

When Florence Nightingale headed the revolution of sick nursing, that branch of woman's work had reached a depth of barbarism that could only have been the result of a steady national decline of healthy sympathy with toiling and suffering humanity.

The light shines clearer to-day. It has been generally recognised as a speciality not invented by Heaven for exclusive use in our drawing-room and study lamps. We seem to see a sort of significance in that Indian legend that represents *witches* as jealously keeping the fire that should have warmed mankind, to themselves, until it was wrested from them by the cunning of beasts.

In this cosmopolitan age, when we have tacitly agreed that there are other voices worth listening to besides the British lion's roar, views on the meaning of the words "home" and "justice" have become, or are becoming, more catholic. Still, we have not, by any means, reached a pinnacle of perfection; our illumination is not dazzling, and the distribution of our resources is chaotic.

Nor are all our beneficent revolutions modern; many of them are revivals of ancient humane and artistic solutions of the social problem, valued and tested in ages that preceded the period of selfish sentimentality and brutality, blended with refined cruelty, in the disguise of justice, that pre-faced recent efforts towards improvement. Noble ladies went "slumming" in the days of St. Agnes. St. Elizabeth seems to have waged gentle war with her husband on the subject of her persistency in that occupation, just as amateur district visitors of to-day have not unfrequently to differ from the views of male relatives with regard to the duty of calling upon impecunious inhabitants of the East End. Franciscan friars seem to have been kindly enough sick Nurses, according to their lights; and even the much-maligned leper-houses were not unfrequently governed by reasonable regulations. Even the law, that made it incumbent on the inmates in the less advanced stages of the malady to wait upon the helpless and dying, may have had a beneficial moral effect on the unfortunate Nurses.

In any case, it is difficult to imagine a lower depth of savagery in the isolation of suffering than that described by an American writer of no later date than 1872. Describing a visit of the Local Visiting Committee of the "New York State Charities Aid Association" to the hospital at Bellevue, in the year 1872, Mr. Franklin North tells us, that the committee found 900 patients, "most of them in want, many of them in positive

distress. The men's wards were so crowded that three patients would have to sleep on two beds and five on three. Others were forced to sleep on the floor, without blankets or pillows, as there was no supply of extra clothing, except what could be obtained from the stock belonging to deceased patients." The description goes on in the same ghastly strain, telling of overworked and inefficient Nurses, of patients drugged with morphine, "to keep them quiet" (but as Mr. North informs us, there existed *no* night nurse and only three watchman for six hundred patients, there seems to have been small option). "In the kitchen," the account tells us, "tea and soup were frequently made in the same boiler."

Workhouse women, who had been committed for drunkenness and disorderly conduct, were frequently transferred to Bellevue as helpers. The Committee of 1872, which eventually brought about a vast and wondrous change for the better, was chiefly composed of ladies of high social position—certainly Amateur Nurses to some purpose! It is frightful to realise that the state of things they undertook to reorganise was already an improvement on what had immediately gone before. From 1822 (when the hospital was founded) until 1848, the sick and injured were nursed by convicts of the female Penitentiary, while defective supplies, total want of proper heating, cleanliness and ventilation made *the best medical skill useless*.

It is pleasanter to look away from home, when one wants to say "How shocking!" Yet generations have not passed away since a visitor to our isle might have easily drawn a somewhat similar picture to carry away with him.

There have been a good many light-hearted rhodomontades, lately, on the subject of surplus population, the cheerful burden of which seems to be, that for the good of the community at large it would be well to slaughter off a good half of our brothers and sisters. You and I, my sister, had better make quite sure that we really have done anything to justify our trivial existence, and are indispensable to the happiness of one or two inhabitants of this small planet, before we join these "*pleasant*" pessimistic arguments—arguments frequently tinged with a prophetic taint of selfishness, that recalls the palisade of yore in a less pleasing form. Let wiser heads puzzle over the solemn problem of fit and unfit! You and I have to deal tenderly with the unfit (if, indeed, it be not arrogance to apply such a term to any created being), or most assuredly we may include ourselves among the surplus population.

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