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**MOTTO: "BEFORE HONOUR IS HUMILITY."**—*Proverbs xv. 33.*

*(Our Founder's Motto for the School.)*

The  
St. Mary's Hall  
News-Letter.

Specially Printed for Members of the Pupils' Association.



To the Members of the Pupils' Association.

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MY DEAR OLD GIRLS,

A common sorrow has drawn us all together, and I have thought that you would be glad to have some record of our dear Miss Birrell's life, especially as it touched St. Mary's Hall, and so I am sending out this special number of the News-Letter. The ordinary one will not be sent out till later in the year. I had quite hoped to let you have this early this spring, but I was unable to finish it in the holidays, and our term has been an arduous one in consequence of a serious epidemic of measles.

I should like to add that the very general wish that there should be a memorial of Miss Birrell's work here will find fulfilment, we trust, in the scheme of which particulars are enclosed. It will, I know, receive your loving support, for it seems to be one with which Miss Birrell herself would be in fullest sympathy, and there is a very wide-spread and earnest desire among you that there should be some means of perpetuating in tangible form the memory of one whom we all loved and revered so much.

With true sympathy, I am,

Yours affectionately,

EDITH L. POTTER.

*March, 1907.*

Christina Macdowall Birrell,

HEAD MISTRESS

OF

ST. MARY'S HALL

From 1884 to 1899.

Stern Daughter of the Voice of God!  
 O Duty! . . . I myself commend  
 Unto thy guidance from this hour;  
 Oh, let my weakness have an end!  
 Give unto me made lowly-wise,  
 The spirit of self-sacrifice;  
 The confidence of reason give;  
 And in the light of truth thy bondman  
   let me live!

THESE words were among those chosen by the girls of the Sixth Form in 1899 for the album which they illuminated as a gift for Miss Birrell when she left St. Mary's Hall, and they most truly suggest the keynote of her life—a passion for duty founded on a love of God, the reality and depth of which could not but impress all who had the privilege of knowing her.

Christina Macdowall Birrell, third daughter of Alexander Birrell, manufacturer, of Glasgow, was born on the 16th of November, 1849, one of a large family who were carefully and sensibly brought up by a wise father and mother. Her parents, especially on the mother's side, had long been associated with Glasgow history in the period during which the city developed from a comparatively small borough to its present importance. They brought up their family in an atmosphere of Christian influence and love which showed itself in deed rather than in word.

Christina spent a bright and happy girlhood, passing the school year in town, while the summers were divided between Fife and the lovely shores of the Clyde. Here, amid a large circle of playmates, she was the gayest of the gay, full of fun and adventure, the active leader in all childish sports. In later life she used to take special delight in recounting the pleasures and adventures of these childish days, revealing to those who listened to her the marvellous simplicity and freshness of her outlook on life which she kept to the last. Thanks to a wholesome upbringing, she enjoyed sound and vigorous health all her life long, but childhood and youth were to a certain extent clouded by the pain arising from a poisoned chilblain on her foot which her active disposition caused her persistently to neglect, though great suffering ensued from her participation on equal terms in the recreation of her companions, until the disability yielded to more drastic treatment. This suffering she always regarded as one of the most formative influences in her life.

After a good education, which included two years at an excellent boarding-school in Edinburgh, a period which helped



to develope in her those habits of method and order so characteristic in later life, she returned to take her share in home duties. At this time began the movement to foster the Higher Education of Women, and into it she flung herself with the ardent enthusiasm of her nature, receiving the full approval of her parents. She studied English Literature with distinction under Professor Nichol, and laid the foundation of a thorough knowledge of French and German. In assisting the home-lessons of younger sisters and brothers, she began the study of Latin which proved the turning point in her career. As other sisters grew up she felt that her services were no longer necessary at home, and an engagement in Cambridge was offered and accepted. She had previously shewn her talent by teaching and managing the unruly and destitute children whom Mr. Quarrier, following the noble example of Dr. Barnado, was endeavouring to reclaim. At Cambridge, Miss Birrell entered with delight into the new social and literary atmosphere, and was one of the first to study for and pass the Cambridge Higher Local Examinations. This training was supplemented later on by that of the Cambridge Teachers' Training Certificate. Then followed a long and successful High School experience at Norwich, Preston and Cambridge.

In August, 1884, she took up her life work at St. Mary's Hall, Brighton, where for fifteen years she directed the School with unique ability and wisdom. An educational writer, in reviewing the history of girls' education in the nineteenth century, speaks of St. Mary's Hall and other clergy daughter schools as deserving "full recognition as almost the only institutions which attempted in the early part of the century to provide a good and cheap education for girls." In the closing quarter of the century, when the ideas of education for girls had changed, and methods had improved and the general standard of work been raised, it became necessary to bring these older schools into line with those which were the outcome of the new movement, if our pupils were to be efficiently equipped for the battle of life. This was the work to which Miss Birrell set her hand at St. Mary's Hall, and with her deep-seated reverence for all noble traditions and her enthusiastic sympathy with new ideas, she was especially fitted to undertake the task.

