

The Nurse as a Health Missioner.

Before I became a nurse I looked upon each member of that sisterhood as a profound oracle, and thought that their teaching must do a vast amount of good in the world. When I myself became a nurse I also thought it my duty to teach.

My first trial was made in the East end of London, upon a woman of about twenty. After I had seen her several times, and had heard all her family history, I began in great trepidation to try to leave that woman a little cleaner than I found her.

"Mrs. Shaw," I said, "you have such pretty hair; I wonder you don't keep it clean."

"Clean, nurse! Why it ain't dirty!"

"But there are a lot of little things walking about in it, and there ought not to be."

"Well, Nurse, where would they live if they didn't live there?"

"There is no necessity that they should live at all."

"Ain't you got any in your head?"

"No!" (I hoped not.)

The woman looked at me with a pitying smile; she evidently thought me a poor sort of a liar. I did not do any more teaching in that house.

Another day, I undressed a baby to see if there was anything the matter with it, as it cried most of its time.

"Well, Mrs. Lee," I said, "I don't wonder the poor little girlie cried; she is all over bites."

"Yes, Nurse. You see a baby's blood is so sweet, everything goes for her."

"But why don't you kill the things?"

"Lor bless you, Nurse! you couldn't do it; the place is full of them. They drop down from the ceiling and come out of the walls and floors."

And I had to agree with her. I think nothing but a second fire would clear London of its zoological collections.

Later on I became a private nurse. My first patient was a lady of ninety-two. She lived in a four-post bedstead—feather bed, of course, with curtains all round. The window was closed, and brown paper pasted over the cracks; thick woollen curtains were drawn across it; a screen was placed inside the door, and thick curtains hung outside. I was on night duty, and most of my time was taken up with endeavouring to make the fire burn. The lady said coals were not what they used to be in her young days.

"Perhaps not, Mrs. White; but really you could hardly expect anything to burn in this room, with no fresh air; the oxygen is all used up. You would feel much better yourself if you were to have the window, or even the door, open a little."

"You call yourself a nurse, and talk about

letting the night air in on a sick person! It is most dangerous."

"I don't think so. I never found the night air do any harm."

"Perhaps not; but you're not ninety-two. I think you will find it advisable to keep out the cold air when you are."

I left her at the end of two months, feeling that I stood little chance of ever being ninety-two. She was a kind old soul; she gave me a little book of prayers when she said good-bye, and told me never to have the window open in the room of a sick person. She died at the age of ninety-four. I cannot think how she managed to live so long. I certainly failed to teach her anything, for she was never properly washed, and her room was never aired or thoroughly cleaned.

I gave up all idea of teaching for a time, and just made the best of things, till one day it struck me that I was not doing the good that a woman in my position ought to do. I was then on my way to another case. Here I found people who had an idea that whiskey and beef were the two best things in the world. On the first evening, at dinner, my hostess said:—

"Surely, nurse, you drink something besides water? You ought to take wine to keep up your strength."

"I have never yet been convinced that wine does keep up one's strength," I answered.

"Oh! perhaps you are a teetotaller."

"Not quite. I drink a little champagne at weddings and on jubilee days."

"Oh! Well, I shall speak to the doctor about it. You eat scarcely any meat, and drink nothing. I don't know what you live on."

"I eat plenty of vegetables and fruit."

"That is all very well in the country, but you can't get vegetables in London."

For seven months I preached to that lady that even in London one can buy vegetables other than potatoes and cabbages, and that fresh fruit was better for her children than chocolates, and that it was not kind to them to insist on their drinking wine every day, and whiskey if they had a slight cold—but all to no purpose. I overheard her telling a friend, "Nurse is a dear kind soul to Lillie (my patient), and I really don't know what we should do without her, but she has such odd ideas about food. We almost fight sometimes over Lillie's."

"Oh yes," answered her friend, "I know nurses are very trying; they are such faddists, but you must be firm and not give in to her more than you are obliged."

I left at the end of seven months, feeling certain that my patient would be fed up on beef, wine, and whiskey—and so she was. She had a relapse, but even that did not teach them, and I cannot flatter myself that I did any good there.

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