

DISTRICT NURSE NOTES

One of the most mischievous effects of an all-out cry such as that behind the present defense ^{and aid to Britain} movement is the reckless grabbing of essential people in established institutions necessary to the health of the community. This has begun on the District Nurse Service of the country. A service which gets to the very bottom of the effort to make in this country ^a population without flat-feet, decayed teeth, tuberculosis, weak hearts, all ills which ruin the effectiveness of later life, make men and women incapable of giving a service which is now wanted from them, a service for war.

If one looks over the record of common ills cutting men out from military service as developed in the last War seemed incredible that we should come so near duplicating that list after twenty-five years. We knew where the weaknesses were, we had the money and the time to go after them at the source, but only in spots was there anything done and now when we come to size up the reports of the physical examination of youth for the service what do we find. One thing, and a tragic thing, is that one out of every one hundred draftees, as they call them, has T. B. Of course this is a better record than that of twenty-five years ago. Those that know say T. B. is still killing more people between 18 and 40 than any other disease, that tuberculosis not detected in the last War has been costing the country something like a billion dollars.

Now there is a way of detecting the tubercular tendency in youth. I am free to say that if the District Nursing Service as developed in our best schools at certain points in the country had been put into active operation directly after the War all over the U. S. there would have been a different story to tell about the present exhibit. They'd be nearer one in a thousand than one in a hundred.

Moreover, if this service had been in operation nationwide there would have been very few boys turned down because of flat-feet, poor eyes, for these are the things for which the District Nursing Service is concerning itself in working as it does on the principle that a healthy community is only possible when there is from babyhood on an intelligence and a universal application of preventing ^{ve} care.

The application of this principle has come about as logically as any growth of Public Service that we have.

It's hard to believe that the first Public Nurse dates back only seventy-five years. She was put to work in Liverpool, England, purely as a philanthropy, but she was backed by highly intelligent people and they were not long in discovering that although they might make illness easier for the very poor it was only a temporary thing, it prevented nothing. The conditions under which the poor lived made it impossible to do anything to stop disease. So out of that first Good Samaritan gesture ~~te~~ of sending a nurse to whose too poor to have a nurse there began a series of attacks on the conditions back of the disease. Here was sound reasons for better housing, better sanitation, better food, better hours and wages, for the improvement for all of those factors which go into making tolerable life. Those behind the District Nurse service said we can do nothing permanent until the community sees the need and rallies to the effort to improve conditions. That was the initial progress. The initial broadening of the principle. It was something like twenty years before the District Nurse appeared in the U. S. in anything like the form that was worked out in Liverpool. I think she can be credited almost entirely to the settlement movement which began to take hold here around the early nineties, the first great experiment being that of Jane Addams in Chicago in Hull House. How it did take hold the country over, but the settlement

which contributed vital creative power to the District Nurse came from what was known as the Nurses Settlement established in 1893 in New York City by Lillian Wald. Here the nurse trained for the work and full of devotion and zeal went out from the settlement to care for the sick of the neighborhood and here there became active campaigns going on generally over the town, a stimulus to all efforts to improve conditions. The great contribution which Miss Wald and Henry Street made to District Nursing was in 1902 she persuaded the schools of N. Y. to experiment with a nurse working with the children in the schools teaching them the principles of health, the practices of health, The most serious ravages in the country at that time came from tuberculosis so that the work was largely concentrated on the conditions which produced the disease and the practices which might off-set it. It came to me in New York from youth in which I was under- interested and I shall always remember the seriousness which a couple of these boys told me how they succeeded in sleeping in their narrow quarters with their heads out the window so that they might get the fresh air they needed and how they worked to get an extra pint of milk for themselves and for the babies. There you have as fine a type of what the District Nurse could do in the schools towards making a healthy population as anything that I have ever seen.

The settlements, the churches, charitable organizations of all kinds, dozens of them including many industries set up nurses for children. Today, nearly forty years to be sure, but such a short period for fundamental progress in any national progress there are District Nurses working in the schools of the United States. And judging from the work they do as I am seeing it in the little Connecticut township where I'm living I repeat what I have already said that if such work as its done here could be done the country over there would be no trouble about the discouraging exhibits we are getting

Digital Image, 2011, The Ida M. Tarbell Collection, 1890-1944, Allegheny College Pellerin Library.

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in the examination of our youth for the Army. The germ is caught at the start, his meaning and his treatment are demonstrated to children. Moreover, there is an incessant training in home conditions which make for cleanliness, strike at the roots of disease.

