score years of the Psalmist, in spite of the many years she has spent in the hard work of amusing other people.

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