

## CLOSING ADDRESS.

By MRS. BERTHA HONORÉ PALMER.

Mingled with our regret at seeing this great Exposition and this unprecedented opportunity for women drawing to a close, is a feeling of satisfaction that the aims proposed to be reached by the Board of Lady Managers have been carried to a successful conclusion.

Not only have the material exhibits drawn attention to the skill of women and shown the degree of development which has been reached by them, but their interests, their capabilities, their needs and their hopes have been brought before the public and thoroughly discussed from every point of view.

In the Exposition at large, but particularly in the Woman's Building, her attainments have been spread before the public; successes in unexpected directions, which had hitherto escaped notice, have been made known to the world, the building itself being one of her notable achievements in an altogether unaccustomed field.

It has been the means of opening new and congenial lines of work, and as woman is the acknowledged home-maker, to her hands will be entrusted more largely than heretofore not only the atmosphere and the influence of the home, but also its place, construction, sanitary arrangements, decorations, furnishing and all practical features. The general appreciation and commendation of the Woman's Building have greatly hastened this result, and the exhibits contained within it of designs by women for the weaving of carpets and textiles, for wall paper and hangings, as well as architectural plans for the construction of houses, show that they are already alert and equipped to take possession of this newly acquired territory.

The interest felt in the Woman's Building and the sentiment it expresses was made manifest by its great popularity, it having been crowded from the beginning to the end of the Exposition. In days when visitors were few and exhibitors in other buildings were forced to provide bands of music, scatter special advertisements and use ingenious devices to attract attention, the Woman's Building was crowded. Early in the summer letters came from our committee in France, saying that they understood there were ten persons who saw their exhibit in the Woman's Building to one that saw it in the Manufactures Building. The order to close the building at six in the evening, which was issued by the director-general some two months since, was thought to be a great hardship by visitors, who plead so earnestly for longer hours that director-general consented to rescind his order.

Perhaps the most remarkable result obtained by the efforts of the Board of Lady

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Mrs. Bertha Honoré Palmer was born in Louisville, Ky. Her father is of French descent. Her mother of an aristocratic Southern family. Her early education was received in Louisville, but later in a convent in Baltimore, Md. She was married in 1871 to Mr. Potter Palmer, a wealthy and representative citizen of Chicago; she has since resided in that city. To the poor she has always been a staunch friend, giving generously to public funds and more freely to private charities, and be it said to her glory that all this work has not been neglected during these years of public life. She has traveled extensively and has wide acquaintance with wise and fashionable people, making her a valuable leader for the Board of Lady Managers. Her numerous addresses delivered in their interests have been read and admired by thousands, but the peculiar charm of her beautiful face and bell-like voice can never be forgotten by those who were fortunate enough to hear her speak. She was the chosen President of the Board of Lady Managers, and to her office she gave time, persistent energy, executive ability and wise leadership, to which in large measure is due the success of the women's exhibit, which excelled the fondest hopes of its most sanguine supporters. Few women and not many men have become so widely known and universally admired as Mrs. Palmer. All nations have received and delighted to honor her, giving aid in securing exhibits, and statistics which will prove of great value in future; through her womanly tact and irresistible influence she secured favorable legislation without which the Exposition could not have reached its marvelous success. In all this work she has had the hearty support of Mr. Potter Palmer, who has sealed his approval and won for himself a place in the hearts of the people by donating \$200,000 toward a permanent building for the exhibition of woman's work. Mrs. Palmer's postoffice address is 100 Lake Shore Drive, Chicago, Ill.



Managers was the unprecedented official co-operation secured from women of every country and of every race; from women who are interested in charitable, educational, religious and ethical and reform work, as well as those desiring to make practical exhibits of their skill in industrial arts.

Letters, documents and circulars were sent out, explaining the character and scope of the Exposition, the classes of objects and the degree of excellence which we wished to secure from exhibitors. Having issued these invitations, the fact that we had independent control of the space in the Woman's Building became a great factor in carrying out our plans. We were able to include exhibits from the women of many countries, who would not otherwise have possessed influence to secure space. None of the ladies appealed to had a commercial interest in sending exhibits to the Exposition. The unusual nature of the plans which were presented were attractive enough to gain their attention and secure their adherence, and our foreign committees, after being organized under the most distinguished leadership, set themselves diligently to work, at great cost of time, effort and money, to send us such exhibits as would illustrate what was being done by the women of their respective countries. The exhibits sent were not, perhaps, in every case of the high grade we desired to maintain, but the actual truth of the situation was represented by each, and there was vast significance in the fact that these collections were forwarded to us by the first committees of women ever appointed by their respective governments, and in many cases represented the first independent steps ever taken by women in certain countries. Before they were trained to act for themselves, perhaps, before they even sympathized with the thought of so doing, we thus secured a precedent for them which will be of incalculable value hereafter, and will pave the way for great changes of public sentiment and of custom.

