

## Ethics.\*

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"Ideas are often poor ghosts; but sometimes they are made flesh; they breathe upon us with warm breath; they touch us with responsive hands; they look at us with sad, sincere eyes, and speak to us in appealing tones; then their presence is a power, and we are drawn after them with gentle compulsion, as flame is drawn to flame."

It is quite generally believed that the text-books upon ethics and morals have been closed by our generation, and that the great poems, novels, and essays have been substituted for them. This does not prove a decline in our appreciation of fundamental principles of right living, but a determination to study such principles as we may find demonstrated in the lives and characters of those around us. Such study and thought tend to increase our valuation of right motives and ideas as the cause or controlling force in right conduct and character. The theory that there is an impulse in inorganic and material nature by which things unfold and work steadily upward towards higher excellence is not new. It is with immense waste, so leisurely and circuitous, slow, with something of retro-action; but the unfolding of nature by this mute, almost latent, tendency towards a better future leavens and develops the world. This is the spirit of the ages, the genius of the universe—we are all ever on the march!

In our day each man is said to be made for a sage; each woman, a prophetess of better days and higher things.

Despite the pessimistic refrain that for the present and the future there is no creative work, all is copy or criticism of what has preceded; we know full well that each era brings its own and new inspirations.

History informs us that each prophet is a seer with clear acumen, a great heart with deep feeling, and the courage or daring of a hero; while experience has convinced us that to the great mind and tender sympathy purity was the crowning quality and celestial spark which betokened a divine impress upon the great (men)—that supremacy is, after all, chiefly moral genius.

The author of the great English epic was far more to his century and his people and language than the great German poet. Why? Because Goethe is said to have kept one friend busy clearing mud from his garments, while another wove laurels for his brow.

True, Ruskin ranks as our greatest art critic, but his fame arises from his work as a social reformer; from his lesson that life without industry is guilt;

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industry without art, brutality; that stone and steam are not human food; that only by justice, truth, love, can this desert, earth, be converted into a garden of God.

"New occasions teach new duties; time makes ancient good uncouth;  
They must upward still and onward who would keep abreast of truth.  
Lo, before us gleam her campfires, we ourselves must pilgrims be,  
Launch our Mayflower, and steer boldly through the desperate Winter's sea—  
Nor attempt the Future's portal with the Past's blood-rusted key."

The dignity and majesty of life are in the divine motives which urge the soul onward and upward towards a sublime destiny. This is the spirit, or quality, which makes possible to us nurses a comradeship with the characters of the heroes and heroines of all ages—a spirit of emulation, with a sense of obligation to place to-day one step higher than yesterday.

A great English writer describes a book as "the precious life-blood of a master-spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose for a life beyond life." Possibly each of us has realised his full meaning; this seems the sentiment of a profession, the passing on to our successors of what we have gained, preserved, or treasured.

Error and vice are the outcome of ignorance—ignorance of principles or ignorance of penalties—for the criminal population is made up chiefly of the untaught, the illiterate, the least intellectual class of individuals. Were none save good and great books written and read, the class of evil-doers might be greatly lessened. In most human lives one may readily trace out in their characters the influence of certain books, just as clearly as of certain instructors under whose tutelage they may have been. In nearly every instance they will be found to have kept more closely in touch with favourite books than with the friends or instructors. "Man is not better than the book he reads" is an old but an unchanged axiom.

Mr. Emerson has said, "The youth who surrenders himself to a great ideal, himself becomes great." The nursing profession is a fine illustration of the truth of that statement. In no other vocation or profession has as much been accomplished in so short a time. But note well that our best and greatest have been those who set for themselves a high standard and took as a motto, "Goodness is more than gold and character outweighs intellect."

The subject under consideration is "The Science of Right Conduct" as applied to our professional duties and obligations, but which also involves to a very great degree our personality and character.

If any of us have followed the reported transactions of the American Medical Association, particularly its struggles and difficulties with what it

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