

SANITATION, SOCIAL MORALITY, AND  
DISTRICT NURSING.

To the Editor of "The Nursing Record."

Sir,—It seems to me that there is, after all, a fair share of sound and practical common sense in the logic of the old Yorkshire farmer, the philosophy of which is thus expressed: "There's a deal o' talk naw-a-days abart deing reight. I's noan so consarned abart deing reight as living reight; for I knaws if I live reight, the Lord 'll tack care that I dee reight."

Well, I also am a Yorkshireman; and therefore I have read with feelings of honest pride and thanksgiving the "signs of the times" which the following cutting foreshadows, taken from the *Methodist Recorder*, of April 10. And it is still true that "He who doeth good to another doeth good to himself," for the consciousness of well-doing is an ample reward:—

"Several principal landowners in East Yorkshire have apportioned a considerable acreage of land in allotments for cottagers and small tradesmen in the villages on their several estates, and in no case has it been necessary to apply the provisions of the Act of Parliament, the landlords having spontaneously offered their land."

Again, to my own mind it has long been a problem difficult of solution, why District Nurses should have been for so long a time called upon to do durable work in those so-called "homes" of the poor, which consist of one damp and imperfectly ventilated cellar, one dilapidated garret, or one ground-floor and one bedroom over that, for, say, from eight to sixteen persons to sleep in. Morality indeed! Surely "England still expects every man to do his duty."

"Which is the greatest room in the world?" said a witty fellow to me one day. "The room for improvement, sir," was my quaint rejoinder. "And so you would think, my good man, had you had your feet fast in 'the stocks' of as many old rotten bedroom, garret, and cellar floors as I have; and had had half as many 'spankings' on the head with the descending and immortalised 'four-poster,' as have fallen to my lot time after time. To wit, splendid specimen cases of the rickety condition of the bases of that impotent Social Morality of ours. Let us hasten to change our religion; and instead of longer preaching to the poor the blessings of poverty, we might, to our mutual advantage, preach to them the blessings of being above poverty."

I have great pleasure, likewise, in asking your attention to the following announcements, drawn from a Metropolitan paper:—"Lord Cadogan has given a plot of freehold land to the 'Guinness Trust,' worth £40,000, on which to erect workmen's dwellings." Very good indeed! for everyone who fights against wrong and evil is a hero; and to be good and noble one must fight always.

Below, and in painful contradistinction to the above, we have brought to light cases which might, humanly speaking, justly be termed the criterion of much of the wretchedness, misery, and squalor around us. This cutting from the paper aforesaid runs thus:—

"A case was heard at the Marylebone Police Court the other day which not only illustrates the scandalous condition of so many of the dwellings of the poor, but also shows how and why it is that the ample powers which the local authorities already have so often remain a dead letter. The owners of several houses were summonsed by a member of the St. Pancras Vestry for allowing them to be unfit for human habitation. The prosecutor stated that no language could exaggerate the horrible condition of the houses. Representations had been made by the Sanitary Committee in the strongest possible form to the Vestry, which body simply refused to do anything. The explanation of the whole thing was that the Vestry was full of house-farmers, and they would not employ a sufficient staff of inspectors to do the work properly. The houses in question were ordered to be closed until the necessary alterations were made. But it is not in

St. Pancras only that these 'vested interests' stand in the way of reform; in other parts of London, as may be seen from the Report of the Commission on the Housing of the Poor, the same state of things prevails. Neither Acts of Parliament nor Royal Commissions will be of any avail so long as those upon whom is laid the duty of enforcing amendment are the very persons who are interested in keeping things as they are."

We want, Sir, above all things, a higher moral tone and plain speaking as to what is "honesty." John Ploughman says, "Let us set our faces against falsehood and deceit, and speak the truth in plain words, even if pretty pussy dies of it." We need now-a-days upright men in downright earnest, who say what they mean, and mean what they say. Old Father Honesty is the man for our money. None of your painting and gilding; give us the real thing. Let each one of us begin to mend the world by putting off every bit of sham we have about us. Don't let Jack be a ginger-bread gentleman, nor Tim Bobbin set up for a superfine swell. One said to John Ploughman, 'We all know where you are.' 'Yes,' said John, 'and if you don't know I'll very soon tell you.' *Open and above board* is a very good motto. 'Speak the truth and shame the devil' was the word of our grandfathers. We may improve on the wording of it, but we cannot better the meaning of it."

Furthermore, I have no hesitation in saying that this is an age, comparatively speaking, of cheap philanthropy and "sweating systems"—the handiwork oftentimes of well-meaning busy-bodies—owing to which the onerous post of the District Nurse of to-day is, as a rule, no sinecure. And the post is, there is reason to believe, becoming more and more responsible and trying as the years increase; in view of which you will, I feel sure, pardon me if I administer to the would-be District Nurse a parting word of friendly counsel.

On entering upon an unknown and untried appointment, let it be thy first duty to walk circumspectly, to entangle thyself with as few words as the matter in hand requires. "Keep thyself pure." Thou shouldst likewise guard against the common error of wasting thy precious time in speaking disparagingly of the work already accomplished; rather endeavour to quietly and gradually ascertain what work there remains yet to be done. "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." And if thou hast sufficient moral courage at thy command, self-sacrifice and self-reliance, to take up the "reins" fearlessly, and holding them firmly and steadily wilt drive straight on, regardless of what the world may say or think, then thou mayest ultimately be permitted to do good and "telling" work.

And I hope thou wilt believe me when I tell thee plainly that, in my feeble judgment, the "secret" of the repeated failure of many of thy predecessors in District Nursing hath lain, for the most part, in their own wrong and preconceived notions of District Nursing. Need I assure thee that, if the would-be District Nurse in entering upon a district expects to find there everything ready to her hand, and has not previously become queen of herself, and learnt to readily conjure up and get along with "make-shifts" from time to time, it is clear that such an one has, unfortunately, missed her vocation in life. For it should be distinctly understood that the District Nurse is left almost entirely to her own resources; hence the necessity and grave importance of a thorough domestic training preparatory to her Hospital training.

Seek the truth, not a truth. Walk straight, heedless of every man's opinion and censure; and should there overtake thee a time when men shall steal from thee thy good name (which does occasionally happen), even then let it be thy "study to be quiet." Remember that a true worker can trust results. And should it but be thy duty and pleasure alike to do all the good thou canst, thou mayest rest assured that, come what may, thou canst do nothing better for thy fellow-men or for thyself.—Thy affectionate friend and well-wisher,

THE YORKSHIREMAN.

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