

## A WOMAN'S MELBOURNE LETTER.

Melbourne, Dec. 4.

There is an idea abroad, which as regards Melbourne, w. any rate, is quite erroneous, that our sailors are not as well looked after as our soldiers, and that the noble men of the Mercantile Marine are much neglected! For once, perhaps, my readers will pardon a letter dealing with only one subject, but the steady, unostentatious work done by the Ladies' Harbour Light Guild, in connection with the mission to seamen in Melbourne could not be adequately explained if dismissed in the usual short paragraph. Some of the most prominent names in Melbourne are associated with this guild and with the Mission Chaplain, and Mrs. Gurney Goldsmith, the members have made the Seamen's Institute a real home for those sailors of the Mercantile Marine, who touch our port. What we as a community owe to those men by their heroism in recent hostilities

is certainly more understood by this band of enthusiastic workers than by the community generally. By using their unflagging energies, and influence on the sailor's behalf they endeavour to discharge a debt to which in some way or other we could and should all contribute. Even the most casual person can, if he thinks at all, sum up a few of the things our sailors—other than those belonging to our glorious navy—have done for us. On the spur of the moment we remember that those of the Mercantile Marine, are the men who manned our transports, who carried our wheat and wool, to overseas markets; who kept us in touch with our loved ones abroad; who kept the fires going in the furnaces of the great leviathans, bringing our wounded soldiers home again; who never flinched when self-sacrifice was demanded; who cared, with that tenderness, innate in all sailors, for the women and children, when the passenger ships were struck a dastardly blow by the wicked enemy; who, mocking death, gave up life with a heroism all the more heroic because it was always taken as a matter of course! Is it any wonder, then, that the members of the Ladies' Harbour Light Guild make it their business to provide a bright, homelike, spot in Melbourne, where the sailors are always certain of a cherry welcome ashore?

The members of the guild are admirably drafted! The 360 non-workers each pay £1 ls. per annum. The workers, of whom there are between 700 and 800, donate 2s. 6d. and school members—it is confidently hoped that gradually all the schools will take an active interest in the mission—is. a year. The knights of the guild—as the men members are designated—are responsible for any sum they wish to name, from 5s. a year upwards. Everything is paid for out of these revenues, with the exception of a small grant from the Home Mission Fund—and such is the organisation, and management, that the

organisation, and management, that the entire concern is quite free from debt.

The Seamen's Church and Institute where the "Harbour Lights" gleam so brightly, is situated right in the midst of all the bustle and turmoil of the wharves, at the end of Flinders-street. The building, comprising chapel, and institute under the one red tiled roof, is grey stuccoed, with a small tower, from which flaunts the flag of "The Flying Angel"—the badge of the guild. A visit to the institute makes one fully appreciate the boon the place must be to the voyage worn, weary, sailor. The atmosphere is eminently social in its best sense. While the architecture imparts an elegance, and quiet dignity which soothes by the very subtlety of its charm. With its comfortable furniture, its wealth of flowers, and the happy, wholesome, feminine influence which prevails everywhere, the quality which stands for the magic word "home" abounds. The Chaplain in the course of conversation said:—"We try to make this really a free club for sailors." But the habitues

would probably tell you it was far more than that to them.

The Institute is excellently appointed, and every little corner seems to have its particular history. It was built after the model of one of the old mission churches in California, and retains something of the old world attraction, while yet it combines all the advantages of modern, practical, conveniences. On entering the door the first thing, one notices is a huge compass, inlaid upon the floor, evidently to indicate one's proper bearings for it points due north—to the chapel! Only one other seaman's mission in the world boasts such a compass. As the sailor swings through the entrance he finds the office on his right, and there is, here, always a smiling face to welcome the shy, or timid, new comer. Quite a real post office is staffed by members of the guild, and all the letters received are listed alphabetically. Therefore, the expectant sailor has just to run his eye down the list, and he can immediately see whether there is a letter for him or not. If he is fortunate, he comes up to the member in charge, who unlocks the box, and produces the longed for missive. The boys are always encouraged to answer letters—and to write them. Often a few words about their mother, and their own

home, will provoke a sleeping memory into activity. The writing room is well stocked with paper, envelopes, pens, and ink. The tables are so divided to ensure the utmost privacy, and through a calculated chain of circumstances, many an anxious mother receives a letter from her sailor lad, who, perhaps, might not have written but for these kindly inducements.