In this development have come logically a sense of the relation of this work to prevent disease, of the part that social service must pay if it's carried on successfully. The business of the District Nurse is with the child in the schools. If he's absent or word is sent that he's ill the Nurse must go to the home, but she's not responsible for the conditions in that home and here comes in auxiliary, we will call it, of the greatest value, and that is an organized social service helping out and improving the home itself, finding jobs for the unemployed seeing that temporarily they have food or fuel, necessities of life, helping them to help themselves. This thing can be carried on so successfully and is in the little township which is ^{my} the object lesson so that now there's not a man on relief in the community and only on W. P. A. work. Like all kind hearted communities in the past, one of the Christmas activities has been filling baskets for those who could not provide their own Christmas dinner. Last year the baskets went begging. Those who had filled them had to beg people to take them. That is, as an outgrowth direct from the District Nurses work combined with Social Service there has been such sense of self respect, such a desire to stand on their own feet grown up and I take it the children had been largely responsible for it. As an old-fashioned charity was demoded, out of style.

Moreover, in this development there is coming about an application of the principles of racial tolerance so essential if we are ever to have a united country. See Common Ground.) It is a growing sense of what Louis Adamie and his colleagues are working for in the organization which is known as "The Common Ground", a base on which all of our races can co-operate.

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I have watched for thirty years in this little community
the gradual development of racial interest and tolerance.

NOTES ON

EASTON DISTRICT NURSING

Dept of
Mrs. Files, head of the Connecticut ~~Public Health Organization~~
called *at* Mrs. Storm's to talk over my writing an article on District
Nursing as I have seen it working in Easton and about the way it
grew in the Town and in the State, its relation to State Public
Health and to social service.

She is not definite about dates, but promises to get me them,
but I gather from our talk that the first impulse as she sees it came
from Jane Addams and Lillian Wald social service and nursing.

She says that west of the State has gone much farther in
District Nursing than the East and attributed it to its nearness
to New York. I think she is right. So many people in the West of
Connecticut spend winters in New York and are interested in social
developments there. She says that there are many towns, even cities,
in Connecticut, that have no type of public nursing, little social
service. It would be interesting to see how they get on. I fancy
that they are still following pioneer methods which, after all,
considering the money available and general conditions, were as
good as you could perhaps expect and they had the recognition of
the local responsibility for the sick and the poor. But I might
tell what I found when I first came up here and give reminiscences
of the poorhouse which for so many years flourished on this farm.

According to Mrs. Storm District Nursing in Easton began when
Mr. Beers, the Town Clerk, now 81, heard of first Miss Wald's work
in District Nursing and said that it would be a good thing for
Easton. He is ^{the} one from whom to get the story of its development,
I think, not Mrs. Storm.

It was introduced, I think, for school children mainly and at the expense of the Town largely. The State Public Health service began to help. Find out when. The pioneers that have been looking after the poor seem to have pushed it. And the broader idea that is working so strongly now in New York City that such a service ought to contribute, like medicine, to those of modest means, that it ought to be put within the reach of salaried professional class to whom hospitals and nursing are practically cut off because of the expense. The thing has grown until it is what I see here today. For 75¢ a visit I can get occasional service in the way, say of massage, that I need. That does not go to the nurse. It goes to help the Town support the nurse so that they are glad to have patients like myself. This is what they are trying to push in New York as I understand it. It is a way of meeting a real need among low salaried groups. And at the same time help support the District Nursing Service. But this service through its contact, through the schools largely which is free and compulsory (see State rules governing) sends the nurse into all sorts of homes, particularly into ^{the} very poor and very backward, and astonishing things are found for a community as old and experienced and generally responsible towards its citizenry. It is hard to believe that there are at least two homes, one Jewish and one American, in which a bath is regarded as dangerous and in which clothes are washed only at long, long intervals. The story of the dirt in these places and the fear of stirring up dust in these places, dirt carrying germs as one little girl claimed in the class on how to keep a room clean. This dirty child going to school in groups where cleanliness is almost a religious rite results in a social ostracism which is a menace to the community and tragedy to the child.

The case of Cora is to the point. She belongs in a grade where there are twelve or fifteen. They give parties and everybody is invited except Cora because she smells so and don't know how to behave. Delicate problem for the District Nurse who is as keenly alive to social meaning as she is to physical.

One of the interesting developments is that through the work of the District Nurse the social service of the Town has been broadly extended. The Committee is made up of local people of various classes and churches. The whole idea being to democratize the population. The methodist Minister tells me that in a Cantata that they gave a while ago his leading lady was a Catholic, his janitor and his wife are Greek Catholics and go to services. That is the whole thing is a broadening of outlook. As near as I can make out there is nothing in political, religious or almost racial differences that is not represented in Easton.

No more of racial differences, which is what it all amounts to, is that through this kind of service there is coming to be a genuine understanding of what the thing we talk about so much, that is democracy, really means, the cooperation of all people in a community giving to each the right to be himself racially, religiously, socially, professionally.

And of course the taking in of the professional groups of workers gives a dignity and standing to the District Nurse and her efforts among those who look on it as a charity pure and simply. It is a charity in the same sense as the public school the church and the care of the roads, is a charity. It is a collective effort. There are thing about it that strike me as particularly suggestive at this moment. We have been hearing

about the large percentage of drafted boys turned down because of physical unfitness, poor teeth, flat feet, round shoulders, general physical slovenliness. Put a District Nursing Service into a community like that of Easton and twenty years from now when we have our next war practically every boy and girl for that matter in the town, unless he has some incurable inherited disease which is unlikely, will be fit for the draft. That is, we'll make a race of boys and girls as fit as Germany's are and we are a long way from doing that now. And we'll do it by thoroughly democratic procedure.