The exhibits proved to be of such different grades and classes that discrimination was found to be impossible and unjust. We therefore decided not to exercise the right of rejection which we had reserved to ourselves, but that everything coming to us from foreign countries should, by courtesy, be received and installed just as arranged and forwarded to us by those committees. Among the exhibits secured, in addition to many rare and unexpected articles, were the most marvelous loan collections of laces and embroideries ever brought together.

No attempt has been made to demonstrate any theory, or to realize Utopian ideals which we would wish to see prevail. Our only desire has been to present the actual conditions existing, which will give us a basis to build upon for future improvement. This conservative course may have caused us to be censured by many holders of the two opposite extremes of opinion. Many "advanced" women have become impatient when contemplating the evidences of infinite detail and elaborations shown in the marvelous webs and stitchery of other days; they resent the confining and infinitesimally painstaking drudgery of arts which formerly were the only outlet among women for originality of taste and the desire to create beauty. On the other hand are those who disapprove heartily what has been accomplished by the adventurous spirits who lead in invention, manufactures, literary and professional pursuits, etc. These pessimistic souls see with dismay the walls of the old "sphere" being battered down; walls within which women have been held for centuries willing prisoners; the light of a new day and a new common sense shining upon the inmates, revealing their antiquated and ignorant helplessness and their incapacity to meet the many demands pressing upon them from the new needs of today.

It is evident that the tendency of modern life is to remove women more and more from the seclusion of the home. The theory that the following of industrial and commercial pursuits may make her less domestic, lessen the charm of family life and the home atmosphere, may have truth for its foundation.

If women be withdrawn largely from the home and placed in the steady conflict of life, a great source of inspiration will be lost to her, her ideals may be lowered, her perceptions become dulled, and she may cease to be the great conservative and regen-



erative agency which has helped to hold the world to high standards. Undoubtedly, the home and the privacy of domestic life is the chosen sphere of every woman. There is only one here and there who would prefer any other career than that of the happy wife and mother, but alas for my sex, there is, unfortunately, not a home for each woman to preside over; most men are unable to maintain one. That is where the great difficulty occurs, and not in the objection of women to occupying them. If we consider it an unwritten law that it is the duty of the husband and father to maintain his wife and children, then we must face the fact that the majority of men must be failures, for they are certainly today unable to accomplish this result with any comfort to themselves or families.

I do not speak of the comparatively few men who are conspicuous exceptions to this statement, but of the rank and file, the unnoticed men, men occupying small clerkships, the second and lower grades of mechanics, factory operatives, etc., whose labor must generally be supplemented by that of their wives, and too often that of their children, to maintain their homes.

We have heard for years of the incompetent wife and mother, but it occurs to me that we have heard singularly little of the incompetent husband and father. It would seem to be the fact that comparatively few marriages could occur if women were not able to assist in maintaining the home, and we constantly see girls, trained to self-support, marry and continue their avocations as a matter of course. The filling up of the factories, shops, schools, offices, and every avenue of fairly paid employment with women, does not, therefore, result from a revolution on their part against their rôle as wives and mothers. Those who theorize about a possible changed relation between the sexes because of the so-called emancipation of women, and fear that the world will no longer be replenished and that the peoples will fade away from the earth, have only superficially studied or understood the facts under their eyes. The fact that women are self-supporting, or educated, does not greatly change the result of the old, old love story, and the man who has objected to the competition of women in the industries, seems to accept the situation philosophically when the time arrives for his own marriage. Women prove to be no less sweet because they are strong, no less companionable because their opinions are based upon knowledge rather than prejudice, no less attractive and fascinating because they have given up superficial accomplishments for the practical knowledge that makes them true helpmates and burden-sharers. There is no science which teaches them that human love and helpfulness are not the highest ideals, and lead to the best service that can be rendered to humanity.

Should men discover at any time in the future that they are capable of assuming the entire maintenance of the home, women can undoubtedly be persuaded to give up the tedious and wearing grind of the factory, the shop and the office, to turn to higher service. Until that fortunate moment arrives the wise course would seem to be the acceptance of facts as they exist. We are not able to see how far-reaching may be the result of this period of change and experiment. We feel urgently impelled to follow the highest law known to us, that of evolution and progress. We must abandon ourselves blindly to the instinct which teaches us that individuals have the right to the fullest development of their faculties, and the exercise of their highest attributes. We reassure ourselves with the thought that there can certainly be no great harm in doubling the intelligence and the mental and moral forces of the community.

