A Day in the Life, July 1907

In July 1907, a New York Times reporter followed a Henry Street nurse on her rounds. Notice how the nurse focuses on the “whole” person—their home, work, and family life—not just their sickness. It was an innovative approach.

The Morning

■ The nurse climbs over several boats to reach a pneumonia patient who lives on a canal boat.

■ Goes to her next visit. She bathes a newborn baby and its mother, “a poor creature left utterly destitute by her husband’s recent death.”

■ Visits an elderly man with leg problems, whose “chief hankering seemed to be for a little intelligent gossip.”

■ Next, sees a “charming old Irish-woman, almost crippled but not a case for a hospital.” With the nurse’s help, the woman is able to manage and maintain a home for herself and her only son.

■ Visits a family of Italian immigrants. Although a dying man and his wife cannot “bear to be separated during his last few weeks,” the wife continues to sew garments so she doesn’t lose her job. The nurse makes the man comfortable.

The Afternoon

■ The nurse returns to check in on her pneumonia patient.

■ Heads off to see a little girl recuperating from an illness. On the way, buys flowers to cheer her “otherwise dreary home.” Once there, she takes time to explain a change in medicine to the girl’s mother.

■ Returns to see the newborn baby and its mother.

■ Goes back to visit the pneumonia patient. Telephones to request a night nurse to help him through his crisis.

■ On the way home, the nurse has “the happy inspiration” of hiring someone to do the sewing for the dying Italian man’s wife. That way, “she might spend all her time with her dying husband and yet not lose her place and be without a livelihood when she found herself alone.”