

Royal British Nurses' Association.

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CHRISTMAS GIFTS.

A ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON CALENDAR.

Last year we compiled a Calendar, suitable to use as a Christmas gift, in order to raise sufficient money to give nearly a hundred of our less fortunate colleagues comfort and happiness at Christmas time and we felt much gratitude to a large number of Members and friends who helped us with this scheme. A budget of letters in our files speaks eloquently of the appreciation of those who benefited from it; most of the writers belonged to a generation in which the economics of the nursing profession were such that it was impossible for them to provide for the exigencies of sickness and old age. Conditions are better now, but we try, among many other activities, to find time to give a thought to the past and to remember those who helped, in their own way, to make the present; in the letters we received after sending out the cheques, on 21st December last, the chief pleasure indicated by the writers, was the discovery that "after all they were not forgotten"; Christmas had become suddenly and unexpectedly something to look forward to instead of being a time when loneliness became paramount; a loneliness accentuated by memories of the active, busy, happy years in the hospitals.

But while our main purpose, in undertaking the task of compiling such a calendar, was a benevolent one it was by no means the only one, for there is something to be gained for everyone who reads those beautiful thoughts that so many great writers have bequeathed; one Member wrote to us the other day that she liked to feel, as she read the quotation for the day, that many others were enjoying the same beautiful passage with, behind, the feeling that all had united to make Christmas a happy one for others less fortunate.

By the time this goes to press our Calendar for 1935 will be in print. This year we have confined it to the works of one writer—Robert Louis Stevenson. We had various reasons for choosing his writings and the chief one is that we recognise in him one of those whom we may regard as a Forerunner. Very often we find that, before some special subject or activity has commenced to interest a particular generation, there are those who, without any definite purpose in view, almost unconsciously and, at the time, unrecognisedly, come with ideas and activities that are first beginnings, new arisings, which, flowing on almost imperceptibly at first, become a current of thought, an accepted development. We might regard Robert Louis Stevenson as one of the forerunners of modern psychology. In every branch of life psychology is taught now and we hear that, in some industrial works, "a psychologist" is being employed in addition to the usual welfare worker. But the psychology taught nowadays is a very different psychology from that which rings through the writings of R. L. S. and we doubt whether its application is a whit more productive of mental health

than that which gleams in many a maxim, many a telling sentence and many an aphorism from the pen of a writer of whom the Encyclopædia Britannica says "He was the most attractive figure of a man of letters in his generation." The original meaning of psychology was knowledge of the soul; for the Greek word *psyche* meant the soul and not the mind. But this very important word has followed the materialistic tendencies that were born in the nineteenth century and has become a sort of science of the mind. The four temperaments, which were so highly important to the ancient physicians, have sunk into obscurity as a subject for study and the origins of the study of psychology, and notably that of Freud, are mostly, in our opinion, grounded in the physical part of man alone.

A lecturer once said that all true psychology could be found in the Bible and in Shakespeare—and, we would add, in Robert Louis Stevenson. This man, practically an invalid throughout his life, has probably written more robustly of life and of happiness than any other of modern times. He has an intuitive, a psychological, gift of finding a sort of artistic flavour in every situation, of getting straight to the very feeling that it arouses and describing that by suggestion rather than in the words he uses; a gift is his of grouping together the things he sees so that "a commonplace" becomes "a great poetic truth." But most of all in his psychology do we admire Stevenson's attitude to childhood. Lloyd Osbourne, his stepson, has said that he "always paid children the compliment of being serious" but there is something more than that for "*the child in him never died*," so says a writer of R. L. S. He could see with the eyes of a child and, from what he saw, has added much to the beauty of the literature of childhood; in reading it you feel that he understands so intimately the mind of a child. But his faculty of intuition passes on even to inanimate things and so our "Stevenson Calendar" will not only prove useful from the point of view of its practical teaching for every day but we have gathered together jewels of poetry and prose that have in them something of the adventurous spirit of Stevenson, of his appreciation of beauty, of his insistence on the duty of happiness, of his charity towards his fellows, of his contempt for "mean hopes and cheap pleasures" and of encouragement and counsel for all those who labour in his beloved Profession of Letters or in some more everyday calling. For primarily Stevenson was a student of life—"There was one thing he loved more than writing and that was living."

No such comprehensive Calendar of Stevenson's writings has yet been produced and the fact that we have been privileged to compile it and to publish it for the benefit of our benevolent scheme, we owe to Mr. Lloyd Osbourne, Messrs. Chatto and Windus, Messrs. Heinemann, Messrs. Methuen and Messrs. Seely Service, who have most kindly granted permission for us to use the quotations from a writer whose inspiration lies not so far back from our own times and which is therefore the more suited for the consciousness of our times.

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