

HOW AGED POOR ARE HOUSED

In Denmark and Russia—A Maximum of Comfort and a Minimum of Cost. Edith Sellers in the Nineteenth Century.

The model old-age home for all Denmark is the new home in Copenhagen, which was built and organized under the direction of Herr Jacobs, chief of the poor department. The new home is a fine building, standing in a large, beautiful garden, and with another garden lying just beyond. All the rooms are bright and cheerful-looking, well warmed in winter, and well supplied with fresh air in summer; they are prettily furnished, too, although as simply and inexpensively as possible. In all the Danish old-age homes the food is excellent; but in the Copenhagen home it is better even than elsewhere, as the cooking of it is watched over by an expert, the former chef of a great restaurant, who takes immense pride in the dainty dishes he serves up for the city's old pensioners. Large towns must, of course, have large old-age homes, and the home in Copenhagen is certainly perfect in its way. Still in Denmark it is not the large homes, but the small ones, those in country districts, that are the most attractive of all. There is one, for instance, at Fredensborg that is quite charming. This home is the joint property of three villages. Now that they are compelled to provide a home for the respectable poor apart from the ordinary paupers, neighboring communal authorities often enter into some such partnership as this. There are communes, however, that prefer keeping the entire control of their own institutions in their own hands. The cost of the homes is divided between the state and the commune, or the municipality, as the case may be, one-half of it being defrayed out of the yield of the beer tax and the other half out of the local rates. The average cost per head in the Danish homes is only a shilling a day. In the most comfortable of all the London workhouses it is one shilling and elevenpence.

Between the old-age homes in Denmark and those in Russia there are fundamental differences, of course; for whereas in one country these institutions are but the complement to a singularly perfect poor-relief system, in the other they practically take the place of any poor-relief system at all. In Russia they are for the most part private institutions, the property either of the crown or of individuals; the money wherewith they were built was a free gift. St. Petersburg prides itself on its nice appreciation of social distinctions, and holds that, in deciding how even the destitute are to be provided for, respect must be paid not only to merit but to birth. This being the case, it is but natural that the most attractive of its old-age homes should be reserved exclusively for those who have seen better days. This is the Widow's house, as it is called, in spite of the fact that among the six hundred old ladies whose home it is there are more spinsters than widows. The Old Women's house, which stands quite near the Widow's house, is a modern institution. Here some 400 old women find a refuge in their old age—a very pleasant refuge too. The inmates of this home, unlike their near neighbors, have not come down in the world. On the contrary, they are probably seeing better days now than they ever saw in their lives before; for they all belong to the working classes, the servant-class for the most part, and not a few of them were born serfs. The charge

for a woman who has a private room is 300 roubles a year (is. 9d. a day); for one who has half a room, is 7d. a day; and for those who sleep in the dormitories, 10d. By far the largest of the St. Petersburg old-age homes, and in some respects the most interesting, is the Gorodskaja Bogodielna or municipal house, which Catherine the Second built at her own expense and presented to the city. It is curious to note how much more is done in Russia for women in the way of providing them with homes than for men; in this municipal house, for instance, there are 3,000 women and only 800 men. Men and women alike belong for the most part to the poorest section of the community, the unskilled labor section.

It is not in St. Petersburg, however, but in Moscow, that the best of the Russian old-age homes are to be found. Two of the homes there, the Heier and the Boew, are perfect models of what such places should be. Both these institutions belong to the city; they were built and endowed by private citizens, and they handed over to the keeping of the municipality. The Heier home is a beautiful building, and in a style singularly appropriate to its purpose; every thing about it is as simple and plain as possible, yet every room is so prettily arranged that it is a pleasure to see it. Although the full cost there is only 180 roubles a year per head (is. a day), the inmates are well fed and well clothed; they are well cared for, too, and life is made as pleasant for them as possible. The Boew institution is much larger than the Heier, and on that account less homelike; but in all other respects it is just as comfortable, as well organized and managed. It has 300 inmates, 180 old women and 120 roubles a year each—9d. a day. There is not a single old-age home in Russia where the cost per head is so high as that in the London workhouse. Thus not only Denmark, but Russia, turns to better account the money she spends on her aged poor than England.

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THE UNDER-BUTLER AS MILLIONAIRE.

Freaks of Some Modern Croesuses.

While to some men to be a millionaire is the most desirable thing on earth, there is, on the evidence of Dr. Barr, the great American mind doctor, at least one man who prefers the most sordid and wretched of lives to all the luxuries which his millions could purchase for him.