The central hall—where social evenings are held every other night besides two special concerts a week—is inviting in the extreme. A handsome piano affords opportunity for those musically inclined.

portunity for those musically inclined. The tables are strewn with papers. The walls are bright with pictures, and here, and there, is a carved model, of a ship. One, of especial interest, is a model of "The Roon" carved, and presented by a French sailor. This German vessel will always be remembered in Australia. For it was across her bows that the first hostile shot was ever fired in Australian waters.

In the corner is the canteen. It was fitted up entirely from the proceeds of a quotation calendar compiled by one of the members. The sailors may at any time, get a teapot of tea, or a tray of eatables, at a nominal cost. Before the canteen was in existence they had to go out for

refreshments—and sometimes they did not come back! Groups of sailors sit chatting at the tables. Half a dozen Swedes laugh and talk among themselves, for the simple reason they know no other language than their own. Several British sailors cluster about a dark-eyed Welsh lad—a perfect Celtic type—who, although only about twenty years of age, has been the victim of the Hun five times. Mines and torpedoes sank the ships he was in, either in the Channel or off the English coast, four times; and it is to his fifth experience, when the Inverness was wrecked, that everyone is eagerly listening. "We were in the boats eight days," he was saying. "I was pretty well mangled when they picked me up. The sufferings we endured were awful. At last we managed to reach Rapa, a Hawaiian island. The natives thought we were Germans, and came at us with spears. When they found we were British, they were awfully good to us. They even cried when we left, and the day before the rescue boat arrived they begged us to go into the hills and hide."

At another table a Canadian lad—once a sailor—then a soldier, who trained at the Broadmeadows camp—was telling his experiences:—"The voyage which will always stick in my memory," he said, "was to a place which must be nameless. We left the United States not knowing whether we were bound, or what we were going to do. After some weeks we sighted a group of wonderfully beautiful islands, and we headed for the most remote and most lovely of them all. Then, and only then, we learned our mission from the skipper. We were taking their year's supply to a leprosy station! Oh no! I don't blame the skipper for not telling us! Someone has to do these things, you know. A naval guard saw they didn't come near—and we all got sixty dollars extra. When the job was over we were quarantined on another island for two months, and one little chap—the baby of the crew, not eighteen—developed leprosy, and died before we left. Yes! I'll never forget that voyage, mates! Sometimes, I seem to see Leper's Island yet, with its lavish tropical vegetation, and the gorgeous sunsets which stained all the water with blood. Then, too"—

all the water with blood. Then, too"—here the voice deepened—"there was an English girl—a leper—here. We heard she used to be an actress, and she contracted the disease somehow or other. She was always alone, and always watching us. In the distance we could see her come to the water's edge, and from there she would watch. Just watch . . . watch . . . watch . . ."

"Here come a couple of North Sea chaps," broke in an elderly man after a pause. "One of them wounded, too, poor lad."

It is not strange that all the sailors flock to the Institute. It is so comfortable, and essentially inviting, besides being full of human interest. The men's quarters comprise reading, writing and dressing rooms—hot and cold baths are always available—billiard room, and a special baggage room, where any sailor may leave his kit for as long as he likes. The payment of 3d. covers its complete insurance.

Upstairs are the officers' quarters. These also have their own billiard room, writing and reading rooms, bath and dressing rooms. Just close are the apprentices' quarters—"The Half Deck," as popular parlance has it! The lads also have a billiard room of their own, and indulge in an easy armchair—amongst others—which was a donation from the Milverton School Branch of the Guild.

It is hoped by the committee to some day utilise the huge empty rooms, which run the length of the whole building. Their ultimate intention is to fit them up as cubicles, or "cabins," as they are to be called. They trust these "cabins" will be donated, either in memory, or in honour, of someone dear to the donor.

Another forward movement soon to be put in hand, now that materials are available, is the establishment of "Norla Gymnasium." In a sailor's club such facility for exercise is absolutely essential. The men both need, and miss, exertion. As one boy, who had been backsliding, once said pathetically:—"If only there was something to do to get me into a good sweat, I would be all right." Soon such an one will be helped to swing from the trapeze of the Norla Gymnasium into the right track!

Sunday is always a fete day at the Institute, for 40 or 50 sailors generally come into tea. The up-to-date kitchen, which is fitted with every labour-saving appliance—all paid for out of working members' half crowns—is then a hive of animation, and methodical order. A formidable row of teapots await filling. Mrs. Goldsmith—the chaplain's wife—rightly thinks it is far more homely to pour out the tea from a pot, than to serve it straight from the urns. So tea is poured out by a member, who sits at the head of a table gay with flowers, and chats to the guests. These latter are of all nationalities. But the

French, the Spanish, Scandinavian, Norwegian—or any other sailor—is equally welcome with the British. Two enthusiasts

wegian—or any other sailor—is equally welcome with the British. Two enthusiasts belonging to the Guild actually learnt Norwegian, so that men of this nation would have someone to talk to, and so be less lonely when they reached this, to them, foreign port!

