

Royal British Nurses' Association.

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THE ASSOCIATION OF TRAINED NURSES IN PUBLIC HEALTH WORK.

LECTURE BY COUNCILLOR BEATRICE KENT.

Mrs. Earp, Educational Organiser of Infant Welfare Centres in Hampstead, took the chair at a meeting at 10, Orchard St., London, W., recently when Councillor Beatrice Kent gave a most interesting address on "Civic Duties and Responsibilities." In introducing the lecturer Mrs. Earp congratulated her audience on their being able to listen to one so well qualified to speak on the subject; it was one of great interest to everyone, for people had thought so much more about civic responsibility since the war.

Miss Kent then presented her paper on

CIVIC DUTIES AND RESPONSIBILITIES.

I am optimist enough to think that, out of all the turmoil and chaos and gross materialism of the present day, and which we hear—*ad nauseam*—is the result of the great war, a new and better world will emerge; indeed, it is already emerging, like a new growth struggling through a hard and inhospitable soil.

A greater sense, and more lofty conception of citizenship is going to be the redemptive power of all civilised countries I think, and it is this force—patriotism, at its best and highest—which is going to restore the lost equation. With this vision, which I trust you will share with me, we can "greet the unseen with a cheer." A writer on the subject of civics has said:—"If interest is sufficiently strong, it will bring knowledge; without interest, the so-called citizens are a fluid mass, drawn hither and thither by any tide of chance feeling, if they are moved at all. Indeed, the right to vote should be dependent on the elementary qualification of having some *personal care for public affairs*." This is a fine expression of the writer's earnest sense of civic responsibility. I will ask you to listen to one more quotation. Professor James Ward in his "Personality—the Final Aim of Social Eugenics," gives utterance to this beautiful truth:—

"The value of a single man or woman of open mind, independent judgment and moral courage, who requires to be convinced and refuses to be cajoled, is only concerned to be right, and is not afraid to be singular, deferring to reason and not to rank, true to self and therefore not false to any man; the value of such a man or woman, I say,

is priceless; a nation of such would leaven and regenerate the world. That is the true national education at which England should aim."

That person of course would be the ideal citizen. It tends to stimulate interest, and stir our sense of gratitude to pioneers and pathfinders, to look back and recall what they have done, and compare it with what is being done in our day, on the same lines; we shall probably find to our astonishment that we are taking credit for initiating things that are not at all new.

Looking back many centuries, the names of two lawgivers stand out prominently as good citizens, because they were good public health workers; (1) the Hebrew Lawgiver, Moses, who lived more than 1,400 years before Christ; (2) the Spartan Lawgiver, the Prince Lycurgus, who lived between 800 and 900 years before Christ. We are perhaps more familiar with the useful laws governing health laid down by Moses, than we are with those of Lycurgus. The latter was an infant welfare worker—his laws were much in advance of those of Moses. Indeed, he seems to have been much in advance of his own time. Lycurgus was the first to make laws for the preservation of the life and health of the mother and child. He also laid down laws for the ante-natal care of the mother. The most tender care had to be given to the expectant mother. The pregnant woman was regarded and treated as something sacred. But Lycurgus went further than that, he was a Eugenist, he would not allow any but healthy people to marry. This then is the secret of the traditional health and beauty of the Spartan race.

Now compare this fine sense of civic responsibility with the barbarism of our own country less than 100 years ago. When Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837 there was not a single Act on the Statute Book in the interests of the child—the child had no rights whatever. It is on record that a little girl of nine was sentenced to death for burglary; her offence was that she had broken a pane of glass and stolen a paint-box. The sentence, however, was not carried out.

About four and a-half centuries later than Lycurgus we have the great genius, the Greek philosopher Plato, with his vision of a well-governed country, providing for the health and happiness of all. This has been handed down to us in his immortal classic, "The Republic." It

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