A few years ago this Transatlantic Croesus—who is described as handsome and cultured, as well as surpassing rich—vanished from the view of the world in which he had been a conspicuous object and made his home among the "hanins," the gravediggers and pariahs of Japan—men who are little, if at all, higher in the scale of creation than animals.

Here, surrounded by the low companions who batten on his wealth, he indulges in the most remarkable eccentricities. He has had every square inch of his body tattooed with various kinds of grotesque and barbaric designs, which he exhibits with pride to any one whom he can induce to look at them. But the most astonishing of his freaks is to enlist a squad of Japanese boys, all purchased from their parents, and make them fight against an equal number of trained monkeys dressed as Chinese soldiers. He perfectly revels in these contests, and, in Dr. Barr's words, "offers rewards to the boys to urge them to further atrocities."

It is a relief to turn from such debasement to the harmless eccentricities of M. Paul Colasson, a French millionaire, who died recently. Twenty eight years ago M. Colasson's favorite nephew, a boy of thirteen, was burned to death at a fancy-dress ball, and from the day of the tragedy the millionaire shut himself up in one of the rooms of his palatial mansion, exchanging it only a few months ago for the family vault on the Montmartre. During all these years he would never allow a single soul to enter his palace with the exception of a devoted old servant, who, twice a week, took him a supply of eggs and bread—the only food the disconsolate old man would touch.

The eccentricity of the late Prince Slavianski, one of the richest of the Czar's subjects, took an amiable if novel form. Although he had more palaces than he had fingers on his

hands and was lord of over a million acres, the eccentric Prince elected to live in a couple of rooms in a squalid corner of St. Petersburg and to dress as shabbily as any beggar.

It was his amusement when he walked through the streets of St. Petersburg to watch the sympathy or aversion his appearance excited; and when, as frequently happened, any charitable stranger, moved by the spectacle of such poverty and misery, would slip a coin into his hand, the Prince invariably shadowed his benefactor until he discovered where he lived, and would then send or leave at his house a large sum of money, a thousandfold more than he had received.

Equally benevolent was the oddity of the late Robert Arthington, who in personal appearance, manner, and habits was known as the most eccentric man in Yorkshire. Although so penurious as to earn the title of miser, Mr. Arthington was prodigality itself to all forms of foreign missionary work, and while denying himself a fire in the winter he could write a cheque for £10,000 to establish a mission among the Awemba tribes in Central Africa.

Once he was invited to take the chair at a home missionary meeting in Leeds in the hope of a princely subscription. Mr. Arthington took the chair, made an eloquent appeal, and subscribed—a shilling.

Off Brightlingsea for many years has been moored a magnificent steam yacht, the floating palace of a well-known millionaire, who is reputed to have an income of £175,000 a year. The yacht has a crew of twenty-one men and is always going to go to sea, but never moves. Every day she is surrounded by a flotilla of small boats, the occupants of which wait patiently for hours in the hope that the mysterious owner of the yacht will show himself to them; and sooner or later he appears at the door of his cabin, beckons to one after another of the expectant crowd, and after chatting with them sends them away—as an old sailor told the writer—"with their pockets full of gold."

This scene has been enacted every day for no one knows how many years, the greedy

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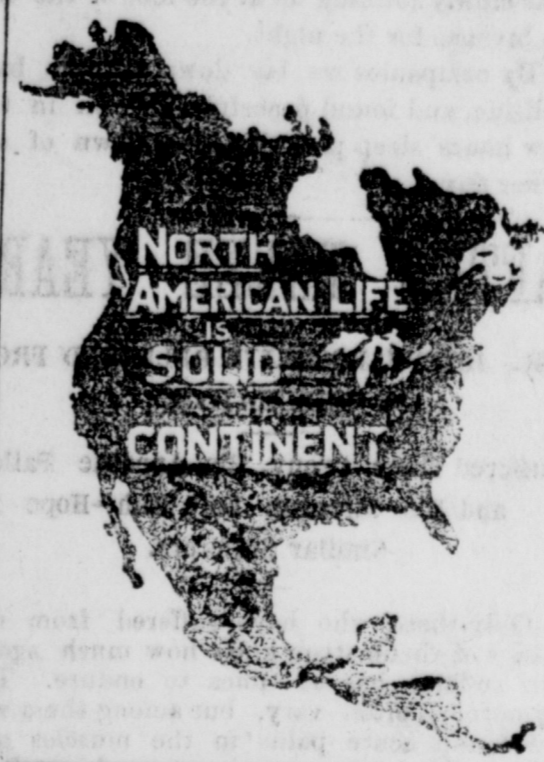
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