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Mary Carpenter

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Reformatory Schools

Daughter of a Unitarian minister and schoolmaster, the penal reformer and educationist Mary Carpenter (1807–77) grew up in a pious family with a strong sense of obligation to those who were less fortunate. Moved by the appalling circumstances of destitute children in Bristol, she established her first ragged school in 1846. In her bid to improve the difficult lives of juvenile delinquents, her enlightened philosophy was one of rehabilitation rather than retribution, emphasising the importance of giving children a sense of self-worth. These views form the basis of this landmark work, first published in 1851. Marshalling a range of evidence in support of her argument, Carpenter highlights the need for radical change in the treatment of young offenders. Her lobbying bore fruit in England with the passage of the Youthful Offenders Act (1854), described as ‘the Magna Carta of the neglected child’.

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BY

MARY CARPENTER.

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P R E F A C E.

THE enormity and amount of juvenile depravity is a subject which now most painfully engages the public mind. The mature and headstrong character which it exhibits has been unveiled and presented to the public eye in colours, fearful because true, by various recent publications, which must make every Christian heart shudder and tremble. Statistic tables prove to us its appalling progress, in a ratio far exceeding that of the population generally ;—but even these, clear as they may appear to be, and forcible in their appeals, are less powerful to convince of the dreadful truth, and to demonstrate its results, than the daily experience of our great cities, as it can be attested by our magistrates,—our governors and chaplains of gaols,—our police,—or even the common readers of our newspapers.

These things have long been known to the few ;—now they are made evident to the many ; and it is equally clear that if the evil is not checked it must

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increase. Now we see : — therefore our sin remaineth if we strive not to remove the evil.

But what can be done? Is there any remedy? If so, how can it be applied?

None, probably, will hesitate to acknowledge that education, — the early nurture, and the sound, religious, moral, and industrial training of the child, is the only curative that can strike at the root of the evil, by infusing a fresh and healthy principle, instead of that which is now so rotten in our state. But can it be given, so as to influence these degraded children; and if it can, ought it to be bestowed gratuitously upon them? Have we not already done enough in this country for the prevention of crime, by providing Schools, Penitentiaries, and Gaols?

These are important questions, which it will be attempted in this work fully and satisfactorily to answer; while it will be proved that Reformatory Schools, adapted to the various conditions of the “perishing and dangerous classes” of children, both can, and under Providence, will produce the desired effect of *checking the progress of crime in those who have not yet subjected themselves to the grasp of the law, and of reforming those who are already convicted criminals*. Such Schools occupy a middle ground between educational and penal establishments, and are liable to misunderstanding from a double source; such misunderstanding it will be the aim of the

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following inquiries to remove, placing them in their true position with respect to society.

It is earnestly entreated that all who have within them any desire to promote the welfare of their fellow beings, or any sense of the high responsibility which every Christian lies under, to do something to prepare the way for the coming of his Lord's kingdom on the earth,—will seriously and candidly peruse this volume, and, excusing its many defects, will allow due weight to the truths it contains,—truths which all may test for themselves.

Then let every one go forth to do what he can in this great cause;—all may find a way;—and what they do, let them “do quickly;”—the hour is fully come; the harvest truly is ripe;—may the Lord send many labourers to gather it in faithfully.

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