The chief structural alterations and additions made by the Trustees while she was Head Mistress were the building of the much-needed sanatorium in 1886, the enlargement of the North-West, North-East and Top-East dormitories, the building of the north room with beds for the four senior scholars in 1891; and the building of the Princess Christian annexe with its six classrooms in 1898. She found time in the midst of all her school

duties to write numberless letters asking for donations to the special funds raised to meet the cost of these improvements, and her enthusiasm culminated with the building of the annexe. To those of us who knew that already she was contemplating the need of giving up her work at St. Mary's Hall, there was something especially pathetic in the interest she took in every detail of arrangement and furniture.

The rooms were informally opened on Founder's Day, October, 1898, and the next January were used by classes, but it was not till the following autumn, after Miss Birrell had left us, that Princess Christian formally opened the annexe. It is almost impossible now to realise how we ever managed without those six class-rooms, and succeeded in housing three large forms in the schoolroom, the others finding homes in rooms which are now small dormitories.

In addition to actual building, much was done to improve the arrangements in dormitories, dining-hall and every part of the Hall, but more important than these material alterations was the re-organisation of the school work. Miss Birrell introduced a wider curriculum, and in every way raised the standard of study. She realised the value at that time of submitting the work more largely to the test of public examinations, such as the Oxford Locals, and in the Sixth Form the standard aimed at was that of the Higher Locals or London Matriculation. In 1887 the annual report mentions among other successes the names of three girls who had matriculated in the 1st Division, and of one who had obtained an Open Clothworkers' Scholarship, tenable at Somerville Hall, Oxford, on the results of the Oxford Senior Local Examination.

The general atmosphere of the school life was a bracing and invigorating one, and the Head Mistress' zeal and strenuousness were felt everywhere. In addition to giving most of the religious instruction she frequently took other lessons. When the movement began for training girls educated in secondary schools to be teachers in elementary schools, she gave it her full sympathy, and started a class in preparation for the Queen's Scholarship Examination, herself giving lessons on class management, but there was at that time unwillingness on the part of parents to let their daughters take up this work, and the classes were afterwards dropped. She constantly visited other schools and colleges and places of training where there might be openings for our girls, her aim being to encourage them to think of other work than private teaching to which formerly most of them had devoted themselves.

From all these visits she came back full of ideas. One such visit, towards the end of her headship, was to the House of Educa-



tion at Ambleside, and this gave a great impetus to the nature study in the school. Nothing gave Miss Birrell more pleasure than her early morning walks with the mistress and children of Forms I. and II. making nature observations in our garden. The children's nature letters were a source of interest to her after she left school, and she often used to send us nature notes of her own—jottings from Varengeville, from Glasgow, from Devonshire and elsewhere.

She expected her Sixth Form to exercise a strong influence, and by giving them many little duties as prefects and monitresses, she enabled them to keep in touch with the whole school. All Sixths were not of course equally strong, but there were some who stood pre-eminently as a power for good, and to whom she often referred in later years. Her Sunday afternoon readings of Westcott's "Christus Consummator" and other books with the Sixth Form were times of inspiration and help, whose memory is still treasured. At the close of one school year she wrote a paper entitled, "Faithful Words addressed to the Pupils of St. Mary's Hall." It was printed, as she explained, "because the power to speak fluently has been denied me, and because *Litera Scripta Manet*, and some things which would be forgotten if heard with the ear may be remembered and referred to when placed before the eye." The "Faithful Words" were an earnest exhortation to give care to the choice of a profession and to aim at advanced training for it after leaving school. She brought home to the girls that we have entered on a new era, and that whereas life is likely to be happier, more successful and more interesting for all who fit themselves for the new order of things, those who stand still and retain old-fashioned ideas of work and of "gentility" will inevitably rank as failures, and will neither do work for God nor for their fellow creatures, such as they, with training, might be expected to do; and she emphasized what was a constant declaration of hers, that "character is more than attainment." The address was characteristically introduced with the words of her favourite hymn in the Cheltenham Hymn Book, often sung at morning prayers:—

" 'Tis to no easy achievement we go;  
 Self must meet self, as a man meets his foe;  
 Thoughtlessness, indolence, coldness of soul,  
 Selfishness are between us and the goal,  
 As on life's meadow we war against ill  
     With a will, with a will,  
     Onward and upward."

