

On the Training of Sick Nurses.*

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OUR pride in the progress and civilization of our age and country, in the advance of science and the spread of education, is not infrequently dashed by the consideration that, in former ages of the world, there existed civilizations as great, and culture as high as our own, and that these, as time passed, fell to pieces beneath the touch of the barbarian, and ceased to be. We ask ourselves—will our fate be the same? or is there any promise of greater permanence for the civilization of the nineteenth century than for that of ancient Egypt, of Babylon, and Nineveh, of Greece, and of Rome? I believe there is such promise, and hold firmly to the conviction that the principle underlying the social life of the present age is such as to ensure greater permanence and higher development—material, mental, spiritual—than the past history of the world can show. In the palmiest days of the Empire in Rome, the many were sacrificed for the benefit of the few; and it was only to a favoured class that progress and culture meant anything at all. Amid a luxury which debased and rendered effeminate, and social vice in high places such as one cannot think of but with horror and repugnance, Rome fell, as she deserved to fall, from her place as mistress of the world, because she had not learned the lesson that the good of the individual is inseparable from the good of the race, and that self-sacrifice is the very essence of everything that is true and great. In whatever respects we of this nineteenth century fall short of the past ages, we can certainly claim, as a moral advance we have made, the increased value of life, even of the brutes, but especially of man, and the respect and tender concern shown to the sick, the halt, the lame, the blind, the mentally afflicted, the feeble, and the faint-hearted.

The essential difference, indeed, between the civilization of the past and present, is that the latter is associated with, and depends on, the highest ethical and moral evolution, and the noblest religious system the world has ever known. The essential ground-work of the Christian Religion is self-sacrifice, for did not the founder of our faith offer up himself for us all? Throughout his whole teaching, also, the lessons of self-denial and self-devotion stand out as the main ones he would enforce. Even those who would get rid of the Christian Religion accept its precepts, and insist on the moral obligations which it enforces. The

religion of humanity which is to supplant the religion of Christ insists on self-sacrifice, on thought for others, on love to our fellow-men, on moral rectitude, and on the control of passions. Hence, when Christian and non-Christian agree on these essential principles, I am surely safe in concluding that modern civilization differs from the old extinct forms in respect that it is essentially unselfish, self-denying, and that, as an outcome of this, human life has become a thing of value; not only *mine*, but *thine*; not only *ours*, but the life, health, the moral well-being, the spiritual growth of the veriest outcast, and the most benighted savage.

This increased reverence for human life is seen in many ways. It has originated our hospitals and dispensaries. It is true that there is some evidence that hospitals existed in the time of the Romans, but it would seem that these were like our present hydropathics—being bathing establishments with treatment, patronised by the wealthy, not by the poor and outcast. Certain it is that the old civilizations were not distinguished by any consideration for the value of life, or by care of the sick, the poor, the crippled, or the incurable. Now, we have not only general hospitals in increasing numbers, erected according to the most perfect methods, where the poor are treated without any consideration of expense, but we have special hospitals for all sorts of diseases, for cancer, consumption, hip-joint disease, stone in the bladder, for diseases of the eye, ear, throat, skin; Homes for convalescents, for incurables, for the blind, the deaf, the dumb, and the mentally afflicted. Nay, more, our charity has reach beyond the limits of the human race, and homes are now established for destitute, sick, or homeless cats and dogs. It is even stated that our sensitiveness is getting so acute that true manliness (in the sense of the power to endure pain) is dying out, and that anæsthetics (chloroform, chloral and cocaine) have weakened our moral fibre. Be that as it may, the sentiment of sympathy for pain is good enough in itself, and the desire to relieve pain, to succour the helpless, and to aid the afflicted springs from the highest and noblest fount of our nature.

In the expression of this sentiment, and in the attempt to make its issues practical and effective, I note especially two directions in which work has tended to run during the last twenty years, namely: (1) the prevention of disease, and (2) the perfecting of the means of grappling with it. As to the former, the subject is too vast for me to enter on it in an address of this nature, but you will note that we have not considered it as outside your course of training, but have ensured, by providing lectures on hygiene, that the principles of preventive medicine should be known to all our Nurses. The perfecting of the means of treatment of disease is a work which may well occupy the energy and ability of medical men for all the ages of the world's

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[previous page](#)

[next page](#)