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Talks by Tiberius.

THE DISMAL DWELLING.

In my last article I made the statement that poverty was a social evil and called for a social or state cure. Destitution being largely an individual matter, called for individual relief. There are, however, exceptions in both cases. There are also certain facts in connection with these matters in relation to the state, which ought to be mentioned. One of these facts forms the subject of this "Talk."

The fact is: The "State" or "Government" of "Ye Ancient Colony," but latest Dominion, makes an attempt every year to cope with the problems of poverty and destitution along three well defined lines: (a) The so-called "Poor Asylum;" (b) The arrangements through the Department of Charities; (c) Old Age Pensions. That there is some degree of efficiency in the methods of carrying on the work of charity, all will admit. Each line of activity is a demand upon the best brains and energy of our statesmen. The last named, viz., "Old Age Pensions," being a splendid example of the modern tendency to recognize the rights of labour. More of this later.

The second one named, commonly called "Poor Relief," is hoary with age and much abused in its dotage. The first one, the "Poor House," demands our immediate attention, and will get it.

The Poor Asylum; the refuge of hundreds of poor and destitute; male and female; sane and insane. At least they are sane when they go there, just how long they remain sane, is best known to those concerned. The conditions as I know them would drive me insane very soon if I were compelled to make it my home.

THE POOR ASYLUM—OUTSIDE.

The Poor Asylum—what is it? or

rather, what does it look like to a casual observer? Let me clear the deck, however. I know the people who are endeavouring to "Run the Show." I know the people, at least many of them, who are, by reason of very unfortunate and unavoidable circumstances, compelled to live there. I also know what is being done by those "Ladies Bountiful" who go occasionally to the Poor Asylum with food and clothing and music and so on. God bless you men and women who go there to try to relieve the sombreness and sadness of that poor, miserable, Asylum for the Poor. When you so far conquer your finer feelings as to be able to go there and spend several hours with those Poor, Poor, People, bearing with the bad sights and worse smells, I say:—God bless you; it is divine love that impels you. I also want it to be clearly understood and emphatically stated: I do not blame the Superintendent or his assistants for the conditions of things which prevail there. They are to be pitied, for they have ideas and plans which are excellent, but which they cannot carry out owing to causes over which they have no control.

The following, taken from the "Telegram," indicates the kindness of some people on the one hand; the interest of the Superintendent on the other:

NOTE OF THANKS.—The Superintendent of the Poor Asylum desires to thank those kind ladies who sent candles for the inmates.

Let us have a look at that building from the outside, and then let us ask ourselves if we would like to live there. We have no right to be a party to any one living where we ourselves would not like to live. We should do unto others, as we would, that they

should do to us. If at the close of our inspection we would like to live there, then there is nothing left to be said.

VIEW FROM THE HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY.

Once a year, in the speech of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, or perhaps I should say—the Minister of Finance and Customs; time and space are given to the consideration of the Poor Asylum. The whole of the time and space is occupied by considerations of finance, and amidst a jumble of figures, so far as the Minister is concerned, and a yawning desire to get it over, on the part of most of the members there, the following statements, or something like them, is made.

E. POOR ASYLUM—CONCLUDED. Contingencies.

Estimate 1914-1915.
Sundries, including telephone \$110 00
Maintenance.

Rations 9 000 00
Clothing and bedding . . . 1 850 00
Sundries; utensils, cleaning, etc., 1 700 00
Fuel and light 2 000 00

Total for Poor Asylum . . 18 510 00

I do not know who does the "adding up," for the Legislative House. I have given the figures as they occur in the Journal of the "House" proceedings. Do not add them up, dear reader, the figures will not bear close inspection. The total vote as given is \$18,510.00; according to the details given, it is \$14,660.00. The difference does not matter much now. For the sake of putting the best side out, let us take the larger figure; we will even assume a bigger thing; let us say that \$20,000.00 were voted and spent on that institution. \$20,000.00 to house, warm, furnish light, clothing, food, etc., and so on, for the staff, consisting of a Superintendent; assistants; (three men) Lady Superintendent;

assistants; (three women) Cooks and maids; (about six persons) inmates; Hospital cases; etc., and so on; rats; mice, etc., and so on, and so on, and so on \$20,000.00. Why the Superintendent should appropriate \$4,000.00 of that at least, and their assistants another \$8,000. The only point I want to make now is that the vote passes the Assembly and equally there is no question, as to how the balance of \$8,000.00? is spent, or how the "inmates" are fed.

A few years ago a spirit of benevolence passed over the Members of the House of Assembly, or at least so it seemed, and a vote was made for the erection of a new Poor Asylum. I admit that for several election campaigns the prospective members had promised, "if elected," to represent the people in St. John's West. It was the eye sore, Newfoundland's disgrace, would be removed. It caught the vote, true, for the people of St. John's West want and wanted it to be removed. I also admit that the "Vote" in the house had something to do with that election promise. Let us give "Honour to whom honour is due," however, the vote was made, and a show of sincere interest in the project was made. For proof of my statement, read the touching soul stirring address made by my learned and honourable friend on that occasion, as recorded in the Acts of the Politicians, commonly called "Hansard." That was years ago. The Poor Asylum still stands plus the accumulated filth and wreckage of the intervening years; But where is the vote? It was copied from one budget to another for a few years and then—?