In the spring of 1899 it became clear to Miss Birrell and her friends that she could no longer continue her labours at



St. Mary's Hall. Every detail of the school and domestic life of the Hall had been directly under her control for fifteen years, and though with her splendid constitution she had been able to achieve more than the majority of women could have done, she had now exhausted her powers too greatly and was too tired for it to be right for her to carry on her work. By the doctor's orders she had a lengthened holiday at Easter, and when she returned from Glasgow she had "burnt her ships," and, to our consternation we heard that she was leaving in the following July.

During the last term she spent some days of quiet at Hassocks, and thereby gained fresh strength for the closing difficult weeks. She thought herself that it was the psychological moment for her to hand over her work to another. The system by which she had succeeded in raising the School to a high position in some ways needed, she felt, to be modified, and that work could be better done by another. We know that no one could have done it better than she herself could do it, but we all realized that the time had come for her to slacken speed and take rest.

A large number of old pupils and friends assembled at a garden party to bid her farewell, and she received many tokens of affection and gratitude from her staff and from the old girls and others. She would take no present from the School, with the exception of the album mentioned before, in accordance with her firm opinion that presents in a large community like ours might become a trying tax on individuals. After her death her sisters sent the book to the School to be kept amongst its treasures, but the Sixth Form and all of us felt that we should like it to be in the hands of her family as a small token of the love and gratitude which her pupils felt towards her.

The Trustees presented her with an honorarium of one hundred guineas, and the Report for 1899 thus speaks of her :

"The Lady Principal, Miss Birrell, after fifteen years of most faithful and diligent supervision of every department, for the purpose of seeking rest and lighter work, has laid her resignation before the Trustees, who have accepted it with deep regret, placing on record the following resolution :—'The Trustees desire to record their most cordial appreciation of the able and devoted superintendence of Miss Birrell during the last fifteen years. The education at St. Mary's Hall has been raised to a very high standard of excellence in every way since she took office. Her relations with the Trustees have been excellent, and her influence on the pupils has been in every way for their good. The Trustees earnestly trust that she may be prospered

and cheered in her future course, firmly believing that good and lasting fruit will result from her long and influential management of the Hall.' "

As this leaflet is intended for the eyes of old pupils, I feel I must quote from one of her letters to me, written in the autumn of 1899. After speaking of the anxiety and difficulties which must assuredly meet anyone holding such a post as hers, she says:—

" But if you could have read the letters I had between July and September this year you would say 'It was worth while.' If I was allowed to help these girls I have not lived in vain. When I find myself in bed at 7.30 or 8 a.m. instead of being dressed at 7.30, I say to myself: 'It was a good life at St. Mary's Hall—a beautiful life, and if I had to live over again I would choose it.' "

As far as she was able to spare the time Miss Birrell had taken a share in work outside the School. She was a member of the Committee of the Brighton Branch of the Teachers' Guild, and of the Parents' National Educational Union, and from time to time meetings of these societies were held by her invitation at the Hall.

After her resignation she spent some months in a favourite haunt of hers—Varengenville, on the coast of Normandy, and between 1900 and 1902 she was giving her help in educational work at various places. From 1902 to 1903 she was Assistant-Secretary for the Home Department of the Church of England Zenana Society. This was a source of great pleasure, both because of her great interest in missionary work and the association with some of its guiding spirits, and because it necessitated her living in London, and so enabled her to see many of her old girls. Numbers of these were welcomed by her on Sunday afternoons and on other evenings at 23 Mecklenburgh Square, and she spent hours in correspondence with others; no matter how tired she was, these letters were not given up.

She found however that office work was too great a strain for her and gave up her Secretaryship, finding for some months a very happy temporary sphere at the Olives Training Home for Missionaries.

In 1904 she settled down again in Glasgow, and at the earnest request of the authorities, undertook for a year the superintendence of Queen Margaret Hall, a very arduous post in which she could not attempt to remain after the year was completed. She gave up her little cottage at Nether Stowey in Somersetshire, which had been a delightful retreat for several years, and spent the autumn and winter of 1905 at home. In February and March of 1906, she was doing deputation work



for the C.E.Z.M.S., and on March 20th she came on a visit to St. Mary's Hall. She was ill when she arrived, and was glad to be settled in the sunny south room at the sanatorium which, marvellous to relate for that term of the year, was empty and quiet.

She was suffering from nervous exhaustion and rheumatism, and though she was better at the end of a few weeks, she was very weak and ill when she returned to Glasgow in May. Before she left she was able to take dinner with us on one day, and to inspect the School buildings once more. Some hours had been devoted, as soon as she was able to sit up, revising a paper on "The Endowment of the Daughters," which afterwards appeared in *The Churchwoman*, and she enjoyed visits from girls in the Sixth Form who had been little ones when she was Head Mistress. It was hoped that a visit to the Bridge of Allan would restore her to ordinary health, but at the end of the summer she returned to Glasgow suffering acutely, and was only able to send messages to her friends through her sister, Miss Kate Birrell. On Founder's Day she sent a greeting as usual to old pupils gathered at the School, and was with us in spirit at the Holy Communion which was administered in her room.

