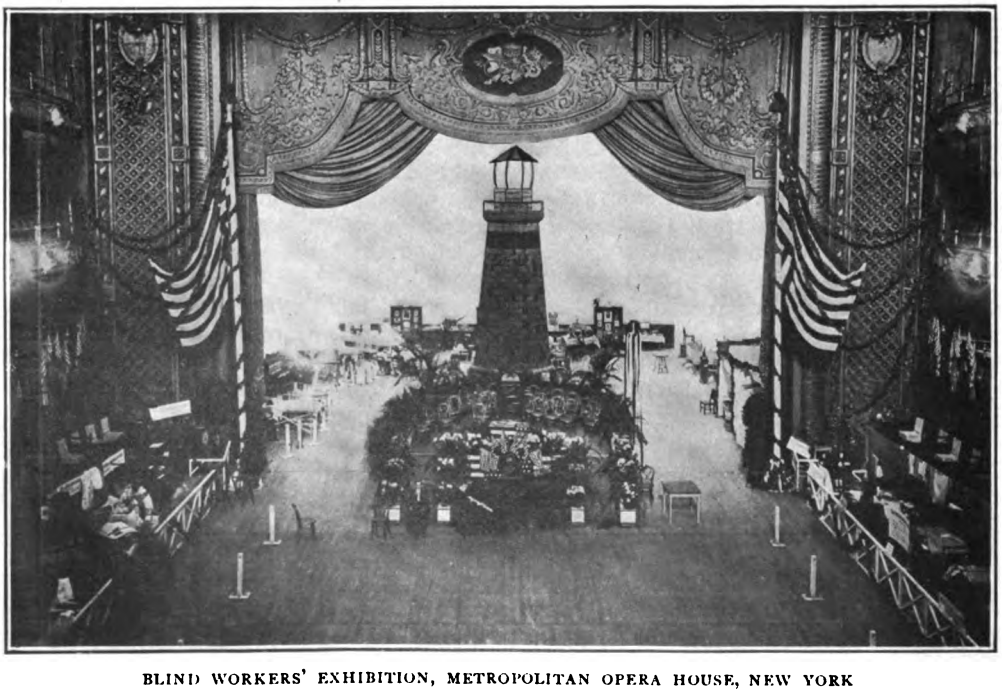
BLIND WORKERS' EXHIBITION

Under the Auspices of the New York Association for the Blind

FROM April 26th to 29th, inclusive, the New York Association for the Blind conducted an exhibition of work for and by the blind in the Metropolitan Opera House of New York City. Other allied organizations in New York and neighboring states coöperated in making the exhibition most successful. This affair was unique and by far the best of its kind the writer has ever seen, both on account of the quality and variety of the display and also on account of the audiences which were brought together at it. President Taft and Governor Dix were both present on the opening night.

"What's the good of such an exhibition?" one visitor asked. He answered his own question before leaving the building when he said: "I've always pitied the blind. I knew that they could be taught to read and write, but I never supposed that they could do anything which would be of real value. This last hour I've seen them doing so many practical things that I shall never again think that blindness is necessarily a hopeless condition."

That man briefly summarized the purpose of the exhibition. For over a century it has been known to *a few* that the blind can be of use in the community; but to the overwhelming majority a person without sight is either an object of pity or a freak, not a member of the community who is capable of doing his share of the world's work.



BLIND WORKERS' EXHIBITION, METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE, NEW YORK

Looking toward the stage

BLIND WORKERS' EXHIBITION, METROPOLITAN OPERA HOUSE, NEW YORK
Looking toward the boxes

A most important part of the activities of all organizations devoted to the welfare of the blind is to arouse the public to a realization of their capabilities. The Blind Workers' Exhibition did much to stimulate this very interest. The many columns of widely circulated newspaper stories in themselves justified the hard work this extensive publicity campaign entailed upon the initiators of the project and upon their friends and coöperators.

Upon entering the main auditorium the first attraction was the lighthouse. The realism of this symbol of the Association's activities was heightened by the splendid light radiating from the lantern at the top of the tower, the only illumination in that part of the building. Directly in front of the lighthouse, as our illustration shows, was the speakers' platform, in the center of which stood the massive chair specially made by a blind carpenter for President Taft, who graciously opened the exhibition.

Those who have seen the Opera House only in its customary garb will find it difficult to realize what an extensive space was made available when a temporary floor was carried over from the rear of the orchestra seats to the rear of the stage, completely covering the permanent stage as well as the seats in the auditorium. Around the outer edge of this ample oval platform blind men and women from several states worked at upwards of forty varied occupations. All the customary trades were shown, and need not be enumerated here. Booths which attracted special attention were those in which blind women were cooking and a blind man was carrying on a barber's shop. We might mention that the only customers patronizing the barber's chair were other blind men. At the matinée and evening performances the programs, in addition to addresses by prominent speakers, included music, gymnastic feats, athletic sports, and æsthetic dancing. The work of the blind pupils from the New York City public schools and from the Pennsylvania Institution at Overbrook aroused great interest, the audiences, both afternoon and evening, applauding in such a way that it was clear many new friends were being won for the cause.

