ELIZABETH GILBERT AND HER WORK FOR THE BLIND

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649572762

Elizabeth Gilbert and Her Work for the Blind by Frances Martin

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

www.triestepublishing.com

FRANCES MARTIN

ELIZABETH GILBERT AND HER WORK FOR THE BLIND

Trieste

ELIZABETH GILBERT.

Gilbert
= Martin
AN

ELIZABETH GILBERT

AND

Her Work for the Blind.

NEW AND REVISED EDITION.

BY

FRANCES MARTIN,

AUTHOR OF "ANGÉLIQUE ARNAULD," ETC. ETC.

CASSELL & COMPANY, LIMITED:

LONDON, PARIS & MELBOURNE.

1891.

PREFACE.

THERE is a sacred privacy in the life of a blind person. It is led apart from much of the ordinary work of the world, and is unaffected by many external incidents which help to make up the important events of other lives. It is passed in the shade and not in the open sunlight of eager activity. At first we should be disposed to say that such a life, with its inevitable restrictions and compulsory isolation, could offer little of public interest, and might well remain unchronicled. But in the rare cases where blindness, feeble health, and suffering form scarcely any bar to activity; where they are not only borne with patience, but by heroic effort are compelled to minister to great aims, we are eager to learn the secret of such a life. No details connected with it are devoid of interest; and we are stimulated, encouraged, and strengthened by seeing obstacles overcome which appeared insurmountable, and watching triumph where we dreaded defeat.

Elizabeth Gilbert was born at a time when kindly and intelligent men and women could gravely implore "the Almighty" to "take away" a child merely because it was blind; when they could argue that to teach the blind to read, or to attempt to teach them to work, was to fly in the face of Providence.

And her whole life was given to the endeavour to overcome prejudice and superstition; to show that blindness, though a great privation, is not a disqualification. Blind men and women can labour, learn, and fulfil all the duties of life if their fellow-men are merciful and helpful; and God is on the side of all those who work honestly for themselves and others.

The life of Elizabeth Gilbert and her work for the blind are so inextricably interwoven that it is impossible to tell one without constant reference to the other.

A small cellar in Holborn at the rent of eighteenpence a week was enough for a beginning. But before her death she could point to large and well-appointed workshops in almost every city in England where blind men and women are employed, where tools have been invented by or modified for them, where agencies have been established for the sale of their work.

Her example has encouraged, her influence has promoted the work which she never relinquished throughout life.

Nothing was too great for her to attempt on behalf of the blind, nothing seemed impossible of achievement. One success suggested a new endeavour, one achievement opened a door for fresh effort.

Free from any taint of selfishness or self-seeking, all her thought was for others, for the helpless, the poor, the friendless. Her pity was boundless. There

was nothing she could not forgive the blind—no error, no ignorance, no crime. She knew the desolation of their lives, their friendless condition, and understood how they might sink down and down in the darkness because no friendly hand was held out to them.

And yet she was unsparing to herself, and a rigid censor of her own motive and conduct. This she could not fail to be, because she believed in her vocation as from God. She never doubted that her work had been appointed for her; she never wavered in her belief that strength given by God supported her. She knew that she was the servant of God, sent by Him to minister to others. This knowledge was joy, but it made her inexorable and inflexible towards herself.

There are but few incidents in her peaceful life. It was torn by no doubt, distracted by no apprehensions, it reached none of the heights of human happiness, and sounded none of the depths of despair. If there were unfulfilled hopes, aspirations, affections, they left no bitterness, no sense of disappointment. A beautiful life and helpful; for who need despair where she overcame and gained so great a victory?

The materials for recording the history of Elizabeth Gilbert are scanty, but all that were possessed by her sisters and friends have been placed at my disposal. My love for her, and our long friendship, have enabled me, I hope, to interpret them aright.

FRANCES MARTIN.

October, 1887.