JOSEPINE BUTLER

1828-1906.

At this time the problem of the social diseases is very much in the minds of all seriously thinking people, as an account of the work of Josephine Butler and her crusade against the evil of State-regulated vice may prove an inspiration. England happily was the last country in Europe to adopt such regulations (1864) and she was the first to abolish them (1886).

During the 19th century women were coming more and more into the outer world as compared with their hitherto limited fields of domestic life and teaching as governesses. With their victorious entr yinto the realms of teaching, nursing and medicine we are not at this moment concerned. The subject of our article is prominent in the galaxy of those who worked and fought for the emancipation of their sex for her work against the "die-hard" theories that a moral lapse in a woman is far worse than in a man and that deep silence must enshroud the social evil.

Josephine was born in 1828 and passed a sheltered happy girlhood in her Northumbrian home. Thanks to the wisdom of her parents her education was far wider than that generally accorded to a girl at that period. In 1852 she married George Butler, who was to prove the ideal help-mate for one with her vision and sympathy.

For five years after their marriage the Butlers lived in Oxford. Their views on the moral question were entirely similar and it was there that they sheltered and helped a young unfortunate from Newgate who had been sentenced for the murder of her infant and who was "the first of a world of unhappy women," thus sheltered and aided by Mrs. Butler.

Domestic sorrows and ill health made a removal from Oxford imperative in 1857 and in that year Mr. Butler became vice-principal of Cheltenham College until 1866 when he became principal of Liverpool College. Before this latter move an added sorrow came in the death of their only daughter by a fall. But sorrow only urged Josephine further in the work the Master had appointed for her to do. In Liverpool she was, she says, "possessed with an irresistible desire to go forth and find some pain keener than my own." Her visits to the hospital and oakum-picking sheds of the Liverpool work-house provided her with the work she sought. The Butlers crowded their home with as many as they could of the girls who were anxious to make a fresh start. In time Mr. and Mrs. Butler founded a House of Rest for such cases, which finally became a municipal institution, and also an industrial home for friendless girls. But this was but the prelude to a wider sphere of work.

The State Regulation of Vice took its rise in France under Napoleon I. Professor de Laveleye says:—

> It could only have had its birth at a period of disturbance, when the rights of human dignity and individual liberty were forgotten or misunderstood . . . never either in Rome, or in Athens, or even in Corinth was the spectacle witnessed of public abodes of shame kept open by the State. Juvenal paints Messalina gliding tither under cover of night. But even Heliogabulus never constituted himself their patron as nowadays do the Municipal and State authorities of our Christian communities in the full sunshine of the 19th century.

The advocates of the system declared that by this system of licensing houses and periodical compulsory eaxmination of the inmates the spread of disease was checked and the inherent natural desires of the male safely gratified. To the present writer's amazement there are some to-day who still hold this view as a pardonable disgression, therefore, let the same authority quoted above speak again:

> It (the system) has been the source of profound disorders, both moral and physical: of moral disorder, by destroying the aversion which vice should inspire, and thereby strengthening its power; of physical disorders, by exciting incontinence, and all its concurrent evils, with preferred facilities and promises of immunity.

An attempt was made during Lord Melbourne's ministry to introduce this French system in England but it was deemed impossible to place such an Act of Parliament in the hands of a young virgin Queen for signature and the matter dropped. It was not until the first year of Queen Victoria's widowhood (1864) that the supporters of the system were able to get the Act through Parliament and signed by the Queen when she was doubtless absorbed in private sorrow.

Those who opposed the Act realised that more than mere argument was needed and that women must find protagonists among their own sex. Appeals for help were many, and Mrs. Butler realised the clarity of the call though with some shrinking from the publicity and agitation. Only her passionate love for justice and purity and her love for her unfortunate sister-women nerved her for the task. "The toils and conflicts of the years that followed were light in comparison with the anguish of that first plunge," she said.

In 1870, at the Colchester by-election, the Government candidate, Sir Henry Storks, former Governor of Malta, was an ardent advocate of the C.D. Acts. His utterance that he much regretted his inability to bring the soldiers' wives under similar legislation lost him many working men's votes. It was among the working folk that Mrs. Butler found her most attentive and sympathetic listeners and supporters. Thanks to their practical help by their votes and the work of Mrs. Butler and her helpers the Government lost the seat by a large majority. Before the day of the election the Liberal candidate was entreated by the Government to retire from the contest. The writer (Mr Glyn) urged on behalf of the Government that they were "quite aware of the vast importance of the question." As Mrs. Butler wrote: "They have never been aware of its importance until now!!" Dr. Langley (the Liberal candidate) answered that he would **not** retire and would be stoned from the town if it would help the cause. The moral of the election was not lost on the Government.

Opposition and indifference only strengthened the cause. At one meeting men "in the **dress** of gentlemen" urged on a gang of roughs to break up the gathering, and Mrs. Butler had to be helped to escape by devious ways. More than once she and her fellow-workers had to leave their hotel to avoid riot and bloodshed. The accounts of her adventures remind one of the difficulties of the Temperance campaigners in the early days of the work in New Zealand!

In 1871 a Royal Commission was set up and Mrs. Butler gave valuable evidence before it. "I felt very weak and lonely. But there was one who stood by me. I almost felt as if I heard Christ's voice bidding me not to fear." Thus she writes of her feelings when she appeared before the Commission, and surely in those words we may see the inspiration of her lovely life and the great work she did.

But the repeal of the C.D. Acts in 1886 was by no means a signpost to indicate the conclusion of the work to which Mrs. Butler had dedicated herself. She was ever an enthusiastic supporter of the Women's Suffrage Movement and spoke ably on its behalf. An International Conference was held in 1899 at Brussels for purposes of promoting international action for the preventive treatment of venereal diseases. As the programme was limited to the administrative and medical aspects of the question the Abolitionist Federation declined to take any official part in the proceedings. The outcome of the deliberations came as a complete surprise, being a veritable triumph of Abolitionist principles. "The prophets who had been called together to bless the Regulation system found themselves almost with one accord led by the spirit of truth to curse it." This was indeed a triumph for the fine band of men and women crusaders who numbered Mrs. Butler among them.

In Europe Mrs. Butler travelled and studied the trgaedies and victims of the White Slave Traffic and the hideous system of the Police of Morals, who (in France especially) worked on the side of evil, aiding and abetting vice rather than as the protectors of the weak and helpless.

In Mrs. Butler's book, "Personal memories of a Great Crusade," may be found many interesting accounts in detail of the work of the Abolitionists, who worked against a far more dreadful slavery even than that of the negroes, whose protagonists were known by that same title. Some of the