The remainder of the building, no less extensive than the auditorium, lent itself admirably to exhibition purposes. Around the corridor, outside the second tier of boxes, were hung seventy-eight charts, each eight feet by four feet, prepared by the New York Association. These gave a general survey of all activities in behalf of the blind conducted in this and other countries. It is to be regretted that preparations for this display were so hurried that the illustrations on these charts were not

fully labeled, and the spectator was thus unable to determine the locality in which the various activities depicted were being conducted. All phases of work for the blind —educational, industrial, eleemosynary, and preventive—were graphically shown. We reproduce one of the most effective of these charts, which shows with its six telling photographs "how a normal blind housewife spends her days." An important group of this series of charts was prepared under the direction of the Committee on Prevention of Blindness of the New York Association.

In the large reception and refreshment rooms the American Association for the Conservation of Vision displayed for the first time its exhibit; and it is due that organization to state that its charts, with their sepia-tinted photographs and soft, brown-toned lettering, were extremely artistic and effective.

Another large room was set aside for daily conferences, and interesting programs, with speakers from several states, were arranged. Space will not admit of a fuller account, especially as the forthcoming report of the New York Association will give complete details. We close with the address made by President Taft in opening the exhibition, who said in part:

ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT TAFT

I AM glad to be present tonight and lend my voice in aid of and in praise of the work which has been done for the last four years under the auspices of the New York Association for the Blind. (Applause.) The loss of that sense which enables us to see . . . to rejoice in the rising sun and marvel in the beauty of the setting sun, to know day from night, to look into the universe of countless worlds, is a deprivation, the very thought of which melts our hearts and brings tears to our eyes for those thus afflicted. Without thought, we class them all among the helpless and necessary objects of charity. We segregate them from the world at large, we put them in expensive asylums, we furnish them with food and clothing, and then, with a sigh, we consign them to a life of hibernation, of deadening monotony, of helpless and aimless existence.

I understand the object of this association to be to introduce light into the lives of the blind by work, to give them happiness by manual and intellectual activity, to maintain their independence and self-respect by enabling them to contribute to their own support, and to enable them to forget their affliction by association, and by sharing their thoughts and interests with those who see.

The helpless condition of the blind led to an effort to assist and educate them as early as the seventeenth century in Italy, but it was not until 1785, in the time of Louis XVI, that the first intelligent steps were taken towards their relief. In the next decade an effort was made in England in this direction; in the early part of the nineteenth century institutions were founded in Massachusetts, New York, and Pennsylvania for the aid of the sightless. . . .

This association has directed its attention, in the first place, to the prevention of blindness. The statistics seem to show that from twenty-five per cent to fifty per cent of the present blindness is preventable; that infantile ophthalmia, which ensues on the birth of the child, may be completely cured by the administration of a very simple remedy. The successful efforts of this association to improve the midwifery and to provide this specific remedy at the time of the birth of children is most highly to be commended. Then the kindergarten for the blind should be encouraged. This coöperates with the association, rescues the blind children under school age from imbecile and idiot asylums, and gives them opportunity to show that their minds are not defective, and thus saves a number who would otherwise be helplessly deficient to become fully developed by the influences of primary and secondary education. Then comes the education of the blind. Through the good offices of this association New York City has now assumed an obligation to give to the blind children the benefit of public instruction, and the fact that they are constantly with children who see—study with them and

play with them—gives to the blind boys and girls a share in the common life of all the children that seems to soften the asperity of their lot.

The New York Association for the Blind has promoted the teaching of trades and occupations for which the blind are best adapted. At least half of those who become blind after birth become blind as adults, after they have learned their trades or studied their professions, and must be fitted to adopt some new calling in life which can be prosecuted without the use of eyes. It is to these unfortunates that the New York Association for the Blind has devoted its most earnest and helpful consideration. It has shown by this distinct service that it is possible to teach those who have lost their sight even after middle age to work with their hands, and with their minds in unison with their hands, so that the work done shall let light into their souls and happiness into their lives. . . .

There are in New York today two thousand three hundred blind persons, or one to every thousand of the population. This ought to be greatly reduced by enforcing the proper method of treatment for infantile ophthalmia. Of the remainder, those of school age should be properly taught in the public schools. They are unfortunate, but they are none the less entitled to share in the system of public instruction which purports to offer equal opportunities to all children. By increase in the power and scope of this New York Association for the Blind, all that are left of those two thousand three hundred—to wit, the adults upon whom blindness has fallen after they have attained manhood or womanhood—should be enabled to live happier lives by a training in mental and physical work which will occupy their minds, stimulate their energies, and relieve them as much as possible of that sense of dependence, helplessness, and hopelessness which makes their lives dismal and unendurable.

All honor, then, to the Holt sisters, who had so much to do with the founding of this association, and have brought it forward in four years to its present state of usefulness.

May the good and generous people of New York, who are appealed to to support so many good causes, add to their list of

One of the 78 charts (8 ft. x 4 ft.) prepared by the New York Association for the Blind

contributions substantial sums for the carrying forward of this great work, not of mere charity to the helpless, but of aid to the self-help of those who have the heavy burden of blindness to carry.

Miss Holt has called me here and I have responded, because such is the nature of the work she is doing that she is entitled to the voice of every lover of his kind in effecting her purpose.