It would seem that the only way to assist in the rapid solution of the problem is to put within the reach of women technical training and the education which is necessary to promote their ends, and to hope that the unreasonable conditions which force them to work, yet condemn them for doing so, and withhold from them proper training as well as just compensation for their labor, may be swept away. We hope that no woman may henceforth be forced to conceal her sex in order to obtain justice for her work.

We expect to demonstrate by means of the statistics which we are now collecting



that the larger proportion of women who are forced from their homes into the industries of the world are married women or widows, working to help maintain their homes and children. The only figures which show with certainty the proportion of married to unmarried women, are those sent us from the French banks and railways, which are under the control of the government. From them we learn that in the railway *Compagnie d'Orleans* there are employed 4,154 married women and 220 single women; in the *Compagnie de l'Ouest* there are employed 3,391 married women and 214 single women; in the *Compagnie du Midi* there are employed 2,700 married women and 127 single women; in the *Compagnie du Nord* there are employed 2,536 married women and 254 single women; in the *Chemin de Fer de l'Etat* are employed 2,024 married women and 88 single women.

The results attained from the statistical investigations undertaken by the Board of Lady Managers are so interesting in their nature, that the different government agencies, which have been making original investigations for us, and tabulating the results, are themselves surprised by the facts elicited, and they willingly give us the credit for having organized new and important lines of statistical investigations which will be immediately incorporated in the bureaus of their respective governments.

The work of the Board of Lady Managers in these new and unexpected directions has been a constant source of pleasure and inspiration. The material exhibits in the Woman's Building have become mere incidents, and do not at all represent the great thought which lie behind them. That we have been successful in creating an organization throughout the world, and in interesting the governments of the world in the condition and position of their women, is of incalculable benefit. A community of interests has been created among women in every part of the world, such as has never heretofore existed, and women delegated by their respective governments have visited the fair, and carefully studied not only our country and our customs, but those of every other part of the world, as evidenced by their exhibits and by their peoples who have come to the Exposition in great numbers. The attention of all has been drawn to the Woman's Building, to the purposes for which it was erected, to the wonderful co-operation secured, and as a result the claims of the weaker sex have been treated with more respectful consideration than has ever before been accorded them. In the great commingling of races and interests ideas have been rapidly diffused, and many supposedly fixed conditions have been modified or changed. The board is to be congratulated upon the results achieved.

I can say freely for myself, and I think most of the members of the board can say with me, that our three years of work together have been years of charming and profitable intercourse and agreeable associations. Many firm friendships have been formed which are for life. I, personally, have seen only the sweet side of every nature, and my associates have treated me with too much kindness, with absolute self-forgetfulness and a devotion that was chivalric in its nature. Our board, on all questions of importance, as is shown by our records, stands practically as a unit, and has always done so. I feel sure that there has rarely been such a number of co-workers brought together from widely varying surroundings and influences who have worked together as harmoniously as have our members, and that all rumors to the contrary are figments of the imagination, although we have been pained by reading in the papers distorted and unrecognizable rumors of discord and confusion among our members.

The closing of this building, which has been the main field of our labors, from which, during the summer, such a helpful influence has constantly gone forth, which has been the scene of so many gatherings, both grave and gay, and which has always been a center of interest and of hospitality for women, can but fill us with sadness.

Here we have welcomed and listened to the great thinkers of our own and other countries, and to musicians from every clime; here we have welcomed guests both distinguished and humble, among the most pleasant gatherings being the popular Saturday afternoon receptions, when all were made welcome and we were overwhelmed by discovering the number of our friends, and the warmth of their kindly feeling. It

was the proudest moment of my life when I was told last Saturday, with a heartfelt hand-shake, and with accents of deepest sincerity, by one of our visitors, that seeing me had given her more pleasure than anything at the fair, except the Ferris wheel.

The ties which have bound us together have been tightly drawn during these six months now past, and we have felt constantly sustained by the earnestness and enthusiasm manifested; and now, when the time has come to leave it, and we look at the fair proportions and stately interior of these halls and of the building we have so long occupied, the knowledge that they are soon to be handed over to destruction cruelly grieves us.

When our palace in the White City shall have vanished like a dream, when grass and flowers cover the spot where it now stands, may its memory and influence still remain as a benediction to those who have wrought within its walls.

