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On

Craik, R.

2007

# THE QUEEN'S DIAMOND JUBILEE.

## THE VICTORIAN ORDER OF NURSES,

PUBLIC MEETING AT MONTREAL, APRIL 21st, 1897.

ADDRESS BY

DR. CRAIK, DEAN OF FACULTY OF MEDICINE,

McGILL UNIVERSITY.

Your Excellencies, Mr. Mayor, Ladies and Gentlemen:—

In endeavoring to assist in my humble way in the objects of this meeting, I would desire it to be understood that what I have to say will be chiefly from a professional or medical point of view, and although I cannot by any means claim to speak as the official mouthpiece of the Profession, yet, as one of its oldest members I may fairly claim to speak with some knowledge of its wants, and also with some knowledge of its views with reference to the proper treatment and the proper tending of the sick.

The time was, not so very long ago, and within the memory of many of us, when the attendance and advice of the doctor with the kindly but unskilled assistance of friends and neighbors, were all, or nearly all, that sick persons had to rely upon for their comfort or cure; or if nurses, so called, were to be had, they were at best self-taught, and without scientific training of any kind.

Even the doctors' ideas about the nature of disease were often misty and indefinite, and the science of Medicine had but little claim to be ranked among the exact sciences. But, thanks to the great progress and discoveries of modern science, all these things have been greatly changed for the better. The causes of disease have become so much better known and its processes and effects so much better understood, that most diseases are now much more manageable and the resulting mortality has been greatly reduced. In short, Medicine—including, of course, Surgery—is rapidly establishing its claim to be ranked among the Exact Sciences.

And how have these changes been brought about? By substituting accurate scientific methods of observation and practice for the crude and indefinite methods of the past. But the doctors themselves would have been powerless in carrying out these changes but for the able and valuable assistance of the

modern trained nurse; and for the introduction of this system of skillful, trained nursing, with all its untold benefits, the Profession of Medicine and the world at large must forever remain under a load of obligation to the great founder of the system, Miss Florence Nightingale. The trained nurse has become almost as necessary in the treatment of the sick as the doctor himself, and if in serious or prolonged illness the two go not hand in hand, much unnecessary suffering and many preventible deaths must be the inevitable consequences.

But though our larger hospitals and certain classes of the community in this country are being well served by our present system of trained nursing, we can scarcely be said to be much beyond the threshold of our necessities or of our possibilities in this matter. As matters now stand, by far the most numerous classes of our people are quite out of reach of help from our trained nurses, and until this want is supplied they must continue to suffer and to die, much as if no system of trained nursing existed in the country. I say this without imputing blame to any one. It is probably nobody's fault, but it is a national misfortune, and one which should not, and indeed must not, be beyond the reach of remedy. The hospitals have been doing their utmost in training nurses up to the full measure of their capacity and the means at their disposal, but the process is a slow one, and, so far at least as the nurses themselves are concerned, is attended with considerable expenditure of time, anxiety and money before they find themselves in a position to earn a bare livelihood. Moreover, their duties are arduous and exacting, and their necessary expenses constant and considerable, while their emoluments are fluctuating and uncertain; and to make ends meet their scale of fees must be such as to place their services beyond the reach of all but persons of ample means, to whom the additional expenditure of a few dollars a day during a lengthened illness, causes little or no inconvenience.

But these people of ample means form but a small minority of our whole population, and what is to become of those much more numerous classes, the people with limited incomes, both in the cities and outlying districts, and the poor in their own

homes, whose needs in the matter of nursing help are quite as urgent, but whose means are quite inadequate to supply them under existing conditions? Are they to be left to sicken and to die without help, or to look longingly and enviously, or with thoughts that are apt to grow dangerous, upon their more prosperous neighbors? God forbid! It is to supply the needs of such as these that Her Excellency proposes to establish the Victorian Order of Nurses, whose duty and whose privilege it shall be, under skilled direction, and supported as it will be by a generous public when its needs are made known, to extend to every class of the community throughout the length and breadth of our land, those valuable and health-giving services which should be the perquisite of the poor as well as of the rich.

And this is no impossibility. What has been done elsewhere can be done here. Ten years ago the situation in Great Britain was almost exactly the same as it is here today. The great hospitals and the well-to-do classes had their trained nurses, while the great middle class, with moderate means, and the poor in their homes, were fain to struggle and to suffer, as they had always done, without them. The Jubilee Order of Queen's Nurses, established by Her Majesty in 1887, has supplied this great want, and there are today upwards of six hundred of these nurses doing valuable work in every part of the United Kingdom, and their number is constantly increasing.

So let it be, with necessary modifications, in this country. Let not the reproach be cast upon us that we continue to train nurses only for the rich, and that those who are not rich must not hope to be helped in that way even in their direst need. That reproach must not, shall not, rest upon this country. It must be wiped away before it becomes a stain upon our fair Escutcheon, and every dweller in the land, whether in the palaces of the rich or in the humblest hovel in the wilderness, must be made to feel that he is within reach of that skilled help in his sore need, which should be the birthright of every citizen of our great Empire.

It is not for me, nor is this the occasion, to enter upon the details of this great scheme. It is in safe hands and the work connected with it

will be well and faithfully done, but this much must needs say: that the aim shall be to make it acceptable to all who take part in it, to the nurses who are to do most of the work, to the doctors and others who will supervise it, to the sick who are to benefit by it, to the friends and benefactors who are to help it to its success, and lastly, to our beloved Queen, whose large and sympathetic heart first suggested the direction which such Jubilee offerings should most fitly take.

It is difficult to imagine any more worthy object for Jubilee gifts, great or small, than this Victorian Order of Nurses, for skilled nursing, even in its present restricted application, is every day, and perhaps every hour, relieving human pain and saving human life: and bearing in mind the Classic Dictum that "what you do through others you do also yourselves," it becomes possible for every one to help in this great work, and puts practically no limit to the good that may be done and the valuable lives that may be saved.

But in contemplating the great benefits to our people by the establishment among us of the Victorian Order of Nurses, let us not forget to whom we are indebted for the initiation of this great enterprise. To Her Excellency the Countess of Aberdeen must

always belong the merit of having been the first to discern this great need among the masses of our people, and to her, also, we owe the quick perception of the fitting moment at which their wants could be best supplied. It was a happy inspiration, and may Her Excellency live to see the fruits of her benevolent purpose grow and multiply, fifty and even a hundredfold.

If more were needed to press the importance of this good work upon the people of this Christian Country, I could point to an obligation more solemn than all that have gone before. Did not the Divine Author of Christianity say to His followers, "Go ye, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils, freely ye have received, freely give?" This is His command. Shall it not be obeyed? But He gave also a Promise, in these words, "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones, a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple" (and what disciple more worthy than our beloved Queen), "verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." Ladies and Gentlemen, Citizens throughout this broad Dominion, this promise will be surely kept. See to it, that ye fail not to secure a goodly share in this Sacred Promise.