

THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND EDUCATIONAL STATUS OF THE NURSE.*

[ABRIDGED.]

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It is fitting that words of cheer and messages of special meaning should be addressed directly to you on a day like this, when you are completing one of the critical periods of your personal history. Yet the particular word I have to bring you is so big with cheer, the message that I carry is of so deep a meaning that I would fain extend it to all the people of your community and to all the members of the profession you are about to enter.

Three years of preparation which you have faithfully followed, which your instructors have faithfully directed, should have made you fit for responsibility, ready for opportunity; but have they, perhaps, revealed to you the largeness of the responsibilities, the scope of the opportunities that await you? Do you realise the new social sense that is being born in the consciousness of human society, the new appreciation of age-old values that has come in our day?

The world war has been a great awakener. The awful experiences of half a decade have stabbed the spirit of men broad awake. Ears that had been deaf to half a century of counsel from the world's great teachers have been unstopped. Eyes that had been held to the dead level of economic achievement have been opened as on the Mount of Transfiguration to see visions. The thoughts of men, narrowed to the concerns of self, to the insularity of national affairs, have been suddenly widened to the embrace of humanity. The hands upon the clock of civilisation have not been turned back, even though the earthquake shock of the most frightful of wars has stood them still.

THREE GREAT PROBLEMS.

Among the immediate results of this war, three great problems stand out to focus the attention of men and women—problems in the solution of which your profession and mine are equally concerned, in which, indeed, all the agencies of human betterment are enlisted. May I ask you to think of these. They are: (1) The worth of human life; (2) the conservation of human health; (3) the religion of social justice.

1. *The worth of human life.* "Life struck.

* An address delivered at the Lakeside Hospital, Cleveland, O., May 26, 1920.

sharp on death makes awful lightning," and when that glare is intensified by the multiplication to millions of sudden deaths, it illuminates the value of all life. This generation of thinking men and women will not lose within their lifetime the memory of that fearful light. It is not a happy thought that the cutting off of the young manhood of the nations should be necessary to enhance the worth of the thing so recklessly sacrificed; but certain it is that human society has suddenly become impatient of its loss, that it cherishes a new sense of the value of the human asset, that measures for the extension of human life meet with a ready response in the minds of the people. And they are measures quite possible of application. They involve a revision of the methods of our living from the cradle of the womb to the threshold of the timely grave. Pre-natal care, infant welfare, child protection, school nursing, health insurance, accident prevention, personal and communal hygiene, are each and all the expressions of an intensified appreciation of the thing we call life.

2. *The conservation of human health* is the necessary corollary to the preservation of human life. It is embodied in the principles of preventive medicine, the practice of which is undoubtedly destined to be the medicine of the future. It will not long remain the business of your profession or mine to cure, but to control the causes of disease; it will not be ours merely to restore, but, instead, to conserve health. All the agencies I have named as preservative of human life are means addressed also to this end. For the real value of life is conditioned upon the measure of health, and these agencies represent the opening of so many new fields of social endeavour for the nurse. And what concern will these larger efforts for the conservation of human health have for you?

3. To serve well, to the help and the saving of the lives, and the health and the happiness of men, you must have within you the passion for social service, *the religion of social justice*, the last of the three great ideas which are so greatly engaging the interest and commanding the devotion of the best lovers of their kind to-day.

In its ultimate end, its highest expression, yours is a profession of service. If it is not that, then it is merely a trade, and among the meanest of trades, because it trades upon the misfortunes of others. But to serve as the mechanism, the medium of social justice: to seek to level up the scales of opportunity which have swung so beneficially for the few, so

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