

Colonel-Surgeon B. F. Pope, the Chief Surgeon at the time of the strike, has died since the *Hancock* and *Rosencrans* left Manila. The new Chief Surgeon will be well advised if he immediately takes steps to rescind the obnoxious order.

The American Nursing World.

HIGH IDEALS.

In a recent address to the graduates of the Training School for Nurses attached to Bellvue Hospital, New York, Dr. Charles Phelps did well to speak to them of something finer than material things, and we find ourselves in much sympathy with his teaching.

"The nurse," he said, "must cultivate ideals which take her beyond the mere prosaic details of her work. She must believe with Miss Nightingale that nursing is one of the fine arts, if not the finest, and that it requires as exclusive devotion as painting or sculpture. It is the smaller part of her qualifications that she has mastered the details of her work; that she has learned to obey the instructions of the physician; that she has acquired patience and carefulness, and that she has even schooled herself to keep awake when on duty at night.

These accomplishments are indispensable to the competency of a nurse, and with them no nurse can be adjudged incompetent. They form the technical and absolutely essential duties of her calling; but they are not those which made it to Miss Nightingale the finest of fine arts, or make it to us, who know its higher aspects, a profession of dignity and honour. It is not enough that the nurse administer pills and potions with fidelity, construct a chart with care, or sterilise with skill. She must recognise that nobler mission which is hers as woman, as well as nurse, of tenderness and sympathy, of comfort and support. The fine instinct of sentiment is sometimes dulled by much contact with suffering, even though harshness may not usurp its place. I fear that a hospital life tends to lessen active sympathy for the sick poor. There are so many of them, they are often so ungrateful, and usually so destitute of graces of mind or manner, that we come to regard them in a purely professional light—become forgetful that they are human beings like the rest of us, and crave sympathy, and have feelings which may be shocked or wounded like those of people more fortunate in life. We are thoughtless—not worse than that, I trust—when with easy indifference we speak in their presence of the operation which awaits them, or of their probable or inevitable death in the near future. I do not believe that women nurses are often deficient in either thoughtfulness or kindness; certainly they are not so in

this hospital, where patients in general have little to commend them beyond their poverty and illness.

In what I have said concerning a loss of sympathy, I have meant to speak only of tendencies which naturally exist and which can be controlled. In like manner unsympathetic natures may be softened by culture. As the nurse born to her vocation can retain her birthright under untoward circumstances, she less favoured by nature can acquire by mental effort and discipline the feeling she lacks, just as the saints, we are told, attained the highest spiritual exaltation by introspection and contemplation.

It is, after all, only a question of degree. Every woman, whether she be a nurse or not, has pity and tenderness in her heart for all who suffer; and if she be a nurse it is by cherishing these womanly instincts, and by seeing to it that they grow warmer, not colder, by constant contact with pain and suffering, that she may exalt and refine her art. A sympathetic nature, if she possess it, will soothe the jangled nerves of the sick, while it gives deftness to her hand and softness to her touch. It is in virtue of her womanly graces, her patience, gentleness, tenderness, and sympathy, that she has so displaced the male nurse that there is little left for him but the cases which require physical strength.

I have only to say in conclusion that as you have honoured this hospital and school in the past by the intelligent and competent discharge of the duties which have devolved upon you, so I am confident that you will honour it in the future wherever you may be placed.

You now enter upon a vocation which it is in your power to render—each for herself—a most honourable profession; one in no wise inferior to the profession of medicine of which it is the complement and the ally; not one, perhaps, which leads to wealth, or often to great distinction, but in a pecuniary way you will not be ill requited; and if your name fail to be inscribed in some contemporary Hall of Fame, by a committee duly appointed to determine for posterity what they shall think about us, better yet, it may still be written in the hearts of those whose suffering you have lessened, or whose remnant of life you have made happier, by your tenderness and care; for no greater reward can be yours than to have added in some degree to the happiness of the wretched of mankind. And when hope and life are done, the last offices of your kindness, compassion, and sympathy rendered, and when some poor soul, delivered from all earthly miseries, 'drifts out upon that dark and unknown sea which rolls round all the world,' it is still for you to be first to comfort and console those who have been left upon the hither shore."

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)