

THE SOCIAL WORK OF THE COLOURED NURSE.*

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I bring to the International Council of Nurses greetings from the National Association of Coloured Graduate Nurses of America, and I beg of you to accept my humble report of the social work being done by our nurses. In this age of civilization, this phrase "social work," so much talked of now, is nothing new. I know not its origin, but the Christian negro woman has always been much concerned about the condition of her neighbour. History records but few of the sacrifices made by women of my race. These women had neither education, money, nor influence, but, with their unlimited faith in the power of prayer, they gave unreservedly all they possessed to help make conditions possible for the uplift of the younger members of their race.

How helpless would be the result of a dear old mammy, with all her Christ-like compassion, going through one of our congested city districts doing the things which made her the martyr nurse of yesterday.

We realize that in this age we need trained negro women to cope with the existing conditions among our people, and with this realization in mind this body of coloured graduate nurses met in New York in 1908 to adopt some plan by which, with their united strength, they might help to alleviate the ignorance and suffering among their people.

We had high ideals: we could see the needs of our people as no one else could. And you, as a body of women engaged in such work, know better than I can tell you what is needed to start or carry on such work. Your expression of interest in the work of the coloured graduate nurses at this time is indeed an inspiration to them. The National Association of Coloured Graduate Nurses, being in its infancy, has accomplished little, but we feel that with the co-operation of your organization, and their untiring efforts, they may look forward with great hope to what in the beginning seemed the impossible.

I shall proceed to outline briefly the social work being done by our nurses in the southern towns and cities. The visiting nurse is an important factor in the philanthropic work of all large cities, country towns, and wherever the physical care of human beings is concerned. She works in connection with the Board of Health, private physicians, city charities, and among the poor whenever called

upon. She at the same time discovers, alleviates, and prevents suffering.

Prevention of suffering is as much her work as nursing. Too much stress cannot be laid on the work she is doing to reduce infant mortality. Through her, many children are prevented from becoming blind, crippled, or deaf.

Her mission is manifold: teaching the people who do not know, and will not learn of their own accord, how to protect themselves and others from disease. The infants of all maternity cases cared for by the district nurse are visited at least once a week during the first year.

The mothers are instructed to 'phone at once to the nurse in charge if in the meantime any abnormal symptoms develop, thus enabling them to stop the progress of any malignant disease in its incipency. Where babies are bottle-fed the mothers are taught by the nurse how to prepare the food.

From Richmond, Va., we have an excellent report of the social work being done by ten graduate nurses. These nurses are giving all their spare time and money towards this noble work. During the past year they have carried sunshine, food, and medicine to 350 destitute persons. The city dispensaries furnish them with paper napkins, ice tickets, and sputum cups to be used for tubercular patients. In Norfolk, Va., the Graduate Nurses' Association is supported by the City Union of King's Daughters and voluntary contributions.

Recently the Metropolitan Life Insurance has aided them financially by paying them a small fee for the policy holders who need their services. During the past year they have made 1,240 visits.

In North Carolina we have the Lincoln Training School, where young negro women are trained, and sent into the homes of the poor to teach them hygiene and how to properly care for their children. This school is filling a long-felt need in this part of the country.

In West Virginia the negro nurse and doctor have instituted a day camp for tubercular patients, there being no provision made by the State for such cases. These tubercular patients can go there and spend the day.

They are taught how to prevent the spread of the disease. They are given fresh eggs and milk three times a day. These in many instances are supplied by the farmers who have become interested in this work.

In the larger southern cities cases simply needing relief are referred to the united charities.

In many of the smaller States where no such organizations exist this work is carried on by

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