

or one of the few trained nurses, or a willing but inexperienced Red Cross aid—which was thoroughly appreciated by the patients. So often one heard, "I know you are doing the best you can, nurse." This, perhaps, for a hastily improvised pad to soften the pillow under a discharging ear. Or, "Bring it when you have time, nurse."

Time was just what we never had, no matter how fast we worked. There was always more than we could do, still undone. It was hard to keep a man waiting to have his face and hands washed while you gave milk or orange juice to those needing nourishment. Anyone who has ever nursed, knows how a patient is refreshed by bathing—is even more than refreshed, is almost made over by a bath and fresh linen. If this is true in a clean hospital ward, it is doubly so of a patient in a dirty Lodging House. We soon learned there is just as much a question of morale with men in a ward, as there is with men of an army, and the morale is very poor when the patients are dirty, and the beds need freshening. But in most cases the men in our ward were really wonderful. No matter what their suffering and discomfort, I never heard an oath. They felt we were doing our best; it was not our fault that hardships existed.

Among the earliest patients were some Chinese taken off a ship, before they had even set foot in America, straight to the Lodging House. Poor fellows, when they saw the white-masked doctors and nurses, they thought they had fallen among brigands. They refused to take off their clothes for fear of being robbed of them, refused food for fear of poison, and would not allow the doctors to come near. The interpreter, failing to make them understand, and fearing the disease, departed, leaving the Americans to do their best in a most trying situation. Out of the twenty-five patients, seventeen died, a heavy mortality, which shows that in most cases medicine and suitable nourishment help the patients.

Chinese, Negroes, Poles, Portuguese, Greeks, Finns—many were the races represented in that hastily organized hospital, and more than a little good was done by a nurse's ability to speak the patient's language. One Brazilian boy eagerly welcomed all attempts to speak to him in Spanish and Italian, translating those languages more easily than English into his native Portuguese. He was so grateful for everything done for him, courteously begging the nurses to sit down because they must feel so tired from being always on their feet, craving cleanliness and so happy when freshened by bathing, that he speedily became a great favorite. He was moved to Bellevue in the hope that an operation might save his life. Notwithstanding the comfortable bed on an airy balcony, soft pillows, light warm blankets, Francesco missed the love given him in



Photo by Hine

the dingy Lodging House and longed to be back there. Death came to him. But many were sent home to their families on the road to health, and it was very pleasant for the nurses to be urged to come and see the patient in his house, and, as in the case of a splendid looking Pole, to be asked "to meet the wife and kid, the best boy in the block, and receive their thanks."

After two weeks of service, it was decided to close the Lodging House and send the remaining patients to wards which had been opened to influenza in other hospitals. They were transferred to their new quarters by the Volunteer Ambulance Corps, girls quietly effective and picturesque, doing in their twentieth century way what the men of the fourteenth century did. But I cannot help feeling that in the old building on the river, something more than a fight against influenza had taken place. Another disease was being fought, a disease from which the nurses were suffering as well as the patients, the disease, the plague, of class feeling. Amid the inconveniences and discomforts of the Lodging House hospital, the kind of democracy toward which we are all working showed a sign of health. I feel that we shall have attained it when we are all enrolled in a brotherhood of misericordia.

The New White Folks

By Homer W. Borst

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IT fell out that there were just ninety old colored people under the care of our Colored Auxiliary. The interest in this pathetic group came to a head in a certain meeting of the board.

"What is their story?" I asked. "Why are they all alone?"

"They are alone because slavery destroyed their home ties," was one answer.

"Or because it and their subsequent life failed to develop them," I suggested.

"They are rank individualists," some one else contributed. "They won't consent to leave their little cabins for the homes of their children. I know, because my old mother is that way."

"Their children have gone North," guessed a third, "and don't write because they don't know how." Some children do not write who do know how, I thought.

"They have outlived their children," another decided.

When the meeting was over I spoke to the secretary.

"Suppose you see what you can find out," I said.

They were old people, everybody knew, but just how old? There seemed only one way to estimate that, namely, on the basis of their age when freedom came. Were you full grown? Were you big enough to work in the fields? Those were the questions. One, an aged woman, could remember when the stars fell! This is the way of age estimates grouped: between forty and fifty (cripples), 3; between fifty and sixty, 11; between sixty and seventy, 19; between seventy and eighty, 35; between eighty and ninety, 14; above ninety, 8.

There were more women than men: widows, 57; single women, 1; widowers, 29; single men, 3. The single woman helped a married sister bring up two boys, who have now disappeared. The men who claim never to have married have been for years blind or paralyzed.

Not one of these old people seems to have grown old naturally. It is a question of disease as well as of years.

