

### "Old Sisters."

When I have a seat in Parliament the first Bill I intend to introduce to the notice of the nation's legislators (which will then include mothers) will be "A Bill for the Compulsory Countrification of Children." Its first clause may run—

"(1) No person shall reside for a period of more than one month in any year in an urban district until he or she has stopped growing. (2) As soon as a child can toddle it shall run wild—babes, pups, kits, lambs, and little pink sucking pigs shall gambol together daily at will. Spacious flowery meads shall be provided for the purpose. Grown-ups shall remain without the Pale."

I talked this Bill over with Sister Clendon, in the old Fever Annexe (only enteric admitted) at the General Hospital, Nottingham, more than thirty years ago, and that reminds me, she was the first "Old Sister" I ever knew.

At the "Children's" then across the road (now attached to the "General") we were all very modern in those days. The Lady Superintendent, a sprightly, yet wondrous wise, young thing in the twenties, and with the exception of a Lady Pro. of mature years, who was by far the most infantine of the community, we were all in deadly earnest—the sort of new brooms that flipped up the dust! Sister Clendon was trained at St. Thomas'; she had the Nightingale *cachet*. Moreover, she had seen and spoken with the High Priestess of Nursing, but she was very human, and as she was shut out of the "General" by a barrier, and found life somewhat lonely in the Annexe, she loved me to slip in at the back door after dark and to pour into my appreciative ears tales of St. Thomas' over fragrant cups of tea.

She was a pale-faced, unobtrusive, natty little scopril of a woman, with dim purple eyes like a dead pigeon. In a speckless cotton gown and Nightingale cap, she was nun-like and demure, but she knew life, and had the saving grace of humour. At my gentle tap she would fly down the corridor to let me in; if her bosom was bony, her embrace was warm, and she had a dancing heart.

One day she said:

"I am going to give you a present," and handed me a dingy, well-worn black book. I opened it and on the fly leaf found written, "Willie Clendon, from Henry Bonham Carter, Esq., Secretary to the Nightingale Fund." It was "Notes on Nursing: What it is and What it is not," printed in 1860. (I still possess that

gift.) When I had thanked her I said, "Fancy you being 'Willie'; surely nothing so frivolous as a 'Willie' could have been trained under the Wardroper régime?" "There," she said, kissing the book, "I want you to have it. I value that book more than anything I possess. Miss Nightingale not only wrote it, but her hands have touched its cover—with that and the Bible you can travel safely to Kingdom Come, and supposing you find a barrier I'll be at the door to let you in."

"Why a barrier?"

"Oh, Dr. Peter Prejudice may happen to have charge of the keys, and if he sees a bit of Modern Nursing coming along, he'll keep that barrier down, sure enough. There's going to be plenty of opposition to nursing before it converges with medicine. The time is coming when there won't be enough of the right women to go round, and I'll tell you why—because they are not planted in the right soil. If I was a Matron I'd only train farmers' daughters and country maidens, no town-breds for me. We want wholesome women for nurses, those who have come in touch with nature and real things, no make-believes and mincing misses who are ashamed of their animal origin. I'd just like to sweep away the cities, and turn the people out to grass along with all the dear animals. They would learn a thing or two worth knowing. It's sure to come to it sooner or later, as it's all written in that wonderful book as plain as a pike staff. Earth, Air, Fire, and Water—gifts of the Gods."

Then we had tea in the bright little kitchen, and worshipped at the shrine of Health, and Sister Clendon insisted upon the inclusion of the "little pink sucking pigs" as fit companions for the toddling child.

"Have you ever kissed a baby pig?" she enquired.

I shook my head.

"Try it," she advised, "they are just as sweet as babes—the cunning pets—see their cute little curly tails. Oh! you can't exclude the piggie-wigs from the flowery meads."

And then we heard the impatient foot-step of the medical officer, who hated "women's chatter," and Sister went forth meekly to attend his lordship on his evening visit.

When she returned she exclaimed:—

"Compare them."

"Compare who?"

"Man and his beasts."

"Yet—they are his, Sister."

"That hit the Gold," she laughed.

Dove-eyed, devoted little woman—an "Old Sister" of the right sort.

E. G. F.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)