Fresh complications had set in and spinal trouble developed, which made her helpless, though it mercifully relieved her from pain. We heard that there was improvement, and we had hardly realized how serious her state was, when the news came that she had peacefully passed away on November 22nd. It was appropriate that the last piece of Hall news which reached her on that day was that a very dear old pupil had offered herself to the C.E.Z.M.S. for Missionary work abroad. From time to time, she said: "Splendid! Splendid!"

She was laid to rest in a beautiful spot at the foot of the natural rock in Glasgow Cemetery. Florrie Thornburgh, an old pupil and once a member of Miss Birrell's staff, represented the School at the simple funeral ceremony. Influenza kept me a prisoner to my room. A wreath of chrysanthemums, mauve, yellow and white, grown in our own greenhouses, was sent by the School. Not for several years had these flowers been so beautiful here as they were last year, and we recalled the pleasure which she always used to take in them.

For twenty-two years St. Mary's Hall has had the priceless privilege of Miss Birrell's influence, an influence which did not cease when she left the School in 1899. In countless ways she helped us by her sympathy and counsel, and her close connection with the Old Pupils' Association was another link which bound us all together. It remains for us to keep true to the ideals which

she put before us, and to follow her example of devotion to the School to which she gave her best. We sorrow because so much has gone out of our life, and we are tempted to lose courage and wonder how we can do without her; but we cannot fail to be thankful that she was spared the long years of weakness which would have been such a trial to her active spirit, and we know that her influence, just because it was so good, must be an abiding one, and will still bind together all who belong to St. Mary's Hall.

I close with Miss Eflie Elliott's words, written to me on November 23rd:—

“A great soul has passed away from us; generous, magnanimous, full of visions and high ideals, yet very human too, which made her so exceedingly lovable, and with such power of loving, herself so brilliant, so far above ordinary beings; yet who was ever more appreciative, extraordinarily appreciative, even of dull and ordinary persons? There was something very vitalizing about her. She seemed to grow in depth and humility, and all that was spiritually beautiful, especially perhaps, when losing health so sadly, that which was outward, alas! decaying, that which was inward shining with a loveliness which even at the time was pathetic, prophesying perhaps this earlier close of the earthly life, earlier than we who loved and revered her so much would have chosen. Surely she will be near the Hall which she loved and served so devotedly, and with such conspicuous ability.”

EDITH L. POTTER.

### Miss Birrell.

BY ONE OF HER OLD GIRLS.

“None of Miss Birrell's many friends can owe more to her than we, her ‘Old Girls.’ Looking back upon the old days at St. Mary's Hall, one realises how greatly her strong personality attracted and moulded the characters of all who came in contact with her.

“How her high ideals and her keen sense of honour and duty won our respect and admiration! How the indomitable energy and steadfastness of purpose, which enabled her to overcome great difficulties, instilled into us the seriousness and necessity of hard work! And above all how her faithfulness as a friend won our lasting love!

“She was strict but just, she was strong but humble, reserved and slow in showing her feelings, but constant and true.



“When she came to St. Mary’s Hall in 1884, she set to work with her usual determination to raise the school morally and intellectually.

“I came back late that term and missed her first drastic methods of ‘licking into shape.’ I remember when I did return in November I was horrified to find that we might no longer lounge about the school three or four abreast, with arms affectionately twined round each other; that we might no longer keep our private stores of cakes and jams to send round to our special friends at meals; there were strict rules about talking, about order, about manners.

“We fought hard against the new régime and made it as difficult for her as we could. But she gradually got the better of us and taught us to admire and respect her, and by degrees she inspired us with her own ideals of honour, of work, of life. How she made us work! I can never be grateful enough to her for that; it was a splendid experience and training. And what eyes she had! She saw everything, knew everything; it was an education to accompany her on her rounds of inspection, not a speck of dust, not an ink spot nor a crooked bed-cover escaped her. There were many changes, many improvements. She transformed the school and raised it to the high level it now holds; she taught us to be proud of our school, to be keen to hold our own in examinations, in tennis, in hockey.

“She increased our Library and taught us to use it. Her enthusiasm about books was infectious.

“Perhaps we felt her influence even more when we left. She wrote to us frequently. I have often wondered how in the midst of her pressing work she could remember us and keep up with us as she did. We shall always think of her as the strong, genuine, loving friend who inspired and influenced us while we were her pupils at school, who inspired and influenced us when we went out into the world, and who will continue to inspire and influence us till the end of our lives.”

M. CLARKE (*née* MARY MILLARD).