

their persistence instead of discouraging us, is only making us redouble our efforts in order that we may vanquish them.

In one stroke, medical work has undergone a profound change. The part of the medical man has become quite different from what it was. *His social functions have increased prodigiously. In days gone by he used to be a giver of prescriptions, a workman, a practitioner. To-day he aims at being a savant.* (The italics are mine.—E. R. W.)

I should be carried away too far beyond the limits of this gathering, if I were to undertake to show you how complex the fight against disease has become, what multiple co-operation it requires, and of what a combination of efforts it is composed. More or less you are all aware of it. But it is important that I should remind you that, in the pursuit of the object which the doctor places before himself, nothing should be left to chance, the sick organism must be watched constantly and completely. Once the trouble is discovered and diagnosed, it is not sufficient to prescribe a remedy, and allow it to act. The patient must be watched and nursed. (I note with pleasure that it is a physician speaking and attaching importance to detailed medical nursing; so far it has always been the surgeon, surgery, and asepsis in France.—E. R. W.)

A patient is like a new born babe, in the struggle which he maintains against the evil he must be protected, sustained, surrounded, because he is in a powerless, prostrate condition, entirely dependent on others.

The doctor called to the bedside is in the position of an architect who is consulted about a house which is unsafe. He considers, examines, and then gives his directions as to what must be done. But who is to carry out these salutary instructions? The patient himself is almost always incapable of so doing. When they entailed, as formerly, taking a pill or swallowing a potion, it was very simple. To-day it is a different matter. The more medical work has become clear seeing and precise, the more the smallest details have acquired importance, the more the nursing of the sick has become delicate, minute, and absorbing. It is a new technique which has developed, a technique different from that of the medical men, full of analysis, and investigation, a technique which the doctor himself does not and cannot possess, and for the execution of which a new profession had of necessity to be created, the profession of a nurse.

*I say that it is a profession, and a new profession.* (The italics are mine.—E. R. W.) In all times, people will argue, nurses have

existed, and there is nothing new in it. Yes, up to the present time there have been two kinds of nurses, the one being in comparison to the nurse of to-day what the barber was to the modern medical man, working women pursuing a mercenary trade, without professional education, without culture, without any professional training, without culture, and without a single notion—notwithstanding any individual worth they possessed—of the essential qualities of their work or of their share in social service. They were, in fact, domestic workers who had specialised.

The others, infinitely more worthy of respect and consideration, were the Sisters of Charity. To them the nursing of the sick was one of the forms of religious activity, the noblest and the most touching of all through which the divine precept, "Love one another" could be accomplished. For centuries it was the nuns alone who consecrated their lives to the sick, and they have done so, and many continue to do so, with a sense of devotion, sacrifice, and heroism which nothing can equal. But ladies, please understand that if I undertook to address you this afternoon, it was with the hope of enlisting your interest in the profession of the modern nurse, and not in works of mercy, that I invited you here. The nursing of the sick, such as we understand it to-day, is not a charitable mission, is not the path to Heaven. It is a public work, a broad profession, chosen apart from all religious undertakings, and which responds to a public need. Amongst the earliest civilised nations, when the need of a general sense of justice rose, it was felt to be necessary to meet this newly developed feeling by forming a judicial Court with its living organs, of magistrates, judges, and lawyers. Thus in order to accomplish this new need, of which mankind has become aware, the right to health, the duty to health, we must either adapt old customs or create new ones. Hence the hygienist, the doctor, the modern nurse. Their domain extends every day, their task becomes every day more complex, more delicate, their collaboration more restricted and more indispensable. In order to exercise these functions, it is necessary to have more daily care, culture, and preparation. Nursing the sick is not manual work, it is a profession which includes responsibilities, which grow heavier and more alarming as we become more enlightened. It is not a question of a good heart and self-sacrifice, but rather of science, of intelligence, a safe judgment, a clear morale, which training alone can give. There must also be natural qualities which make the vocation of a nurse an essentially feminine profes-

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)