

OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

HOW CAN NURSES ASSIST IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF "A HEALTH CONSCIENCE" IN THE GENERAL PUBLIC? ON WHAT SPECIAL POINTS MAY EMPHASIS BE LAID?

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss Ména M. G. Bielby, Cranford, Middlesex.

PRIZE PAPER.

If the courage and public-spiritedness of trained nurses equalled their scientific knowledge and opportunities, the tale of disease and death might soon be reduced by half. In district and private nursing duty more especially may the nurse be a continuous factor in bringing the public into a state of awareness of its habitual sinning against the laws of health, and therefore against the welfare of the community.

In households where trained nurses are working their opinions on health matters are usually regarded with immense respect, and are quoted ever after as authoritative. So they can hardly take too seriously their responsibilities in this connection. A nurse worthy of her high profession should ever be a disciple of hygiene, taking *mens sano in corpore sano* as her device. Practice is stronger than precept, runs the old proverb, and the nurse whose own body advertises her neglect of health rules can never be an incentive to healthy living.

It is by no means only the uneducated classes who need their health consciences awakening. Amongst the so-called cultured classes one may daily see physiological laws outraged, and preventible suffering inflicted in ever-widening circles.

True it is that both courage and tact are required to protect against this form of harmful ignorance. But there is one way of protesting which rarely gives offence, namely, that it is the nurse's business to secure the best possible health conditions for her patients, directly and indirectly, that she is not earning her fees honestly unless she does so, and that it is her professional training that makes her painfully aware of the injury worked by *apparently* harmless habits of life which have survived from the dark ages. This, combined with a deprecatory attitude at having to run counter to custom, will clear the way for much reformation. There is a certain pigheaded type of person who will never alter except by pressure of pain, and this type can only be left for time to deal with.

The most flagrant offences against health include the tolerance of flies. One may still see

loathsome bluebottles exercising their functions on dainty luncheon tables utterly disregarded! Fleas, too, a manifold danger, are accepted as inevitable in homes of many people. In many houses windows are in the winter only opened "to let the smell of dinner or tobacco out." Fortunately pure air is incidentally admitted. That one should never sit in a room with both door and windows closed needs incessant teaching, especially sleeping apartments.

The deformities and injuries caused by follies of fashion find victims to the second and third generation. So does the sin—common amongst the poorer classes—of sacrificing good nourishing food to indulgence in unwholesome diet, coarse pleasures, and ostentatious attire.

A strangely permitted custom is that of exposing food for sale to all the dusty, filth-laden winds that blow. Soft fruit, milk, and bread are more or less dangerous from this cause. The habit of spitting in public places conduces to the danger.

Another national sin is the drinking, several times a day, of overdrawn tea, and its resultant dyspepsia. Trained nurses should give lessons in scientific tea-making wherever they go. I was recently informed at a little shop in a working-class district that half a pound of tea weekly is the usual allowance for one person—which accounts for many hospital out-patients.

Cottage windows are still used as shrines for geranium and fuschia plants, their exterior beauty failing to balance the darkness and musty smell of the room inside them.

The chief points affecting children are the iniquitous dummy, neglect of teeth, sweet-eating between meals, keeping children up late, boxing and pulling their ears, unsuitable feeding, and "bolting" their food.

Regarding the colossal offence of spreading venereal diseases, injuring innocent and guilty alike, nurses have many opportunities for influence, as they are allowed to discuss all subjects. They should demand from all men the cleanness which men demand from the women they would marry. As the brutal callousness touching this evil is mainly due to lack of sex-teaching and training in childhood, nurses should impress on the mothers they encounter that purity needs to be taught, and that without such teaching the dangers to their children at adolescence will be very great. The old idea that a lad is none the worse for having passed through what Kingsley called "the devil's sewer" is happily exploded. But he is scarcely likely to escape the experience unless carefully trained as to his powers and responsibilities.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)