

From Our Special Correspondent.

New York Times (1857-1922); Jun 4, 1876;

ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2008)

THE GREAT EXHIBITION.

WHAT WOMEN HAVE DONE FOR IT. FALSE STATEMENTS REGARDING THE WOMAN'S PAVILION—FEMININE HANDICRAFT DISPLAYED IN ALL THE DEPARTMENTS --WOMEN ARTISTS AND WOMEN LABORERS--A BEAUTIFUL EXHIBIT FROM OHIO --THE ALABAMA AND FLORIDA WOMEN.

From Our Special Correspondent.

PHILADELPHIA, Wednesday, May 31, 1876.

A number of influential and widely circulated newspapers in the East and West have recently published numerous letters commenting upon what they have been pleased to call "women's work in the Centennial." All of these communications have more or less severely criticised the display made in the Woman's Pavilion, and in that lofty and stilted style which some men assume when writing of women and her works the public has been informed that "the exhibit of feminine handicraft is bad in nearly every particular," that "the woman's building contains nothing but old bed-quilts," or, as a paper now before me says, that "the Woman's Executive Committee should have hired a few men or boys to help them out." Criticisms and statements of this kind are not only unjust and ungenerous; they are maliciously false and wholly unworthy of credit. It is true to some extent that the display in the woman's department proper, although a creditable one, is not everything that could have been reasonably expected. The defects in the exhibit, however, were caused not by any inability or lack of skill and taste among women, but by a natural desire on the part of many exhibitors to have their work placed side by side and in direct competition with the results of masculine labor or artistic skill. It may also be stated in this connection that a large number of women have been prevented from making exhibits because they were without the money necessary to forward their goods to Philadelphia or to provide the necessary stands and show cases. As an instance of the embarrassment which has sprung from this cause, I may state that were it not for the timely and liberal appropriation made by the Women's Commission it would have been impossible for the students of the Philadelphia Woman's College to exhibit the truly admirable preparations in Materia Medica made by them. As it is, this display is one of the most noteworthy and creditable in the pavilion. It is not only in the woman's department proper, however, that the visitor must look for women's work; let him remember that in Machinery Hall, in the Main Building, in the Art Gallery, everywhere in and about Fairmount Park are to be found evidences, of her skill and industry. Let those who admire the delicate tracing, the life-like coloring of the famous Doullton pottery remember that the work was done by women. A woman's brain conceived and a woman's hand executed the marvelous tapestry, the exquisite lace-work, which is shown in the Belgian department. Women did much of the truly remarkable filigree work displayed by Sweden and the nice shading and beautiful coloring of the cotton velvets from Linden are all the results of women's labor. It may not be out of place to add that the reward of that labor is little more than cold water and a crust of bread. Should the visitor, after seeing all these things, still incline to the opinion that "the exhibit of feminine handicraft is bad in every particular" let him go into the Italian department and view the magnificent mosaic work executed by women, let him visit the glass display of Bohemia, the velvets and silks from Lyons, and the porcelain displays from England and Germany. In all these things he will find evidence of what women can do, for all the articles mentioned were either wholly or in part manufactured by women. Nor is the women's work confined to what may be called the art industries. Machinery Hall also bears testimony to her delicacy of touch, quickness of eye, and above all, to her wonderful power of endurance. All the looms and spinning-wheels are tended by women. Under the skillful manipulation of a woman's fingers the visitor may with his own eyes see the roughest of cloth and leather turned into the daintiest of boots, raw silk spun into thread, and thick blocks of iron fashioned into tiny watch-screws or clock-springs.

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURAL HALL.

