

League News.

THE CHELSEA INFIRMARY NURSES' LEAGUE.

A very pleasant meeting of the Chelsea Infirmary Nurses' League was held on Friday, May 26th, when Lady Hermione Blackwood gave a most interesting address on "District Nursing," beginning with its earliest foundations. Having acknowledged her indebtedness for much information to "A History of Nursing," by Miss Nutting and Miss Dock, she said that for many years district work was looked upon as a branch of nursing suitable for the failures of the profession, and even as lately as 1900 great regret was expressed when a clever nurse trained in a large London hospital announced that she had decided to take up district nursing, as it was considered she was wasting her talents in so doing.

The work of a district nurse was essentially preventive as well as remedial; and hygienic, scientific, and technical training were requisite as a preparation.

In early days district and hospital work were closely associated. In primitive times sickness and insanity were looked upon as emanating from the powers of evil, and those who were skilled in healing were more often feared than loved, as they were thought to derive their power from the same source. Medicine men often beat their patients unmercifully. The Teutonic women, however, had knowledge and skill, and went out with their men to the battlefield to care for the sick and wounded. At that time nursing and doctering were not looked upon as separate arts.

The speaker then referred to the founding of the first deacons and deaconesses by St. Paul, Phoebe of Cenchrea being the first deaconess appointed.

The Orders grew and spread through Asia Minor, Gaul, and Ireland. The deaconesses at first lived in their own homes, later they came more under the dominion of clerical influence, and finally were forbidden to marry on pain of death.

Lady Hermione referred to the "widows" of later days, the Abbesses who ruled related houses of monks and nuns, the foundation of the Order of St. Benedict, the Crusades, which were a fruitful cause of the foundation of the Knightly Orders—the Knights Templar, the Red Cross Knights, the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem and of St. Lazarus. Then came the foundation of the Franciscans by the great St. Francis of Assisi, and of the poor Clares by his friend and disciple St. Clara. An excellent development of St. Francis' organisation was the foundation of the

Tertiaries, or third Order, composed of those who, owing to home ties, were unable to take full vows. Of the same period was St. Elizabeth of Hungary, whom the grey nuns took for their patron saint, and other notable nurses were St. Catherine of Siena and St. Catherine of Genoa.

Nursing was not in those days regarded so much from the standpoint of the love of humanity as that of a penance and atonement for sin. And there must have been opportunity for self-discipline, for fresh air was dreaded and sanitation most rudimentary. It is narrated that even Marie Antoinette narrowly escaped being drenched by a pail of slops thrown from an upper window of the Palace, which was the usual method of disposing of such refuse, and in the fourteenth century Erasmus had to leave England on account of the unpleasant smells.

An old book giving to foreigners certain English sentences necessary for their use, puts into the mouth of a courier these words when engaging rooms for his master:—"I trust there are no fleas, bugs, or other vermin," and again: "William, wash your feet to prevent the fleas from jumping."

The foundation of the Béguines, the Sisterhood of the Common Life, the Sisters and Daughters of Charity by St. Vincent de Paul, were all briefly alluded to, and the speaker described the Home founded under the supervision of Louise de Marillac as the first district nursing home. The dissolution of the monasteries, with consequent hardship to the sick, was also touched on, and the dark period of nursing—from the 17th to 19th century—till the foundation of the first real training school at Kaiserswerth, where both Mrs. Elizabeth Fry and Miss Florence Nightingale studied the system.

With the establishment of the Training School of St. Thomas' Hospital by Miss Nightingale a new era was entered upon. In Liverpool Mr. William Rathbone was striving to raise the stamp of nurses in the Infirmary, and endeavoured to do so by raising their wages. They celebrated the event by all getting drunk!

One of the first district nurses amongst the sick poor was Miss Agnes Jones, whom the speaker was proud to claim as belonging to the North of Ireland. At one time the mistake was made of making district nurses almoners rather than nurses. A most important event in district nursing was the foundation by Queen Victoria of the Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute. Now there were 1,800 Queen's nurses working all over the country. These had three years' hospital training and district

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