



1.12: A Flash of Victorian Humour, 1896

Without flashlight, this unexpectedly humorous Victorian photograph by future City Architect John J. Woolnough would have been impossible. Woolnough was a dedicated, and published, amateur photographer who experimented with both flashlight (see also “A Consulting Room (flashlight)” in Chapter 4) and special effects.³⁴ We often think of Victorians as unremittingly earnest, sober, and humourless. Obviously, this was not always the case, as this photograph, originally captioned “Good Company ... but he has seen better days!” reveals.

CITY OF TORONTO ARCHIVES: Series 974, Item 29



1.13: Dept. of Health No. 253, Nov. 25, 1913”

Unlike Jacob Riis, City Photographer Arthur Goss was no crusading journalist. He wrote no muckraking articles or books about what he observed in Toronto’s slums. He left no written observations about what he photographed or how he felt. He was the consummate, quasi-objective, professional photographer. And yet his clear-eyed, professionally executed photographs often pack as big a wallop as do those of his American predecessor. This photograph, labelled with “just the facts” of who ordered the shot (the City Health Department) and when it was taken (November 25, 1913), takes us into an unidentified men’s shelter. The “facts” as arranged by Goss tell their story. A dozen shabbily dressed men are exhausted, even ashamed. (No one looks directly at the camera.) While sympathetic, the photograph is also intrusive. Almost certainly, neither Goss nor his boss, public-health reformer, Dr. Charles Hastings, had asked the men’s permission to photograph them. (Some men are looking away, and others are still asleep.) Without flashlight — which bounces off the back wall — this photograph would have been impossible, and we would have a poorer understanding of early twentieth century Toronto.

CITY OF TORONTO ARCHIVES: Series 372, Subseries 32, Item 253