In Agricultural Hall, too, may be found plows and other implements invented by women, fruits preserved by women, vegetables canned by women, and wines made from grapes planted, nourished, and harvested by women who toil far away under the burning suns of foreign skies, who grow old and stooped before their time climbing the steep vine hills of the Rhine land or the mountains of the Canton Vaud. After seeing all these things and the thousand and one other evidences of women's skill and industry, I am sure that no fair-minded visitor will believe the statement that "the exhibit of feminine handicraft is bad in nearly every particular." Turning to Memorial Hall it will be found that women—particularly American women—are well represented, and that their works are in some instances worthy of high praise. It will be remembered that when the Women's Commission decided to erect a building for their use they announced that one portion of their hall would be set apart for the exhibition of works of art executed by women. Suitable provision was made for a small display, and it was expected that the spaces would all be filled by the best works of women artists. In this, however, the committee was disappointed. The leaders of the "artistic sisterhood," with a lack of *esprit de corps* which cannot be too strongly denounced, refused to display their works in the Woman's Pavilion because, indeed, as one well-known lady expressed it, "any quantity of nobodies had been allotted space and would exhibit their daubs." The result of this petty spirit has been to rob the Woman's Pavilion of what might have been one of its chief attractions. At the same time the ungenerous women artists have done themselves a great injury, for in the great mass of noteworthy pictures that grace the walls of Memorial Hall their efforts are covered up and lost sight of. Still, as I have already intimated, there are a number of pictures by women which excite attention and favorable comment, either because of the excellence of their execution or the attractiveness of the subject chosen by the artist. Two pictures, which draw together large crowds, and which because of this, if for no other reason, are worthy of more than a passing notice, are exhibited by Miss Anna M. Lea, a Philadelphia lady, now in London. The most conspicuous of the two paintings is entitled "The Patrician Mother." It is exceedingly well drawn, and the coloring is not without merit. The mother, a three-quarter figure, is represented as holding a sunny-faced child close to her breast. The drapery is heavy, but there is no straining after effect, and none of that mock modesty so often noticeable in the work of

some women. The antique costume, with a rich fan-shaped ruff, that falls in light folds over the bosom, displays rather than hides the beautiful figure of the young matron. The companion picture represents St. Genevieve seated in the depths of a forest nook, which, by its fidelity to nature, appeals directly and forcibly even to the untaught and unpracticed eye. The figure is draped in the light forest green of early Spring, and in her arms Genevieve holds a little child, who is represented as tempting a fawn to approach. Miss Lea has done her work with a firmness of touch and a decision of purpose which is often lacking in women artists. She evidently knows just what she wants to do, and does it without doubt or hesitation. Her handling of her subject is masterly, but because of its strength loses nothing in nicety or delicacy. A well-known German critic, whose word is law in Dusseldorf, pronounces "The Patrician Mother" one of the best pictures on exhibition. Ellen D. Hale's picture of "A Boy Reading," and the scenes from nature by Miss Bridges, of Brooklyn, are also worthy of praise. In common with Miss Lea's works they are exceedingly well spoken of by foreign critics.

THE WOMAN'S PAVILION.

