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ORPHAN ASYLUM, &c., ALEXANDRIA—REPORT.

JANUARY 25, 1833.

Referred to the Committee for the District of Columbia.

First Annual Report of the Orphan Asylum and Female Free School of Alexandria.

With emotions of unmingled gratitude to the Giver of "every good and perfect gift," the board of managers of the Orphan Asylum and Female Free School Society of Alexandria, present to their patrons and friends the first annual report of their proceedings.

When entering on the discharge of their official duties, they were well aware, both of the importance of the object to which their attention was to be directed, and the high responsibilities which, in the pursuit of this object, they must necessarily incur, the charity whose general well-being and particular details were committed to them, so far as they were concerned, was entirely new. And, however well understood as it respected its main design and purpose, as a *whole*, and in its particular relation to the town in which we live, it could only be regarded in the light of a bold, though greatly important experiment. Public feeling had been aroused; general sympathy powerfully enlisted; anticipations of more than ordinary richness awakened; and a variety of circumstances growing out of a previous agitation of the subject, had all served not only to convince them of the difficult nature of the work to which they would be called, but *equally* of the obligations devolving on them, both for the exercise of untiring diligence, and the exhibition of the most exact and scrupulous economy.

But while, on the one hand, there was much in the prospect calculated to induce timidity and apprehension, and a shrinking from responsibility, there were, on the other, a variety of incentives powerfully stimulating to *take courage and go forward*. The object was Godlike, and to a benevolent mind, generally exciting in itself; and they could not help feeling, that, in a cause so high and so holy, provided they were honest and diligent, and faithful to the extent of their abilities, there would be something like a sacredness diffused around their efforts, even though terminating in ultimate failure. And should these efforts be prospered, and the institution, for whose benificent purposes they were put in requisition, be so conducted as to pass in safety and success through the probation of a year, they would be cheered with the delightful anticipations both of its future stability, and its progressively increasing usefulness.

With these views, and feelings growing out of them, your board, in accordance with the wishes of those by whom they had been appointed, felt themselves called upon to act. And though they dare not say that, in the novel relations in which they have been placed, and amid the various and multiform duties which have come before them, they have never erred in judgment; yet they can testify, that, their aims have been right, and, so far as they could ascertain the best means, they have endeavored, with simplicity of purpose, to secure the highest interests of the institution committed to their charge. To what extent they have succeeded in realizing the expectations of their patrons and friends, the succeeding detail of their measures, and their doings, will assist in determining. As none of the objects contemplated by the constitution could be carried into effect without an amount of pecuniary resources far greater than any that was available at the period of its adoption, their first efforts, after the organization of the society, as might have been supposed, were naturally directed towards the attainment of this important and indispensable prerequisite. And having, at a day, as early as the circumstances of the case would permit, through the medium of committees appointed for that purpose, made a personal application to the citizens of the town in general, it gives them sincere pleasure to state that their solicitations on this behalf were accompanied with the most gratifying success. Almost wherever they went in discharge of this unpleasant duty, a generous and discerning public seemed to meet them with sympathies awakened towards the object of their exertions, coincident with their own; and bestowing their benefactions in that spirit of enlarged liberality by which they have so uniformly been characterized. The interesting problem, so frequently agitated, whether an Orphan Asylum, so much needed in this town, could be sustained by its citizens, was happily resolved in a space of time little longer than that which had been consumed in its discussion. Thus showing to a demonstration that, where the *charity* is important, and its claims obvious, a disposition to *faulter*, on the part of those who are called to *act*, is manifestly wrong: and ought to be attributed to a reprehensible shrinking from *unwelcome duty*, far more than to any palpable reluctance on the part of an enlightened public to encourage and sustain them in it.

Having surmounted this most appalling difficulty which interposed itself on the very threshold of the work, that which remained, though perplexing, and requiring the exercise of no small amount both of patience and perseverance, was nevertheless comparatively easy. The number of orphans requiring the aid of such an asylum, and willing to receive it on the terms specified in the constitution, was soon ascertained, and the various preliminary steps taken to have them secured to the board during the term of years, which, in such cases, had been prescribed. A house, as commodious as could be found for the purpose, at the time, was also secured; and, by the gratuitous assistance of some of the other female associations in town, ample accommodations were speedily provided for the convenience and support of as many beneficiaries as the resources of the institution would permit them to receive. On the 2d day of April, every previous arrangement having been made, and a Matron procured to preside over the household, the entire establishment was put in operation; and since then, with few incidents worthy of remark, it has been moving forward on the "full tide of successful experiment."