Outline helps in inferring a analysis

NOTES ON THE DISTRICT NURSE

The story of the health movement in our State, the State of Connecticut, is a typical example of the way democracy works. The people do do it themselves, but you must give them time. Here in our Town, that is our township, we are very proud of the fact that not one of our draftees has been rejected for any of the reasons which brings rejection, and that is no accident. That is the Town carrying out its slow conviction that a healthy boy and girl is about as good a thing as there is and there are ways to make them, but it took them a long time to do it.

Our State set up a health department as early as 1878. It function^{ed} in a way, a limping way, for it was forty years after it was started the shock of the War and the shame of having its sons turned back because of flat feet, poor teeth, under-nourishment, and all the other causes, set them to examining themselves and what did they find. That they had the greatest death rate of any State in the Union and that, when the country was invaded by the frightful epidemic of influenza in 1918, that Connecticut had close to 300,000 cases with over 6000 deaths and this forty-year old health department had no equipment with which to deal with such a case. It not only let old people die, but babies and children die in appalling numbers, and here with an epidemic on its hands it had no organization and equipment with which to handle it.

So we got busy in our State and set up a State Board of Health and were able at the end of two years to have ourselves committed to really scientific, well equipped work on every recognized type of preventative care as well as of the care when something got ahead of you. That has gone on from year to year for twenty years now until instead of having, as in 1917, one of the largest numbers of draftees

turned back, the greatest numbers of deaths from a nationwide epidemic of influenza, we boast that in our Town, which is an example of what has happened in many, if not all the towns in the State, we haven't a single rejection, and the first snuffle puts the child and every intelligent grown-up into bed. That is education! In a democracy is slow, but it does it.

I am inclined to think from practical experience with her work, the District Nurse is the king-pin in the locality. She doesn't come to her job on her own, by any means. One of the first things the State did was to organize a Statewide district nursing service and where it could persuade a community to take on its own individual nurse it did it. Think of us in our town in 1918! How could we afford it. We were only a little over a thousand people, scattered over a territory of square miles. We were farmers in the main or had been. There was a day when ~~we~~^{there} were prosperous little factories along our streams, but that had all gone and a new type of earning your living had not yet been found for Americans to any great extent. It was the incoming of what were called with all inclusive "Dagoes" that began to restore the town, but they brought its problems. It is not only health that but how could the town afford a district nurse. She costs at the lowest from \$2500 a year. The State could not pay that for all these towns, but gradually it grew on the State as it saw what others were doing and had exertations from the heads of the capitol, and chiefly because one or two influential men in the town read Lillian Wald's story of district nursing in New York City. That's the kind of thing we want and somehow we must manage it. The first record we find of how they managed it is in the report of 1832. We had set up house. We had found a way to raise the \$2500. This

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little town with no rich people in it had committed itself to raising something over \$1300 a year. Now by this time the State, so convinced it had been that the future of which it wanted--the healthiest state in the Union--depended on the intelligence and

of these little communities to take care of themselves,

it arranged for an appropriation under certain conditions, if the town would pledge its \$2500 to \$3000 it would make an appropriation. Well, this report for 1832 shows that we did raise something over \$1300. It had held up its citizens for membership in an organization to support a district nurse, had raised \$277 that way. One of the sources which interested me very much, since I was a beneficiary and for the first time was discovering what a district nurse could do for professional people of modest income, was that they let you for a modest sum become a paying patient and that first year paying patients turned in \$214.60 to the budget. It has been going on that scheme ever since. I am inclined to think that the one appropriation the Town would refuse to sacrifice is that of the District Nurse. Ever in the way of democracy an institution once set up which is fundamentally sound takes on things. This District Nurse, what does she do? Her first business is with the school. To let influenza get started would be equivalent to losing her job. It is her business to find where the child gets the germ and if you think this is an easy job try it. Her work is among families of ten to twelve nationalities with their own ideas of treating ills and taking care of the sick. She knows the condition of the teeth of every child and they are treated once a month. She knows whether they are getting proper nourishment and one of her important and interesting jobs is supervising the school lunches, and there is a whole saga of getting a whole palatable lunch for three cents and she does it and it is

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palatable for I have tried it; some of them I would have been glad to drop into the school to get. While on this, health has become familiar enough to everybody, accepted by all for the general public. This nurse of ours knows, what interests me most since I belong to the class, every old person in the community and her business is to set up their faith so that they will get something out of life. If you think that is easy, try it yourself.

She doesn't depend on her own Bureau alone for this work, for one of the useful adjuncts which the District Nurse has brought into existence is that of the social service worker.