

A Word from the Sweet Land of Liberty.

THE NEW ETHICS.

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Can anyone who is born to the lot of the worker in this busy work-a-day age realise the turn of mind which could believe in a fixed and settled state of society as it is at present? To me a most dreary vision, I am sure no worker could ever have contemplated it with joy. It must ever have been held by those whose circumstances compelled them to lead more or less artificial lives—the leisured, and, let us frankly say, the lazy people.

Who else could ever have wished to set a clamp and padlock on any one given age—any one known phase of human society? Whatever rules the pedagogues and political economists made in times gone by, the workers must always have felt assured that they were living in a transition age; that there was something greater coming; that they were preparing a way of life beyond what they knew for themselves. Do we not feel it, we workers? Do we not share this sensation, as we join the ranks of those who earn bread and salt?

The vision we see, which rejoices us and makes us thankful to be living in this time, is the approaching economic independence of women.

Oh, the heaviness of the time which forbade independent exertion to the single woman; which held no outlook for her save a nunnery or the bread of dependence in the household of her male relatives!

And single women always have been and always will be. The wisecracks who dread seeing women independent, for fear they will not marry, forget that in the olden time nearly every household had an old maid aunt or two living on charity in its borders.

To-day we have the promise of the complete financial emancipation of women—last to emerge from pennilessness, slowest to become organised, most belated in resistance to unfairness (taking them as a whole), and prone to subordination, we know now that their feet are set in the way of freedom.

Our work and training as nurses has been a powerful factor in this advance. Our whole nursing movement is but one part of the universal movement of women toward fuller education, more equal opportunities, completer freedom to develop. Here enter the new ethics, in our responsibility, the obligation that is laid upon us so to live, so to work, so to strive forward, that we may help, and not hinder, the whole movement; that we may strengthen

the cause and encourage the advance of all the others; of those whom we have never seen; of those of whose very existence we are unconscious.

Every bit of progress that we make helps forward the cause of all women. Every time we fall back we hurt and keep back others by so much. Each advance made in position and dignity by any one body of women brings so much nearer the day of hope for those who are still down-trodden. Realising this, dare we become indifferent to our blessings; neglectful of our obligations to our sisters who are less fortunate than we?

Rarely indeed has it happened that a new profession has been created, as was ours, by the genius of one woman. Out of a formless, characterless mass of unorganised womanhood has arisen in a lifetime a definite, distinctive, self-reliant, and self-supporting army, whose influence in ameliorating misery is not more striking than the moral ideas of the elevation of labour, the worthiness of service, and the dignity of self-support which it has radiated in its path. I think no movement has ever done so much to break down the cramping conventions which kept unoccupied women in homes where there was nothing to do. It has made thousands free, and, better yet, it has made ideas free.

For all this we owe gratitude to the great woman whose name we revere, and whom we must hail, remembering the vast revolution her work has been, as one of the greatest of revolutionists.

To her we owe it that we are as free as we are to-day. Not only did her hands remove the control of the whole nursing world from men and give it to women, but her voice, clear and fearless, proclaimed what no one had dared to say before, that to be successful nursing affairs and nursing management must be entrusted to nurses with authority, and that there was a sphere of their own within which they must be supreme.

This was the most radical part of a most radical work, and this the chiefest treasure which we, as a profession, are bound to guard and cherish for the benefit of all other women.

We have not guarded it as sacredly as we should have done, all told. Instances may be pointed out where prerogatives have been given up, and rule and domination by outsiders almost invited. Surely, if we look beyond ourselves over the whole vast field of still subjugated womanhood, we will not dare risk the liberty so hardly won. The nurse of the future must be something more than nurse. She must be, if she will live up to the level set for us by the greatest of nurses, teacher as well as nurse; a moral force; a public conscience; a prophet and a critic. Self-governing she must be, free and self-reliant must she maintain herself. Then she can go out of the world, feeling that she has done her part towards making it better than she found it.

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