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We Salute Our Readers at this Christmastide

Christmas Reverie

WE were recently spending a quiet evening by a glowing coal and log fire, writing to friends. They were the first batch of Christmas letters and, whilst bewailing the flight of time, we were amazed to discover that it is nigh on three years since our famous Foundress, Ethel Gordon Fenwick, left us for the eternal shores. Musingly, we recalled how dearly she loved the Christmas Season, and we remembered her delight on receiving greetings and gifts from her admirers from all parts of the world.

As the pen slipped out of our relaxing fingers, and the cosy firelight bewitched our gaze, we were not surprised to find her editorial room at No. 19, Queen's Gate slowly taking shape in the flickering flames. We saw distinctly the beautiful vase of golden freesias holding the place of honour on her desk, and the little statue of the warrior saint, Joan of Arc, standing almost pensively by her writing materials. Scattered in untidy profusion were her papers, whilst her large and scrawly handwriting was visible everywhere. The mantelpiece beyond was laden with Christmas Cards, and a calendar of Mr. Winston Churchill held pride of place.

There in the centre of the room, sitting at her desk, we saw her, and heard her old familiar greeting, "Ah, there you are, come in and tell me what's going on in the world outside." Her room was beautiful, and most tastefully furnished. Lovely old lace curtains graced the windows, and a fine carpet covered the floor. The walls were high and spacious and everything that met the eye spoke of distinction and quiet luxury, and revealed her artistic and cultured preferences. It was always thrilling to sit and chat with her, and she revelled in her reminiscences of famous nurses from other countries, whom she proudly claimed as friends and colleagues. Dearest to her heart was probably America's most gracious and accomplished Nurse, Miss Lavinia Dock, now a most charming "genuine antique," as she so merrily described herself at the Congress in Atlantic City. We, too, have had the privilege of meeting this delightful and cultured lady, and the experience is unforgettable. She spoke of many others, too, from South Africa and Australia. Her "chats" were usually interspersed with vitriolic condemnations of changes in the Profession which were not to her liking, and of withering criticisms of "reactionary" Ministers of the Crown who had slipped from the grace of her approval.

There was never a dull moment in her stimulating presence, indeed one often felt a little strain and was glad of a cup of tea. She was devastatingly witty, profoundly wise, often biting and scornful and sometimes, perhaps, a little cruel, but then—she was a genius and could not conform to normal standards. What wonderful power she possessed! Many a dictator has been less generously endowed! She was a born leader, clear sighted, strong minded, capable of bending other strong personalities to do her bidding; and yet, in her less dominating moments, kind and generous to a degree, and exhibiting some of the weaknesses to which human nature is prone.

Not a few nurses in prominent positions to-day hold them as a result of Ethel Gordon Fenwick's generosity and interest. We, ourselves, received much from her bounty and gladly acknowledge our indebtedness.

And now Christmas is coming again. Her room is still at No. 19, but her chair is vacant. The furniture is rearranged, so that College members may hold their tea parties there. She is badly missed, for there is no one like her. She stood alone, isolated by her genius and her innate greatness. She stooped to our littleness which must have been irksome beyond enduring at times.

She must, in justice, be given her rightful place in the history of the English Nursing profession, for she *was* the profession! When we speak of State Registration, we echo her name; the General Nursing Council flourished in its early years by her genius. She created the National and International Councils of Nurses, and she forged the bonds of friendship between nurses of the different countries of the world.

It is our solemn and binding duty to give her name that everlasting lustre and glory which she so abundantly merited for it. She worked and toiled for the advancement and recognition of professional Nurses and her hands were ever full of priceless gifts for them. She died when she realised that she could do no more. Let us determine that posterity shall not be deprived of the privilege of knowing and honouring her as the greatest Nurse of her time.

May she sleep peacefully this Christmastime, and forever, and may her friends keep her cherished memory ever green.

G.M.H.

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