The members of the Guild have their own private suite where they arrange the flowers and do other necessary odds and ends undisturbed. No one appreciates flowers like a sailor, and the earliest and most beautiful may always be seen adorning the tables and rooms.

Teas are served and lectures are held in the "Ceila Little Hall," one of the most beautiful portions of the institute. It was erected by the chaplain in memory of his aunt from whom the hall takes its name. The Gothic windows open upon the cloisters, where, in the hot weather, the sailors enjoy their meals out of doors.

The cloisters, indeed, form an exquisite spot. They are between a series of sweeping arches which lead to the chapel, and are sheltered by the open balcony of the chaplain's quarters. Grace of contour marks the architecture on every turn. Just around the corner is the chaplain's garden—a patch of green and colour, transformed from a desert waste, by a well-known woman horticulturist.

The book room is a department especially valued by the sailors. There are two secretaries, one for home and the other for foreign literature. Books in French, English, Spanish, Scandinavian, Norwegian, and German may be found on the shelves. Each week about 36 convenient parcels of reading stuff are made up. These contain illustrated papers, books in various languages, and magazines. These parcels are eagerly accepted by the sailor with a long monotonous voyage before him.

But complete as is every corner of the institute no part is so well equipped as the memorial chapel erected by the Ladies' Harbour Light Guild, in memory of the officers and men, who have lost their lives during the war. St Peter's—for it is called after the sailor's patron saint—with its hallowed gentle dignity is a veritable sanctuary of peace, perhaps all the more so because it sprang out of war. The fittings are entirely of Australian wood. The pews, given in memory of some loved one by one of the members, are of Tasmanian hardwood. The reredos and altar chairs of carved blackwood. The rich carpet was provided by the members' magical half-crowns. Already this chapel holds memorials of peculiar historical interest. The altar lectern was given in memory of Commander Etwell, who, it will be remembered, was killed at Rabaul, in the early part of the war. The font commemorates two heroes—Nigel Hockley and Fred Hyde, who lost their lives at the hands of the Germans, although they survived the actual torpedoing of their ships, the Gallgorn Castle off the coast of Ireland. The mother of one of them wrote out that her son had died as an Englishman should—fighting for the right. This noble sentiment is suitably paraphrased upon the inscription engraved upon the font. Practically every-

thing enshrined in the chapel has its own sentimental value. The alms salver of beaten copper, studded with agate, is fragrant with the memory of a saintly woman. The eye of the sailor is caught and held by the pulpit, which is fashioned like a ship's hull and only a twist of rope guides the chaplain up the steps.

For the last 13 years the Rev. A. Gurney Goldsmith, M.A. has acted as chaplain to the Seamen's Mission in Melbourne. Before that he and his wife worked in China. Mr. Goldsmith visits all the boats and gets in touch personally with the sailor, over whom he has great influence. He is not only their chaplain and friend, but, amongst a wide range of other things, their banker besides. An exchange system exists between the various Missions, and the sailor who has "banked" his money with the chaplain, upon going away, receives a cheque which is cashed—minus exchange—by the chaplain of the next port. Mr. Goldsmith will tell you he has a soft spot in his heart for an old sailor he calls "Paddy." This ancient mariner has been wrecked ten times. It was a long time before the chaplain prevailed upon "Paddy" to partake of the spiritual and secular advantages afforded by the institute. He would not come, he said, until he could do so "with a good heart." Finally he frankly admitted that he had no "friends like those of 'the Flying Angel,'" and that he eventually proved his own "good heart" will be shown in this story. One day he came in to the chaplain and said bluffly, "Well, sir, I've been payin' off some old scores up Carlton way, an' I tells yer, plain, sir, not one of 'em would have seen a penny of their money but for the Mission."

The Ladies' Harbour Light Guild has over thirty working suburban branches, and the excellent results achieved at the institute now will no doubt be considerably augmented in the future. The practical actions of the members do more than anything else to convey the subtle meaning of the name of the Guild. To the visiting sailors the word "ladies" signifies the bread givers; "harbour" safety; "lights" welcome; "guild" the welding of fraternity and they one and all tell you the ideals thus embodied are unselfishly carried out by all the ladies who have banded together to care for the sailors' welfare.