

An Imperial Woman.

Once more death has claimed a member of our Royal Family. The Empress Frederick, our Princess Royal, on Monday last, passed away, surrounded by her children; the end, after a long and painful illness, borne with heroism, being calm and peaceful.

Although the greater part of her life has been spent in Germany, the dead Empress had always the most affectionate feeling for the land of her birth. It was no doubt to her English upbringing, as well as to the bent of a mind moved by liberal impulses, that she owed that appreciation of modern movements, and interest in politics which, in a country where women are entirely ignored as political factors, brought her into collision with the ruling powers. "Unhappy he who is in advance of his century," and it was because, in her point of view, she was a quarter of a century before her time that the late Empress had to bear with much misunderstanding, to find her aspirations, and energetic and progressive schemes, confronted by stolid ignorance and prejudice and constant opposition. But her nobility of character has left its mark on the country of her adoption, the women of which owe her much for her constant efforts to establish their position on a higher plane than that of the *haus-frau*, and to develop their higher education.

In this journal it is appropriate that we should direct special attention to the interest of the Empress in nursing matters, which was deep and real. Even before her marriage her attention had been directed to the subject of hospital nursing in the field, and her interest was increased when Miss Nightingale, after the Crimean War, visited the late Queen to lay before her the inadequacy of our Army Nursing system—or want of system.

In 1867 she wrote that "the best nurses would be those who would combine the obedience of the Catholic sisterhoods with the more scientific training which has not as yet been obtained by any sisters belonging to orders." She also advocated the establishment of special training schools for gentlewomen, and during the Franco-Prussian War the Crown Princess resided in the old palace of Homburg, so as to be as near the scene of action as possible. She turned the barracks into a hospital, and added two additional wards, one of which, named after herself the "Victoria" barracks, was used for the most serious cases. So well planned was this ward, which owed several improvements to the suggestions made by the Crown Princess, that a model and photograph of it are still preserved in the military department at

Washington. Every day the Crown Princess visited the hospital, always speaking to every patient, and by her courage and tactfulness proved an immense assistance to those in charge.

In recognition of such services the award to her daughter by Queen Victoria of the Royal Red Cross, which is the coveted decoration given "for zeal and devotion in providing for and nursing sick and wounded sailors, soldiers, and others with the army, in the field, on board ship, or in hospitals," was no empty honour.

Nor was her fine work during the Franco-Prussian war all that nursing in Germany owes to the late Empress. She has left a permanent memorial of her interest in the welfare of the sick in the Victoria House and Nursing School at Berlin, which was founded and endowed out of funds presented to the Crown Princess and her husband on the occasion of their silver wedding. The Victoria House is notable amongst German nursing institutions, and differs from them, in imposing no religious test upon those who enter it for training. It owes this feature to the wise and liberal policy of its royal founder. The history of the later and pathetic part of the Empress' life is well known. In her husband's sad and painful illness she attended him devotedly, taking an active part in the nursing, in the details of which she proved herself possessed of practical knowledge. The late Sir Morrell Mackenzie said that "she managed the details of the sick room in a way which filled us all with admiration." And with fortitude she fulfilled her task to the end, always appearing in the Emperor's room with a serenity and calmness which never failed her.

The day after his funeral she visited St. Joseph's Hospital at Berlin, and it is recorded that when the Lady Superintendent attempted to offer some sympathy to the Royal visitor, that she replied, "It is no longer an Empress who comes to you, but a broken-down woman." Her interest in all that concerned the welfare of the sick was maintained to the last, and no one was more appreciative of the efforts of Dr. Koch towards the cure of consumption. Again and again the Empress visited the hospital which was opened for the victims of this disease in Berlin, and her words of sympathy and comfort brought strength to those for whom there was no hope.

The last years of the Empress have been spent at Frederickshof Palace, near Cronberg, in seclusion and simplicity. Amongst her poorer neighbours she was well known and beloved for her many acts of kindness. She met her death with the dignity and courage which characterised her life, and it may be that in years to come its beauty and devotion will be realised by the people for whom she freely spent it.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)