It is proper, however, to state, and the public ought to know, that the board have been unwearied in their endeavors to render the institution what it was designed to be—a *public blessing; a school of christian morals; of propriety of deportment; and of fixed habits of useful industry*. And in order that the expectations of a generous public, in relation to these important particulars, might not be disappointed, they have made it their *weekly duty*, through the medium of their standing committees, to keep the whole establishment under constant *supervision*; not only making all suitable provision for the support, the health, and comfort, of its inmates, but encouraging and assisting the labors of the Matron, by counsel and advice; and, by every suitable incentive, to lead along the objects of her immediate charge to that happy and delightful development of moral character, which should both meet the wishes and crown the hopes of all who are enlisted in its benevolent operations. What may be the final result of these steadily applied exertions, can only be determined by the lapse of time. But so far as appearances can be relied upon as a ground of hope, the board can testify with much confidence, that, from their present indications, there is every thing to encourage: and the development of every successive week have only served to deepen their convictions, that the same amount of moral culture being continued for the future, the seed which has been sown, and is now so rich in promise, will soon spring up, and bring forth a cheering and abundant harvest. The number of orphans who are thus training up, and whose every prospect, both in this life and that which is to come, is so delightfully different from what it once was, is now thirteen. Much smaller, indeed, than in many respects could have been wished; and yet quite large enough for the commencement of such an institution, and fully equal to the available means which have been provided in order to their support. It was the earnest desire of the board at first, and that desire is far from having lost any of its intensesness during the year, that measures might be devised, and means secured, to receive, under the fostering care and kindly influences of this society, all the children in similar circumstances of bereavement and misfortune within the chartered limits of the town. Nor should they feel satisfied that their duty was discharged, did they not urge it upon their patrons and friends to combine and increase their efforts towards hastening a "consummation so devoutly to be wished." An asylum ought to be procured whose location would be permanent, which would be the property of the society, and in which, accommodations being provided for all who might apply, the operations of the board might be conducted with more convenience, and the beneficence of the institution more extensively diffused. And they cannot repress the hope that, ere the close of another year, the providence of God will have opened the way, through some kindly intervention, to the entire accomplishment of this greatly needed addition to their charity.

The expenditures in this department of their labors, during something more than three quarters of the year which have elapsed since its entire organization, amount to the sum of six hundred and forty-nine dollars thirty-nine cents. Deduct from this, two hundred dollars for the rent of the house and the salary of the Matron, and there will be left thirty-four dollars and fifty-seven cents nearly, as the expense incurred for the maintenance of each one of the orphan children. This sum, however, includes the amount which has been appropriated for providing the whole establishment with all the necessary articles of furniture; and which being subtracted from the

above calculation, and the expenses of the eleven weeks which have yet to run before the completion of the entire year's being taken into the account, will make the per annum support of each orphan not to exceed the amount comprised in the preceding statement, i. e. thirty-four dollars and fifty seven cents, or about sixty-six cents and a half per week. Perfect accuracy, indeed, is not here attempted; yet it is believed to be substantially correct, and that the calculation may be relied on as data in all general estimates of the future. And it shows, at a single glance, what a vast, though unknown amount of good may possibly be effected, and what a multitude of distressing evils, both natural and moral, may easily be averted by a judicious and economical application of a very small amount of means. These children of wretchedness, of poverty, and bereavement, are now reposing amid the blessings of abundance, and the comforts of a home, training up to useful industry, under the fostering care of christian principle and christian example; and separated from that atmosphere of moral pestilence, amidst the contaminating and baleful influences of which, such victims of early misfortune are not unfrequently reared from the very cradle. The prospect is, that instead of rising to maturity but to multiply iniquity and perpetuate contagion, they will grow up to usefulness, to personal respectability, and to a dignified standing in the ranks of the community. And with an object so rich in promise as this, who would not be willing to labor? who would shrink even from momentary privation and personal sacrifices? and who would not pray "Lord bless, and prosper the efforts of the Orphan Asylum!"

But there is another department to which the labors of your board have been directed; and which, on such an occasion as the present, must not be overlooked. It is the Female Free School which, in the constitution of your society, has been, we trust, indissolubly connected with the Orphan Asylum. The operations of this part of your establishment were commenced on the 12th day of last March, nearly a month earlier than those of the Asylum; and with no intermissions other than such as are sanctioned by the standing rules, its blessings have been diffusing, and its sanatory influences going out, from that period to the present time. Over the general interests of this, the supervision of your board has been as frequently directed, and as closely applied, as in the case of the other; and they have ample reason to anticipate, from its continuance, a like happy result. The number of females here enrolled, and in a greater or less degree participating in the lessons of ordinary instruction, is 150; though not more than half of that number can be calculated on as the average amount of learners during the successive days of the week. That this is an evil, an evil of no small magnitude, is on all hands admitted; and any measure that could be adopted, affording the promise of its speedy removal, would be both welcomed by the teachers, and hailed as a boon of no ordinary richness by all the managers of the institution. But from the experiments which have been made, the information communicated in relation to other schools of a similar construction, and the well known inaptitude in the minds of parents who are themselves ignorant as well as destitute, to appreciate the favor of gratuitous instruction, they have been driven to the conclusion, *that the evil is remediless*: and that, if those who are enlisted in such beneficent operations, have not the ability to accomplish all the good they would, they must be content in the conviction that they are achieving all they can. And yet, seventy-five learners, the average number of ordinary attendants, and composed too of such a rude and unformed mass of materials, is quite sufficient

