

THE
BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING
WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD
EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

No. 1,130.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 1909

XLIII

Editorial.

THE DANGERS OF CHRISTIAN SCIENCE.

Christian Science (falsely so-called) has obtained a certain footing in this country, but in America it is even more devastating in its results, and medical men there have hesitated to openly attack its fallacies for fear of laying themselves open to the charge of selfish motives in so doing. *American Medicine*, however, urges the medical profession to take active steps to combat its dangers, and asserts:—

“Christian Science is a constant menace. It denies every tenet on which modern sanitation and prophylaxis are based. Let a pestilence or epidemic come into our midst and the attitude of the Christian Scientists means a calamity such as the world has never seen. Already many innocent lives have been sacrificed by the blind fanaticism of the Christian Scientists.

“The time is ripe for a militant spirit in medical affairs, and if the splendid accomplishments of medicine, hygiene, and sanitation cannot triumph by sheer truth over the ridiculous, ill-founded, and perverted teachings of Christian Science, then we are working and striving in vain.”

The terrible result of the craze for Christian Science is that its consequences do not affect only its devotees, but parents and guardians under its influence deny to little children the medical treatment which might save them, thus condemning them to needless suffering or an early grave. It is one thing to suffer oneself, to risk impairment of health, or premature death, but no one has the legal or moral right to deprive those who have no power of protest of the benefit of scientific discoveries and treatment.

There is, however, usually a substratum of truth in most of the heresies which have

arisen from time to time, and is not the forgotten truth, which has been so grossly caricatured by Christian Science that of the close association of mind and matter, and the influence of the former on the latter?

We see this truth exemplified in the case of hypnotic suggestion under medical control, as well as under less regular auspices, in the cures effected by certain “healers,” and in apparent modern miracles. Close investigation will probably prove that a cure, or an apparent cure, has occurred owing to the patient’s own mental condition and capacity for faith in the agency presented to him as offering relief, and curious confirmation of this is that we do not hear of the immediate union of a fractured bone, of the disappearance of a spina bifida, or of the cessation of bleeding from a severed artery at the bidding of any system of faith healing. These are, by common consent, still relegated to the surgeon.

We have never been able to see the logic of rejecting the means available through skilled treatment and medical knowledge, and then expecting a miracle to be worked so that the sick or wounded person may escape the consequences of that rejection. At the same time we must recognise, as the medical profession do increasingly recognise, the great influence of a patient’s mental on his physical condition.

The duty of nurses in relation to Christian Science is plain. They have no part or lot in it, for their duty is to work under registered medical practitioners and to carry out their directions for the treatment of patients. They are not, and never can be, independent practitioners, and if they coquette with irregular methods they abandon the position of membership of a skilled and honourable profession for that of the quack.

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