"I was strong up to that day on the dock," said one former longshoreman. "I could lift with the best of them, until something snapped."

"Warn't no prettier ironer than me," boasted an old laundress. "But my eyes gave out."

Twenty-one are partially paralyzed, and four completely so. Fifteen can scarcely see, and seven not at all. "Rheumatism" flourishes. Five of the oldest women have open sores, two have tumors, four complain of dropsy, and four of heart trouble. These are all very informal diagnoses, we will admit. If you knew just how hard it is to get a definite statement on these points, from the medical service available, you would perhaps forgive us. But in spite of all the trouble fifty-seven out of ninety have passed the seventy mark.

Have they outlived their children? Forty-three say that they have children living. The three single men and one single woman may be neglected. Forty-seven say that all of their children have died. Seventeen actually live with their children, one with a married son, thirteen with married daughters, and three with unmarried children. For the rest, eleven live with other relatives, thirteen with friends, thirteen at the colored old folks' home, and thirty-six in little cottages by themselves. The daughters have given homes oftener than the sons. Only five of the old people have refused to live with their children. Of course, they blame the "in-laws."

Seventy-two of these ninety old colored people were once slaves. Eighty-five were the children of slaves. In these respects this group of old colored folks represents a final passing for America. The question of to what extent there will be in succeeding generations other groups of aged colored men and women, bereft of children, or at least uncared for by them, broken, ignorant and diseased, is, on the contrary, one which still remains to be settled.

There are two fortifications against dependent old age, generally speaking, namely, children and property. Only seventeen of these old people live with children. What of property? Perhaps it seems odd to speak of property in this connection. Eleven of the old people were of the opinion, however, that they were property owners. They lived securely, as they professed to think, in their own little cabins, surrounded by the characteristic plots of cultivated sand. None, however, could, or at least would, produce a scrap of legal evidence.

"I can't be troubled to show you that deed, child," was one old woman's plea. "I just can't move outen this chair, and I can't have anybody rummagin' through my things."

Ancient Mary's husband died some years ago and left her living in a little home. A friend has kept up the taxes, not

disinterestedly, it is thought. A bent old gardener in the outskirts is said to have given away, bit by bit, most of his formerly quite respectable holding. Altogether the property aspect is not very significant, except that we are speaking of the poorest people.

Children and property the next generation may have, "white folks" they will not have. As an institution, "white folks" are likely to pass with the passing of the old-time Negro, but "white folks" these old people have indeed had. The bonds that lie between them and the families that once owned them, or for whom they served faithfully during the years that followed the war, are spun of the past. It has been their "white folks" who have translated something of the meaning of permanence of human relationships into their pathetic lives, who have helped them out of pocket and sponsored them to the city authorities. Indeed the insistence of "white folks" has been the source of many petty levies upon the public treasury, the indulgence of a private affection out of a public fund.

If we were to comment upon the explanations that were made at the meeting of the Colored Auxiliary as to why these old people are as they are, we should say that all of the answers given were in a measure true. Many have fallen heir to the broken relationships that resulted both in slavery and in its abolition. A few of them have stubbornly refused to leave their little cottages for the homes of their children. The children of many have wandered away and the children of many have died.

But the most significant comment that is to be made regarding these old colored men and women, and what they represent, has not been made. More by far than the wrecks of slavery they signify the results of the transplanting of a race from the barbaric tropics to the temperate zone of the white man's civilization. These human relics are the symbols of that contact. We will not trouble ourselves that slavery destroyed the African family. We are not particularly impressed with the utility of the African family. Let us take the same attitude toward African property and the African manner of making a living. Let us discuss what America has succeeded in putting into the life of the Negro as respects monogamy, the state of the family, the assimilation of property, the preservation of health and the appreciation and advancement of civilization, all after the manner of America. These wrecks are significant. They will continue from generation to generation regardless of the passing of slavery just in proportion as white civilization passes by the Negro.

It was the pride of the old "white folks" that they understood the old-time Negro. It is the shame of America that she does not understand the modern Negro, the more so that the new Negro does not understand himself. What is needed is a new generation of "white folks" who will try to understand him and who will try to help him to understand himself, and finally, who will help him to dedicate himself as definitely to the welfare of both races as he was once dedicated to the servitude of one.

The Negro of America has advanced over his African brother in some respects, and is inferior to his African brother in others, because of three great factors. First, contact with the white man's civilization, with the accompanying divorce from his own culture; second, his transplanting to the temperate climate; third, infusion of the white man's blood. It is the business of the new white folks to know the facts of this great experiment, to emphasize the elements that should be emphasized and minimize the ones which should be abolished. This is more of the essence of public affairs than is the most common-sense administration of public relief.