for the efforts and the management of those who are engaged in their instruction; and the proficiency which they have made, is a demonstrative proof that neither management nor instruction has been wanting or misapplied. Indeed, so far as your board have been able to perceive, from the various examinations to which they have been called, and from the opinions of others who have been co-examiners with them, they have reason to conclude that the progress of the scholars has been, in a very gratifying degree, commendable; and that the exhibition which they make, reflects no small amount of credit upon the skill, the assiduity, and the zeal of those who have been charged with the business of their instruction. The funds which have been expended in support of this establishment, are two hundred and twenty-eight dollars eighty-eight cents. This includes the entire cost, comprehending the salary of the teachers, the rent of the room, and the necessary apparatus of books, &c., for the use of the children. And this, with the addition of what may still be required for the completion of the year, will probably amount to the full sum of about three hundred dollars; making the *per quarter* expense for each pupil, supposing the number one hundred and fifty, to be receiving instruction, and the amount for books deducted, not to exceed forty-five cents. And yet, small as this may appear, and in truth is, they entertain the hope that the next year it will be reduced still lower; and thus in some degree, relieve the society from the burden now upon it. They are well aware, however, that, even at this reduced price, and with the prospect of a reduction still greater, that without the same generous liberality on the part of the public, or a considerable benefaction from some other source, it will be exceeding difficult, if not utterly impossible, to continue its operations beyond the close of the present quarter. And as the board consider its perpetuity as interlinked with the destinies of a very interesting though impoverished portion of their own sex, who, without the instructions which are here imparted, would be left to advance both in ignorance and crime, they most earnestly recommend, and even entreat that it never be abandoned, just so long as any lawful means are yet untried, in order to its continuance. That means will be wanting, and the demand speedy, will be readily perceived by a simple abstract of the report of your Treasurer. According to this, the moneys which have been received from annual subscriptions, from life members, and donations, amount in the whole to two thousand five hundred and thirty-four dollars eighty-two cents. Of this sum, six hundred and forty-nine dollars thirty-nine cents have been expended on the asylum; two hundred and twenty-eight dollars on the school, as stated above; and sixteen hundred, a considerable proportion of which is from life members, has been safely loaned out, at an interest of six per cent., for the benefit of the society. Regarding this last as a permanent investment, and it is the earnest wish of the board that it should be so regarded, and making the other deductions named, and there will be still left in the hands of your Treasurer, to commence the operations of the coming year, an unexpended balance of fifty-six dollars and fifty-five cents; or a balance in the whole, in favor of your society, of \$1,656 55. It may be proper to state further in this connexion, that the annual subscriptions are due from this day; and that these, which will no doubt be paid on the first demand, or the largest proportion of them, amount to the sum of five hundred and forty-eight dollars and ninety cents. Regarding even the whole of this as paid, and the demand on the Treasury during the coming year the same as that of the one that has passed, there will still be, the permanent fund

being left untouched, a deficiency to be supplied of two hundred and seventy-one dollars seventy eight cents. And to close the entire concern in relation to the pecuniary interests of the institution, the board would simply state in addition, that there are twenty four life members, all of whom have paid the prescribed amount of thirty dollars cash. Such then are the past transactions, and such the present condition of your society. What has been achieved during the year that has closed, is now before you. That as much has been effected toward the accomplishment of its benificent aims as might have been, from the means that were provided, your board dare not testify. Nor would they affirm with confidence that the *wisest measures* have been resorted to in the accomplishment of what they have. That to which they do pretend, and they should be grieved if it were not awarded to them, is the humble credit of doing the best they could with their abilities and knowledge. In the perpetuity and general well being of the noble charity committed to their charge, they have felt a deep, an abiding, and a constantly growing interest. Their emotions were joyous on its first inception; they have regarded it with similar emotions in all its subsequent developments; and they shall never cease to rejoice in it, just so long as they shall be blest with the privilege even of witnessing its existence, or of watching the progress of its kindly operations. That it is fully adequate to all the purposes which it were originally contemplated by its benevolent founders, they have not a single doubt. And they do honestly believe that, unless heartlessly conducted, or ruthlessly abandoned, the God of the orphan, and the father of the fatherless, will enrich it with his smiles, and multiply its benefactions as well as its benefactors. All that they desire is, and it is their most earnest prayer to that infinite Being whose delight is in offices of mercy and love, that neither of its departments be dispaired of nor abandoned. The same public who raised the establishment are still around us. They are not so satiated with the delightful consciousness of doing good, as to wish to do so no more; nor have their generous sympathies ceased to flow in the channels which are opened for christian liberality. Let the appeal but be made in the spirit of the Gospel, and the channels will again fill, and the result must be happy. The year of probation has passed safely away; and, without the dereliction of manifest duty, the institution may long live to perpetuate its charities to succeeding generations.

With these remarks, imploring on its interests the benediction of Heaven, your board of managers doth terminate their labors, and retire from the discharge of their official obligations.

January 14, 1833.