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978-1-108-05722-6 - Baroness Burdett-Coutts: A Sketch of Her Public Life and Work

Anonymous

Excerpt

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CHICAGO, JANUARY, 1893

TO HER ROYAL HIGHNESS,  
PRINCESS MARY ADELAIDE,  
DUCHESS OF TECK.

MADAM,—I hope you will permit me as President of the Board of Lady Managers of the Columbian Exhibition to address Your Royal Highness on a matter of some importance, and one in which we venture to ask your gracious assistance.

Your Royal Highness will be aware that the Exhibition will include as one of its most valued features a Section devoted to the Philanthropic Work of British Women. This has been prepared by the Baroness Burdett-Coutts, the President of the Committee appointed for the purpose, and will, I understand, supply a most interesting

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record of women's philanthropic work in Great Britain. The fact, however, that the Baroness has undertaken this work, while greatly enhancing its importance and interest, gives rise to a difficulty which will seriously impair the value of the exhibit. It is obvious that no record of the Philanthropic Work of Englishwomen could be complete, or in any sense satisfactory, without some account of the great part which the Baroness herself has taken in such work. Her name is almost as well known and honored throughout this country as it is in England, not only for a long life of noble deeds, but for the practical insight, untiring devotion, and great wisdom, which she has brought to bear upon philanthropic subjects.

In reply to an official inquiry the Baroness has informed me that as

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*MRS. POTTER PALMER.*

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President of her Section she does not propose to include any account of her individual work.

My Board considers it essential to the success of the exhibit that this deficiency should be supplied, and knowing that the Baroness has long enjoyed Your Royal Highness' friendship, extending to personal assistance in some of her works, we venture to turn to Your Royal Highness as one to help us to fill up the gap which I have indicated.

That object would be attained if Your Royal Highness could arrange that some record of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts' work could be supplied to the Exhibition, together, possibly, with any models or illustrations that may be available. For this purpose we should be happy to place a special position in the Women's Building at Your Royal Highness' disposal.

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I need hardly add that by acceding to this request Your Royal Highness would confer a distinguished favor on the Board of Managers, and that such participation in our labors would be accepted as a very gracious act by all American women.

I remain with much respect,  
Your Royal Highness' faithful servant,

BERTHA HONORÉ PALMER,  
PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD OF LADY MANAGERS.

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WHITE LODGE, RICHMOND PARK,

LONDON, April 8, 1893.

TO MRS. POTTER PALMER,

PRESIDENT OF THE BOARD

OF LADY MANAGERS,

WORLD'S COLUMBIAN EXHIBITION.

MADAM,—I have much pleasure in acceding to the request of the Board of Lady Managers by presenting this short record of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts' philanthropic work to the Chicago Exhibition; for I fully appreciate the inadequacy of any representation of the Philanthropic work of British Women, which does not include the part taken in it by the subject of this record.

It is only just, I would not say to English women, but to *all* women, that one who has enriched the reputation of her sex by her life, character and

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deeds, should find a place in that department of your great Exhibition, which is so wisely devoted to the true public sphere of women's philanthropy.

I have known intimately the Baroness all my life, have valued her friendship, and have often participated in some of her work, as did also my late father, the Duke of Cambridge. The Duke of Wellington, the Earl of Harrowby (the Baroness' cousin), and others of their time, with whom I have been acquainted, watched with interest the earlier stages of a career which has been so fruitful of benefit to her fellow-beings, and often assisted in her undertakings. From that time down to the present day the Baroness has been prominent among the subjects of the Queen in all good works. Your letter shows so well that you appreciate

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the real value of her work—its sagacity and practical insight into the conditions of want and suffering, and their effective amelioration—that I need not say anything on this point.

I would like, however, to add two remarks. Great as have been the intrinsic benefits that the Baroness has conferred on others, the most signal of all has been the power of example—an incalculable quantity, which no record of events can measure. She has ever sought, also, to increase the usefulness of women in their homes, to extend their opportunities of self-improvement, and to deepen the sources of influence which they derive from moral worth and Christian life.

This record has been prepared at somewhat short notice from such materials as could be readily found under those circumstances, and by a

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competent and accurate hand. It does not pretend to be complete or exhaustive, and the main object indicated to the compiler responsible for it, was to show in what varied spheres the Baroness' work has been placed, and by what kind of methods she has carried it out.

Sincerely congratulating you on your praiseworthy attempt to add still more to the renown of your wonderful Exhibition by thus giving prominence to the highest and best form of woman's work, and wishing you every success,

I remain,

Yours very faithfully,

MARY ADELAIDE,

PRINCESS OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND,

DUCHESS OF TECK.



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## INTRODUCTION.

The object of this little volume, prepared at the request of the Board of Lady Managers of the Chicago Exhibition, is to give a short general account of the public work of the Baroness Burdett-Coutts. Even within this limit, it does not pretend to be a complete record, and in no sense whatever is it a biography. It has been compiled, somewhat hastily, from sources which are generally accessible, and while the facts are accurately stated they must be taken as little more than typical and illustrative of the work of a long life “of golden days, fruitful of golden deeds,” which cannot be enumerated in these pages.

The Baroness is the youngest daughter

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ter of Sir Francis Burdett, Bart., one of the leading figures in the political history of the early part of the century, and long the champion of popular rights. She is the grand-daughter of the wealthy banker, Thomas Coutts, whose immense fortune—at that day perhaps unprecedented—was eventually bequeathed to her by his widow. This young English lady then found herself at the head of one of the great financial houses of the world, ranking in London next only to the Bank of England, while socially the unique character of her position conferred upon her informal privileges which almost constituted a prerogative. As one of many ambitions, the gratification of which thus lay within the grasp of the young heiress, a writer declared that, with her wealth, she might “purchase a principality.”