

The Nurse's Sphere in the Mission Field.*

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Medical Missions have been called the handmaid of missionary work. I venture to go further, and say that Medical Missions are the *essence* of missionary work. For the work of the missionary is to preach the gospel, and the gospel means the glad tidings of God's love to man, and preaching it means, not only proclaiming the Divine Message by our lips, but commending it by a practical manifestation of its spirit; and wherever the practical demonstration of that love is not given, there the gospel is not "fully preached." In heathen and Mahomedan lands (as well as at home) the most convincing proof of the reality and power of love is the endeavour to do something for the relief of suffering humanity, and medical missionary work is a living illustration to the world of the love of Christ towards it.

The strange thing about it is that for so many years this fact was quite over-looked, and the fathers of modern missionary enterprise never thought of incorporating medical missions with their earliest efforts. And even when the idea was first suggested it was regarded with suspicion by earnest supporters of our missions, and considered as quite too secular to form part of a purely spiritual work. It was extraordinary how this should have been so, when we look back at the Divine Founder of Missions, and remember that His method was ever the combination of relief for the bodily sufferings, and comfort for the sin-sick souls of men. It is evident, too, that He intended His disciples to follow His example from His charges to those whom He sent forth. Always it is the same, "Heal the sick, preach the gospel." Yet in spite of His example and precept the Church was engaged for a great many years in trying to do missionary work on a method of her own, preaching and teaching only, and she looked on medical work in connection with that as secular and unnecessary. But at last she discovered her mistake, and realised that the more closely she trod in her Master's footsteps the more likely would she be to succeed in bringing the world to His Feet. And within the last 25 years or so, all missionary societies have begun to develop medical missionary work.

If we look at the mission field itself we shall see the scope and value of this work. Through-

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out the Moslem world, for example, those fields which for years yielded little or no harvest while occupied merely by teachers or preachers, rapidly began to be fruitful when medical workers took possession of them. Nor is this surprising. Moslems are strongly prejudiced against Christians and Christianity. They are not ready to welcome teachers of a religion which they hate, and unless we can do something to prove the superiority of our creed there is no hope of getting them to listen to us. Mere argument will scarcely ever convince a Mohammedan.

In Medical Missions we have something above and beyond argument, something which the most bigoted Moslems admit to be superior to anything they have got themselves, something which appeals to the majority of them sooner or later, and which is a striking object-lesson to them of the power of our gospel and the love of our Saviour.

Our Medical Missions, then, are winning their way even in the harvest fields. Everywhere they are removing prejudices, making powerful friends, and opening a way into hitherto inaccessible places. Houses long closed are open to us; doors previously barred have responded to the "open sesame" of the medical missionary, and so no wonder we are hopeful (if only the supply were adequate to the opportunity) of winning over one by one the strongholds of heathenism and Islam.

"If only the supply were adequate!" This leads me to talk of the special need for nurses! If Medical Mission work is so valuable and effective, then what we want is to establish stations all over the world. And wherever a Medical Mission is established, there nurses are needed. At present, however, those stations are miserably inadequate to the needs of the world, and yet few as they are, missionary nurses are fewer still! Think what the proportion of nurses is to one hospital at home, and then think of the proportion abroad.

There is not even anything like one nurse for each hospital! There is many a hospital abroad without a single trained nurse in it. Is this as it should be? Are nurses so few in this country that they cannot be spared to go abroad? You know that is not so. Whenever a vacant post at home occurs, how many applicants there are for it. No, there is no dearth of nurses at home.

The lack of nurses in the mission field in the past may have been due to the slowness of missionary societies to take up the idea of medical missionary work, and to realise, when they did so, that mission hospitals must be supplied with qualified nurses. But that is not the case

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