The Woman's Pavilion, about which so many unkind things have been said, is not a handsome nor an imposing building; indeed, amid the miles of crystal palaces glittering around it, as a well-known lady says, it is rather insignificant and ugly. Its very insignificance, however, its severe simplicity and quiet sobriety should announce the fact that it has been dedicated, not to the uses of the city belle or the watering-place coquette, but that it is designed to be a fitting casket in which to display the results of the hard, earnest labor of the working women of the world. Over the doors in different languages appear the words "Let her works praise her in the gates," and truly within those gates may be found many things which give praise to her and do her honor. While this is true, however, it must be admitted that the exhibits are badly arranged and miserably classified. Then again, "the ladies of the Executive Committee," or whatever they call themselves, are very hard to approach, and either cannot or will not give visitors that information which is necessary for a proper appreciation of the exhibit. They forget that people come to a world's fair to learn, and that the earnest thoughtful women who have sent the results of weeks, months and years of toil to the Centennial Exhibition did so, that their work might be "seen of all men," that it might be understood and appreciated. Men are fully alive to what is required of them in this respect, and in all the departments they are ever ready to give any explanation that may be requested. They have come to exhibit their goods, not to drive visitors away by black looks or surly answers. Most of the officials connected with the Woman's Pavilion are, on the contrary, exceedingly disagreeable and disobliging; they seem to regard all those who ask questions as intruders, and I am forced to believe that they are directly responsible for many of the unfavorable notices which have appeared regarding the exhibits committed to their care. There is too much red tape in the Woman's Pavilion, and the lady officers take on too many ridiculous airs, fondly imagining that they are assuming a proper and becoming dignity. In spite of these drawbacks, however, and they are really more amusing than annoying, the Women's Pavilion is one of the most attractive and interesting buildings in Fairmount Park. Overhead the roof arches in soft, well blended tints, and on every hand is to be found something which tells of days and nights of women's patient toil. All sorts of curious little boots and slippers, and caps and baby dresses, and frills and tucks and plaits, and flounces, there are without number. Beautiful embroidery there is, too, some of it worked by the royal hands of the English Princess Louisa and her sisters; wax-work flowers there are in plenty, and pressed fern-leaves, and skeleton bouquets, and all sorts of other queer feminine things, which must forever remain mysteries to "the sterner sex." It must not be supposed, however, that the whole pavilion is filled with such articles as those I have mentioned. There is a steam engine in full operation, and a woman is the engineer. By the power which she quietly directs, a number of looms and machines are run, and under the guidance of women these specimens of man's ingenuity weave carpets, spin cotton, and manufacture worsted. There are also many inventions by women. One of them is especially worthy of mention. It is a life-preserving mattress invented by Mrs. Mountain, of New-York, and approved by the United States Board of Supervising Inspectors of Steamboats. An official trial of its merits will be made during the coming month.

THE CINCINNATI SCHOOL OF DESIGN.

The north-western corner of the pavilion has been devoted almost entirely to specimens of women's proficiency in the decorative arts. Most of the samples are from Ohio, and they do great credit to the fair daughters of that noble State. The exhibits include painting on wood, slate, china, porcelain, and tile, and carving in wood. Many of the articles displayed rival the very best products of Switzerland or the Black Forest. One of the most remarkable pieces of work in the collection is an organ case most elaborately carved by Miss Fannie M. Boaks, of the Cincinnati School of Design. The Estey Organ Company sent the instrument, which is valued at \$500, to the school, with the promise that they would present it to the young lady who would carve and decorate it for the Centennial Exhibition. Miss Boaks undertook the task, and she has succeeded not only in winning the instrument and the warm thanks of the manufacturer, but also in producing one of the most artistically carved pieces of furniture in the World's Fair. It is fully equal to many of the much-boasted specimens shown by the Italians. On what may be called the cabinet portion of the organ a beautifully-proportioned scroll appears, and upon this are carved the words,

"She sang of love as the flowers would sing, If love could lend their leaves a tongue."

Partly hidden by the scroll, and just under it, is a harp, about which are twined and clustered wild roses and morning glories, all executed with great strength and clearness, and with a remarkable fidelity to nature. The cross piece which supports the reading desk is cut through in places and displays a blue silk lining beneath, the wood between the opening being ornamented with passion flowers. The arches under the key-board have also been cut through, the spaces being filled in with branches of convolvulus. Another remarkable piece of work is a rosewood piano case carved by Miss Agnes Pitman, also of Cincinnati. The instrument was presented to the School of Design by the Ohio Valley Piano Company, on the same conditions which governed the gift of the organ. The decorations, which have been made by Miss Pitman, are exceedingly simple, but exquisite in design and finish. The border of the cover is ornamented with surface carving of snowdrops, periwinkles, buttercups, and daisies, intended to represent Spring, roses for Summer, corn for Autumn, and holly and ferns for Winter. In the inclosure formed by this border are two medallions representing Spring and Autumn. Upon the ebony legs of the instrument are carved passion-flowers in bas-relief.

