

THE HISTORY OF ST. THOMAS'S HOSPITAL.

The third volume of the History of St. Thomas's Hospital, covering the period from 1800 to 1900, by Dr. F. G. Parsons, D.Sc., F.R.C.S., F.S.A., is now published by Methuen & Co., Ltd., 36, Essex Street, London, W.C., price 10s. 6d. net. While it contains many interesting details in regard to the hospital, both in Surrey Gardens, where it was closely connected with Guy's Hospital, and on its removal to its present site, its chief interest for nurses lies in the information regarding the foundation of the Nightingale Training School during the latter half of the nineteenth century.

We note that in 1804, "Mrs. Wright, the Matron, the salary of whose post of £60 a year had not been raised for forty years, was given a gratuity of £35, which, in the following year, was made part of her annual income; she, however, had to surrender all her perquisites, such as the right to sell linen rags and old hospital stores."

Of Mr. John Chandler, surgeon to the hospital in 1821, it is related that he was "kind and considerate to all, patients, pupils and nurses included. It seems curious to us nowadays that stress should be laid on his treating the sisters and nurses 'as if they had been ladies.'

"He was fond of emphasising his remarks by repeating, 'Certainly, most assuredly, without doubt'; and a rather characteristic scene is told about him as an examiner at the College of Surgeons. It was well known that he could not bear to reject a candidate and, perhaps for this reason, his colleague on this occasion was Sir William Blizard, who took his duty to the public much more seriously.

"Mr. Chandler first examined the candidate and, as usual, finished by saying, 'Well, Sir, you have passed a very excellent examination.' Then Sir William took the happy candidate in hand and after a few minutes' turned to his colleague with, 'Why, Mr. Chandler, this gentleman knows nothing at all; it is impossible to pass him!' On hearing this, which was probably true enough, Chandler turned to the now dejected youth and said, 'Well, my dear Sir, certainly I am most exceedingly sorry, but certainly, most assuredly, as Sir William says, you are so ignorant that it is impossible to pass you.'"

"It is noteworthy that in 1813 there was no hesitation in using £3,000 of the hospital money to build a department for purely teaching purposes, since it shows that the governors fully realised at this period their responsibility for medical teaching as well as for the care of the sick."

It is interesting to read that Keats, who though a Guy's man, spent a great deal of his time in St. Thomas's, where Astley Cooper lectured, composed one of his best known lines over a tallow chandler's shop in St. Thomas's Street, in the Spring of 1816. "Little Keats—who is hardly over five feet in height—is sitting on the window seat of his lodging, while Henry Stephens, with whom he lodges, is studying medicine.

"I have composed a new line," says the young poet:

'A thing of beauty is a constant joy.'

"What think you of that, Stephens?"

"It has the true ring, but is wanting in some way," says Stephens, and goes on reading. An interval of silence, and then Keats:

'A thing of beauty is a joy for ever.'

"And thus is born in St. Thomas's Street, our own street in dirty, sordid Southwark, one of the most oft quoted lines of English poetry."

Of Dr. Wells, who died in 1817, a pupil of the hospital wrote that it had lost one of the ablest physicians in London, and added: "He was rather an odd character and very hot; I have frequently heard him damn the sister of the ward for showing him a patient that was dying; telling the poor fellow, who was perfectly sensible, that he must die, for he

cannot do him any good. Once he went to visit one of the patients who was extremely ill; he requested the man to let him feel his pulse—the poor fellow put out his hand; the doctor directly came out with an oath, 'Damn you, sir, I don't want to shake hands with you!'"

We get an interesting glimpse of Thomas Wakley, founder of *The Lancet*, whose vigorous attacks on abuses resulted in several actions at law. "He was more at home with the bludgeon than the rapier; but always there was some real or fancied wrong to be righted, some injustice to be exposed."

In 1838 a "Report of the Commissioners Concerning Charities" was published, nearly a hundred pages of which dealt with St. Thomas's. It is noticed that the matron at that time was trying to get a better class of sisters than was possible under the old system of promoting nurses, which were then of the class of shopkeepers or head servants. The nurses' duties were onerous and disagreeable, the stipends low, and frequent changes were necessary. The watchers, too, were very unsatisfactory people."

The hospitaller read prayers in the chapel every morning at 9.30 and visited the wards every morning. Roman Catholic and Jewish ministers were allowed to attend when required, but Dissenting ministers were excluded because they excited the patients.

In January, 1840, Martha South was appointed matron, succeeding Sarah Savery, who had been matron for 24 years.

In December, 1844, the first Royal governor of the hospital was appointed, in the person of Albert, Prince Consort, and the following year he presented the prizes to successful students at St. Thomas's.

In 1847 it is evident that the authorities were still doing all in their power to improve the class of women who held the sisters' posts, and with this object in view the treasurer offered two prizes of three guineas to the sisters who had behaved best during the year. This year the successful sisters were those of Ann and George wards.

On March 4th, 1848, we read: "The treasurer wrote a letter to the committee of lecturers about a proposed training school for nurses. It certainly could have nothing to do with the great fund which was raised for this purpose after the Crimean War, but it is known that Florence Nightingale was studying the nursing capabilities of the London hospitals about this time, and it is possible that the need for such a school was already in her mind and that she had found a sympathetic listener in Mr. Baggallay."

"On December 6th (1853) Mrs. South, the matron, resigned because she was to marry Mr. Walker, the steward. She would be quite ready, she said, to continue her post when married, but the committee thought it undesirable, and Mrs. Sarah E. Wardroper was appointed matron in February, 1854. At her wedding the court presented Mrs. South, now Mrs. Walker, with £100 in recognition of her 14 years' faithful service."

The most important event of the year 1860 was the foundation of the Nightingale Training School with the fund of £50,000 available after the Crimean War. It was decided that the hospital should take 15 probationers to be trained, and should allow the matron and some of the medical staff and sisters to help in the work. The probationers were to live in the hospital under the care of a sister, and their progress and well-being were to be subject to inspection by the members of the Nightingale Committee and a lady visitor.

In 1866 a new agreement with the Nightingale Committee was made whereby the hospital undertook to accommodate 38 probationers, provided no arrangements with other hospitals were made which would interfere with this number being constant. To provide for this increased number quarters were planned behind the matron's house, between the first two blocks of the new hospital. Another

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)