

Why Enthusiasm ?

Whence arises the enthusiasm of the historical researcher referred to at the commencement of our remarks and why is the "History Room" at the British College of Nurses the chief field of attraction at most gatherings there? On considering the matter we might deduce many reasons for this, psychological and otherwise. We will consider those of the first category (*i.e.*, the psychological) and in some later article it may be interesting to pursue another path and to consider how both science and art meet in the study of history.

One attraction that draws forth the enthusiasm, to which Carlyle refers, certainly lies in the wide humanity which history encompasses, the wonderful variety in human beings and in human effort and aspirations that we find on "history's ample page"; nursing history is very rich from this point of view and it is one that makes history a part of human nature and thus it must inspire enthusiasm. Indeed, it becomes individualised in human nature if we endorse Shakespeare's dictum—"History is in all men's lives." Then, too, it invades philosophy and, although this subject may interest one to but a small degree, it does bring enthusiasm to the heart of the historian as he weighs the subtleties that influence and develop history for good or for ill.

The Pageantry of History.

Then there is the pageantry of history for those who are possessed of imagination and can see against the canvas of time, for instance, the beautiful Elizabeth of Hungary in the leper house on the mountain side or in her hospital at Magdeburg; or the Knights of St. John in Jerusalem, Acre, Rhodes and Malta, the Sisters of St. Vincent de Paul in the streets of Paris and perhaps, centuries on, others will build up a picture of a small group of nurses in a gallery watching the passage into law of our Registration Acts in the House of Lords and listening to the final Act in the "Registration drama"—the King's assent to the passage of the Nurses' Registration Bill. So do historical personalities and events come and go and the procession cannot fail to bring enthusiasm to life when we watch the cyclic drama inspired by the Muse of History, with all her infinite variety. Historical researchers have been described as "prophets with their eyes turned backwards" and such they are when they watch the pageantry of history. Then, too, in the search for jewels in the mass of the world's accumulated activity, we find our way, guided by that lady of variety whose veil is never completely lifted, into the Temples of healing of ancient Egypt, of Greece and Rome, into Eastern civilisations of olden times, through Palestine, Assisi and Hungary, into the wards of the Hotel Dieu in Paris, then to Kaiserswerth and the Crimea; what is the enthusiasm of foreign travel, for its own sake, compared to those voyages of the mind into the realities of the past which can be taken so easily by turning the pages of history? Another cause for enthusiasm is that, in the creators of history, to whatever branch it belongs, we see the representatives of the time in which they lived, the representatives of the spirit of their age. They stand at turning points of history surrounded by the mass of lesser personalities who, afterwards, in history live but in the mass. These other iconoclasts often remain and enthusiasm draws us near to them when we scan the pages of history. They are those who bring to us the greatest gift of history as defined by "the Sage of Chelsea."

The Historical Habit of Mind.

There are many other aspects in which we could trace impulses that give rise to enthusiasm in such study, but it would require time and space, not at our disposal now. Admittedly history does not always generate enthusiasm

but this applies usually when it becomes a mere "fable agreed upon," as Napoleon described it. But it is by no means always thus though often enough research may reveal some part of it as merely such a "*fable convenue*" and banish perhaps some really cherished illusion. But enthusiasm can arise even in the matter of separating the wheat from the chaff, although this pertains more strictly to what we hope to discuss in some later issue as the science of history. But, if the historical habit of mind is cultivated in the right way, an intuitive faculty will arise that sets one on the road to the detection of falsehood and the consequent preservation of truth which is so important in compiling history in any branch; by the meticulous observance of truth, on the part of writers of historical records, we nourish the great gift of enthusiasm for future students of history.

To sum up, we may rob Carlyle's remark of any satirical colouring it might appear to possess, and regard enthusiasm in historical research as a gift that is sometimes transmuted into inspiration. Such indeed has become the enthusiasm that has followed historically the work of Florence Nightingale for some seventy decades or so and inspired immeasurably the progress of nursing so that we may indeed regard this enthusiasm, transmuted into inspiration, as the best thing that came out of the Crimean War.

ISABEL MACDONALD.

MY FAVOURITE TREE.

In the Park, I see my lady tree,
With the sunbeams shining through.
She is full of light and mystery,
And she seems to know it too.

For the trees stand all around her,
In admiration mute,
And the wind who loves to play with her,
Comes whistling on his flute.

And then her leaves go dancing
With the sunbeams and the rain,
And the wind he whistles louder,
And the birds join the refrain.

She is charming, she is mystical,
She is full of light and love,
The butterflies adore her,
And the jolly heaven above.

When night comes o'er the country,
And the stars shine in the sky,
They send her secret messages
With the night birds as they fly.

And she whispers back her secrets,
Borne on the wings of love,
And the stars they shine the brighter,
In their palaces above.

When Diana sweeps into the sky,
She sets her moonbeams free,
And they all slide slowly earthwards
To kiss the mystic tree.

And the fairies dance around her
And sing their lullaby,
To the stars that stop and listen,
As they glide across the sky.

This beautiful and imaginative little poem was given to us for publication by Miss Helen Dean, S.R.N. (late Matron of Kilsyth Hospital). It was written by her sister Miss Lydia Dean.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)