

**THE FRIENDS OF THE POOR
OF HAMBURGH;
OR, THE EXERCISE OF
CHRISTIAN BENEVOLENCE**

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The friends of the poor of Hamburgh; or, The exercise of Christian Benevolence by Various

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VARIOUS

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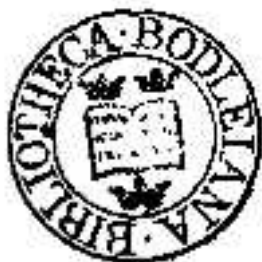
"The 'Friends of the Poor of Hamburgh,' whose zeal and labours may serve as a model to any who wish to devote themselves to works of charity."
MME. LA COMTESSE AGENOR DE GASPARIN.

Translated from the French.

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THE
FRIENDS OF THE POOR
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THE Society of the Friends of the Poor, founded at Hamburgh, by Mademoiselle Amélie Sieweking, is probably not unknown to many of those who regard with interest the efforts of Christian charity; but it seems to us, that the little which is known of it may justly excite the desire to know more. We have therefore extracted from the annual reports published hitherto, all that appeared to us generally useful and interesting. It will indeed be well, if, seeing the blessings which have attended the work at Hamburgh, some Christian people elsewhere feel themselves called upon also to unite, and together consecrate part of their time to the Lord, in His representatives, the poor!

Before describing the organization of this society at Hamburgh, and the spirit that animates it, we think we may interest our readers by bringing before them the commencement of the work, as Mademoiselle Sieweking has related it.

She says, " My heart was early drawn by God towards the poor and the afflicted. In my childhood, the stories which gave me the most pleasure were narratives of alms-giving and beneficence. As soon as it was in my power, I went secretly to visit poor families, and divided my pocket-money among them. Very soon I perceived that things were not as my story-books represented them. In the first place, it was not that ideal misery of half-naked people, dying of cold or hunger; and yet my small assistance was quite insufficient for the relief of the wants which actually existed. I could not, as in certain pretty stories, put an end, as by the stroke of a wand, to the sufferings of a poor family; and, moreover, I did not meet with that gratitude which I had looked for. Therefore, though I felt some pleasure, undoubtedly, in my little alms-givings, it was not the sort of pleasure which I expected.

" At the age of eighteen, I first heard of the Sisters of Charity in the Roman Catholic Church, and that idea immediately filled me with deep emotion. Oh! thought I, if I were destined to found something of that sort in our Reformed Church! I meditated on it during whole nights; the more I loved my Church the more I regretted that it was deprived of this beautiful ornament. But I also felt strongly that the desires of my heart ought to be subject to the Will of God. I

therefore waited for direction from Him, nor did I wait in vain."

Mademoiselle Sieweking then relates, how, at the commencement of the cholera, in 1831, she felt herself called upon, and how, after receiving the blessing of her adopted mother, she offered her services in an hospital, for the care of the sick poor. An appeal addressed to those of her fellow countrywomen who might be willing to join her, remained unanswered; but this silence did not discourage her. "I had not foreseen all, however," she continues; "I had expected the censure of the world, and had already learned to estimate it at its real worth; but the reproaches of Christians, of true believers in the Gospel, went to my very heart. 'High-flown pietism, self-conceited desire of martyrdom, neglect of domestic duties'—I was spared no sort of blame. They spoke without knowing my circumstances; I have never felt as I did then the insufficiency of human judgment. Since that time, I have gained much strength in this respect, and have learned that nothing is more vain than the attempt to please every one. The nearer we think ourselves to the attainment of this object, we shall find it is the farther away from us. I know only one way of obtaining, if not approbation, at least a certain degree of universal esteem: it is to advance firmly, with our eyes fixed upon our

Lord, and not turning aside, to please any one, from the path which we believe to be right. We shall hear in various quarters, murmurs and whisperings—no matter, let us go on with courage! Straightforward people will honour our straightforwardness, even when they do not participate in our views, and their opinion will put slanderers to silence.

“The sight of my sick people encouraged me in my resolution: I found strength when near them. One day, the prayers of a dying woman sank deeply into my heart; I felt strongly that that era in my existence ought not to pass away without fruit, and I loved to consider it as a consecration of my life to the service of the poor. It was then that I committed to paper the plan of a Society of Friends of the Sick and the Poor. Their relief was certainly my ruling motive; but I also thought of the benefits which would be reaped by those of my sisters who might undertake this work along with me.

“I was not ignorant that the first duties of a woman are the nearest,—those of her own home; and that if she neglects them for others, she falls under the condemnation of that text, ‘If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.’ But, for any one who seriously wishes to make a good use of it, time is,

as it were, elastic; and a great truth is contained in that apparent paradox, 'The more one does, the more one can do.'

"The life of some of those ladies for whom the usual destiny of woman is not appointed, has often occupied my mind. How many of these solitary beings I have met, and with what melancholy feelings I have seen them in their old age, when all their near relations were dead, contract by degrees the circle of their activity and of their thoughts, and at last shut themselves up entirely within themselves! Ah! it is a sad thing to live only for one's self. Once, assuredly, the holy fire of charity had burned in those hearts; but a fire which finds no food soon goes out. How many young ladies there are also, whose time, owing to circumstances, is very little occupied in household cares! How are their long hours of leisure employed? They are occupied with dress, with some little reading, perhaps, of the most frivolous kind; above all, with large pieces of embroidery for presents. But can this be a vocation for an immortal soul? No, as many of them deeply feel; and the void in their heart betrays itself by a vague desire to change their position, which we cannot consider as a crime. Lastly, how many widows there are, how many married women without children, to whom our remarks may, in some degree at least, apply? To unite all these inactive