Among a number of beautifully-carved bedsteads, one by Miss Hattie and Miss Mary Johnson, of Cincinnati, is noteworthy. It is made of walnut, inlaid with ebony, and the young ladies originally intended to present it to their brother who now lives in a far western city. The head panels are carved to represent the lattice-work on the porch of his childhood's home. Over this cluster and hang trumpet-flowers and the Virginia creeper. On the posts are carved lilies and poppies, which are intended to typify innocence and sleep, and above the central decorations at the head are two panels upon which are painted clusters of morning glories closed for the night. Upon the foot-board appear the same flowers, just open-

ing to the morning sun. A child's bedstead, which is placed near the one just described, and which attracts much attention, is made of Spanish mahogany, inlaid with ebony, and beautifully carved by Mrs. Dr. Williams, of the School of Design. Upon the foot-board are cut many amusing scenes from "Mother Goose," and over the head appears the German proverb, "Morgen stunde bringt Gold in Munde"—The morning hours bring gold. These pieces may be called the *chefs d'œuvre* of the display, though in addition to them are a number of smaller exhibits which are worthy of great praise. Among these I may mention a wall basket, carved by Miss Dominick, and an ebony pillar, ornamented by Miss Louisa McLaughlin. It may be well to mention that the Cincinnati Department is in charge of a most courteous and obliging lady, who is at all times anxious to give visitors every information in her power.

THE WORK OF SOUTHERN WOMEN.

It has been a matter of universal regret that the Southern States have taken so little interest in the Centennial Exhibition. None of them are properly represented here, and one or two of them would have given no evidence of their existence were it not for the heroic efforts of a few noble women. This is notably the case with Alabama. For a long time her Legislature talked about the matter, and then decided to make no appropriation. It seemed as if the "land of rest" would send no token to the World's Fair, when a brave little woman, in opposition to public sentiment and daring public criticism, and what that is only those who have lived in the South can know, resolved that she at least would display her handiwork in the Centennial Exhibition of her country. She made a quilt, which now occupies a place of honor in the Woman's Pavilion; and it deserves the distinction it has received not only because of the peculiar circumstance under which it was made, but because of its real merit and beauty. It is intended for a double bed, and is composed of white and rose-colored satin. On the white ground are embroidered 1,500 roses and rosebuds, in each of which there are from five to nine hundred stitches. Seven thousand skeins of silk were used in the work, and the lady has been almost constantly engaged upon it during the past eighteen months. But Alabama does not stand alone in work of this kind; the women of Florida have also done their share, indeed I may say more than their share. One of the most attractive cases in the pavilion comes from the land of flowers. It has been prepared and placed in position by a noble-hearted Southern woman who lost friends, relatives, and fortune in the war, but who still loves and glories in her country. And it has been prepared as a Southern woman only could prepare it. Clustering over and drooped all about it floats the gray smoke-like moss of the deep Southern woods, and at the bottom lie wreaths and crosses, composed of grasses, mosses, and lichens, with red berries for centres, and pine cones interspersed. Upon these are laid bats of corn husks and parmetto, fashioned so beautifully that all the ladies go into ecstasies over them. The same may be said of numberless sets of fish-scale jewelry. For a long time this style of ornament has been manufactured on the sea-coast of Italy, but if I am not mistaken, these are the first specimens of the work shown in this country. The material used is the large scales of certain fish found in Southern waters. These are bleached and then fashioned into the charming brooches, earrings, and necklaces now displayed in the Women's Pavilion. In beauty of design and finish they rival the airy filigree work of the Swedes or Italians. The specimens shown were made by the great granddaughters of Thomas Jefferson, who are now living in Florida in comparative poverty. Unlike the fine young ladies of North Alabama, however, who would "rather starve to death than teach dirty niggers," the Misses Jefferson are bravely trying by every means in their power to earn their own living. If the South had more women like them and like the noble matron who has charge of Florida's beautiful display, the women's department of the Centennial Exhibition would certainly have been more attractive, and it is just possible that the Cotton States would soon cease to mourn their lost prosperity.

H. C.