

## Economy in the Sick-Room.\*

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It cannot be denied that in many quarters there is an objection to the employment of trained nurses in private houses. To discuss some of these objections is the purpose of this talk on the economics of the sick-room. Of course, it must be assumed that many people would like to employ trained nurses, but their means will not permit. It is perfectly true that in all serious instances the intelligent physician of to-day would prefer to have the patient in charge of a trained nurse. But in many good families who are able to have the luxuries of life, and are accustomed to do everything that is possible for their sick, there is often delay in getting a trained nurse, owing to hesitation and reluctance on the part of the family in giving their consent to the doctor to bring in a trained nurse.

In talking with many people I find that their side of the story reveals some facts of which I think the medical profession is not aware. On the score of expense it is well known that in a long sickness, especially if the head of the family is the patient, the fees to the physician and to the nurse form but a small part of the expense which the family must bear; and if it is a wage-earner, then, of course, the stopping of the income is a serious matter, but if it is the housewife, it is not so easy to see why the expense of sickness should be so very great. I am convinced that the want of economy in the management of a sickness on the part of the physician and the nurse is, to a great degree, responsible for the great expense incurred.

It is perfectly right that you should know that people generally do not object to paying a salary to a trained nurse, but they do object to the wasteful and even destructive use of the household things which have been accumulated with great care and have cost much time and money. I do not think the physician or the nurse would either of them be guilty of wantonly wasting or destroying things of value in a house, and yet I have seen such wastefulness as I knew would shock the housewife and would cause a prejudice against the nurse which her skill, her patience, her long hours of watchfulness and wakefulness would hardly make up for.

The sin of wastefulness is one characteristic of the American citizen which is not paralleled by the lives of any other people I know of. The wastefulness in the household economy in the care of clothing and in the care and preservation of the linen and of woollen garments; and

belongings which is so commonly seen among people who can ill afford such wastefulness impresses every thrifty soul with something like disgust.

People who have means and who have nice things and who live nicely, are generally people who take care of their things and who preserve them, and who economize in many ways in order that they may have a pretty house and a comfortable manner of living. Now, when you ask these people for money to support a charitable thing or to give help to destitute people, the commonest objection made is that these dependent people are suffering from their own want of thrift and from the wastefulness to which they have been accustomed and from want of care of the nice things which they have had and which has caused their destruction. Many people who have small means seem to think that people of larger means, or even of wealth, live in extravagance and wastefulness, and do not need to consider the little economies of life which so vex them. This certainly is not true. A well-kept house, with dainty belongings, with an abundance of linen, etc., with beautiful furniture, not only represents the expenditure of money, but it also represents years of care and hours of labour in protecting these handsome things from destruction and no end of trouble in their preservation and care, and it is not surprising if the owners do not wish them to become soiled or marred, and, therefore, practically worthless.

I know a house where there is the most beautiful linen and woollen and glass and small bric-a-brac that has been preserved through five generations of users, and the house is full of these beautiful and useful things; but a wasteful or careless or slovenly housewife would probably destroy this entire accumulation in three years' usage. Houses that look nice are like people who seem to be well dressed and always look well; in each instance the fact being true that it is due to the care of the clothing and the painstaking arrangement, preservation, and use of handsome things, rather than to the extravagant expenditure of money in buying.

I know of many families where the expenditure of money is very large in maintaining the household, and yet there is nothing well kept or pretty or fresh, and therefore handsome, in the house, the dress, or equipages. If we could always remember in going into a house where the emergency of sickness has distracted the household from their ordinary duties that it is the bounden duty of a nurse and a physician in caring for the patient to also preserve her nice things from being soiled unnecessarily or stained or destroyed, we would find after the sickness is over that there

\* A Lecture to nurses of St. Luke's Hospital, Utica, N.Y.

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