About three years ago I asked a prominent M. H. A. of that day what had become of that vote. He replied that it had gone "with the dropped balances." What that really means I did not divine; I know that it has dropped somewhere. Puzzle; find it. I do not think that the manifesto of

either party in connection with the last election made any reference to the Poor Asylum. The Delity of Charity bows His head in shame; the angels keep solemn silence; the people don't know or won't care; the politicians are too busy playing the game of politics; the Poor, Poor, Poor, in the Poor Asylum for the Poor, are almost entirely forgotten, except by those dear kind souls already referred to:—the Ladies and Gentlemen Bountiful. The doleful dirge within the dingy walls of that drab dungeon drags out its deadly notes. The Poor Asylum is in the West End of St. John's. The House of Assembly is in the East End of the city. There seems to be a great gulf between. Only a loud and insistent demand note from the people can bridge the gulf. Come on, everybody; Yell out, Shout out, in the holy name of Kind Charity.

VIEW FROM THE NORTH.

Pass up Hamilton Street; past Patrick Street; past the Foundry, the Methodist Orphanage is on your front left; left turn; Halt: Behold! As you face the South, you have the Foundry on your left; a factory also on your left; the Methodist Orphanage to your right. Behind you houses and stables. About sixty feet in front of you, stands the "Pile." A flat roofed, low set, drab, dirty coloured, smoky, building. Chimney; low, large, and flat, emitting smoke; eternal smoke; It is June. Beautiful lovely June. The bride's choice of months. The green grass, very green. In the Park in front of you the gardener has succeeded in making two blades of grass grow where one previously grew. A streamlet, clear and bright on the hill, flows by the park. The Bandstand and Park seats newly painted and looking spick and span. The flower beds—things of joy—giving forth beauty and fragrance abundant. But there is the pile. Enwrapped in gloom, the smoke not having courage to rise above the hills, settles down

upon the valley where the Poor Asylum is. If the wind is East or North or South, other smokes add to the local smoke, and viewed from Hamilton Street in June, it looks as if; "Down there it must be always foggy and smoky and dirty. Open the windows please, let a bit of fresh air in; no don't please, the smoke will come in. Pity the Poor.

It looks like that in June; what does it look like in November and December?

VIEW FROM THE SOUTH.

Now take the car for city West. Got off at Victoria Park. You may not know it as a Park, but the Conductor will tell you where it is. Viewed from the South; i.e., Water Street, the Park does not look so "parkish," (that is my own word) as from other points. Take your stand at the West end of the Park on Water Street West. Look North. You say that you cannot see the Poor Asylum; why? because of that ugly block of buildings just in front of you. At one time, in the old days of open bars and much booze, ales and other inebriating concoctions were manufactured there. Since Prohibition, the buildings, never well looking, now appear as a deserted ramshackle and unsightly thing. They successfully shut off the view so that you cannot see the Poor Asylum. But even that is no relief, for you know that it is there, and psychologically you know that it is all one piece. The brewery; the dilapidation, the ugly sight, and nauseous smell, the polluted stream, and again the poor people. Pity the Poor. Is there not some connection between;—beer, whiskey, dirt, smoke, disease, dilapidation, destitution and death? The grey sombre pile stands there but cannot be seen for a disused brewery. An ancient sore on a modern body. Clean it up. Pity the Poor.

VIEW FROM THE EAST.

Stand in Victoria Park. Note the little gate leading from the "grounds"

to the Park, made specially for the inmates, one ray of sunshine. There is a bench there on which are sitting some poor men from the Poor House. The bench has no back to it. Some of the men come into the Park; what a luxury if the weather permits them to stay out in the air. But there is the building. A nearer view but aggravates the scene and makes confusion worse confounded; filth worse filthier. Why not move those ashes? Why not clean up the yard? Why that rickety fence? Why that blot on our fair earth. In contrast with the grass at your feet, the flowers on your left, the Bandstand on your right; the factory behind; the slum shacks on the street below, the Poor House is poor; and you have the grades by which men and women sink, slunk into the smoke and the dirt; and;—

PITY THE POOR.

VIEW FROM THE WEST.

Just the same. Plus, the open gate and drive. I must close, and give the inside view some other time, perhaps in my next, if I am permitted to write my next. That gateway; that drive; that door way into the House; that smell coming from the house; that sight; reminds me of what Dante must have seen in his vision when he saw the place over the doorway of which were the words: "Abandon Hope, all ye who enter here." A prison of the Soul.

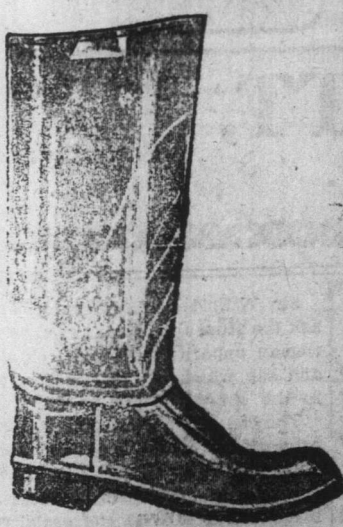
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