

The Modern Nurse and Her Relation to Life.

At the Third Annual Meeting of the Indiana State Nurses' Association, held in Indianapolis, an address was given by Mrs. May Wright Sewall, the founder, and Hon. President of the International Council of Women.

WHOLENESS.

Mrs. Sewall took as her subject "The Modern Nurse and Her Relation to Life," and said that she was first interested in the organisation of nurses by Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, the founder of the National Association of Nurses in England,* and who was in communication with the nurses all over the world, inspiring an International Association. Mrs. Sewall then referred feelingly to her memorable visit to St. Bartholomew's Hospital in 1898, when she spoke to an enthusiastic audience in the Nursing Home. "When I entered the room," she said, "I thought to what degree are the people who are brought in here to-day from the London streets sick and injured better cared for than the people who were admitted 600 years ago. We know who cared for the sick in those days, because they were the only nurses of the sick in hospitals in those far-off times—the Sisters of Mother Church. I sometimes think that we Protestants do not think with sufficient appreciation and reverence of the women who, from the very beginning of the organisation of the Church, sacrificed themselves for others to the degree of living an isolated life, believing that only through the isolated life could they accomplish either a life of holiness for themselves or a life of helpfulness for others. It is the task of the Protestant nurse now to prove that outside of isolation, instead of within it, can come a life as serviceable in itself and as holy to the community as there came out of the consecration and isolation in the Middle Ages.

"Coming to the question of personal holiness, what does it mean? Fundamentally, not the state of sacrifice which those holy Sisters had in mind, but we must go back to the meaning of holiness and spell it as it should always have been spelled, and then we shall find that it means "wholeness." It is sometimes thought that impairment in the organisation and a general debility of the constitution make for holiness, but it is not true. From my point of view an organisation is, in one respect, the reverse of a chain. A chain is no stronger than its weakest link. An organisation is as strong as the strongest personality in it, and it is no

stronger. The strongest personality will strike your keynote. You will not be expected to rise above your keynote; because should you so rise it would be only into discord. Organisation means valuing individuals, strong, weak, and intermediate, and harmonising them by adjusting the minds of all of them to a common ideal, and then keying their minds to a common willingness to unite on the same means for the achievement of that ideal.

"It seems to me that this is just as applicable to nurses as to any organisation I have ever known. I do not approve of the organisation of women on sex lines, excepting as a temporary means of gaining the social, business or financial equality of the sexes. Up to this time I believe we need the organisation of women as a prelude to the organisation of men and women in the same profession without regard to sex.

"The women of a State organisation of this kind should have for their ultimate purpose the obtaining of the same social, financial and professional recognition given to men. To a very large degree you nurses are not in competition with men. So you have this profession for your own; this field is yours. Often, you know, we say women have not had a chance to do this, or that, or the other thing; but there are certain fields in which they have had a chance, and yours is one of them. The women of the world have been the nurses of the world, notwithstanding they have not always been professionally educated for it. That part of the race into whose arms the race when born is placed for nurture and care becomes, by the law of nature—the most fundamental of all laws—members of the nursing profession. Now, if in that field where we have had no competition, because no one wanted to compete with us in taking care of the crying baby—no man wishes to take care of a crying baby until it becomes a cooing, good-natured baby—if in that undivided field we had had the high ideal of health and nothing else, just an ideal of wholeness as the foundation and kernel of holiness, we should have found through all these thousands of years some way of getting self-educated to a degree which would have prevented at least nine-tenths of the diseases of the world.

"If I could have my way and had the power, I should certainly use it to organise a society of preventive nurses. I think every mother ought to recognise herself as a member of an organisation, world-spread, committed to preventive nursing. If that idea could take possession of our mothers and our nurses, much might be done.

* The British Nurses' Association in 1887.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)