

ORIGINAL CONTRIBUTIONS

THE NURSE.

AN ADDRESS TO THE GRADUATING CLASS OF NURSES, THE WESTERN HOSPITAL, TORONTO, JUNE 9TH, 1915.

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I AM not sure why the Board of the Western Hospital have asked me to deliver the Graduation Address to you, but shall flatter myself by assuming that I am credited with some knowledge of medicine, some knowledge of the world and its ways, and at least a modicum of common sense.

You are to be congratulated upon the advance in public estimation heretofore made and still being made by your profession. Scarcely half a century has passed since the nurse, as we understand the name, has become an integral and necessary part of English-speaking communities. The hideous picture of the nursing trade—it could not be dignified as a profession—given by Dickens in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, in the early 40's is as terrible as it is disgusting and nauseating—Sairey Gamp and Betsy Prig, ignorant, drunken, slatternly, unkempt and unreliable—yet there is no doubt that the picture, vile as it was, was true to nature. Dickens could and did see life as it was and could and did faithfully describe what he saw.

It is, in great part, to that splendid woman and efficient nurse, Florence Nightingale, that we owe the profession as it now exists. But some part, and that by no means negligible, has been played by the fundamental revolution in the medical conception of disease itself, due largely to the microscope.

The old physicians looked upon disease almost as an entity to be met, fought with and conquered by the proper medicine; the newer school sees but an abnormal condition of the tissues and organs of the body, due not seldom to some foreign animal or plant which has made its way where it should not. These physicians endeavour to assist nature to throw out the alien and think in most cases they do well in making and keeping the patient as qualified as possible in being himself the agency of bringing about a return of health.

With these the nurse is essential; with those rather a superfluity, nay, a hindrance than otherwise. When a disease was to be subdued by doses of medicine, there a nurse was of no use; she was rather in the way than otherwise; but when the body is to be helped to strengthen itself by a comfortable bed, fresh air, good water, appropriate food, the story is different.

And so the nurse is coming, if not quite come, to her own—a consummation devoutly wished and to be wished.