

NURSING AND INTERNATIONAL CIVILIZATION

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In these terrible times of international crisis, when we are fighting against the most appalling barbarism the world has ever known, it is only too easy to lose our sense of proportion and to talk sceptically of civilization. It is therefore most essential to avoid pessimism and to strive, both individually and collectively, to harbour and improve our resources, to continue to be progressive and to build a sounder and better scheme of society for the future.

A great responsibility lies not only with individuals but with the group to which they belong, and the Nursing Profession has always been, and should continue to be, a great power in international civilization. This can be proved by studying the history of nursing which shows that when nursing flourished and was considered a noble profession, it coincided with a high standard of civilization, culture and goodness, but whenever nursing deteriorated and nurses were looked down upon, civilization practically vanished. It is possible to argue that good nursing is only the outcome of a high standard of education, but the student will find that nurses were always amongst the first pioneers in humanitarian work, and were moved by a love for their neighbours and a spirit of service, without which true civilization perishes. Without nursing mere social service would be of no avail and medicine could not progress.

A nurse comes closer to human nature both physically and psychologically than any other social worker; she is responsible for her patient's body, soul and mind, at a time when he is most impressionable, therefore her influence both in the hospital and in the home is very great indeed. For this reason there is no need to emphasize the fact that she should be a woman of culture, good education, highly trained, and of great strength and integrity of character. She should be treated with great respect and consideration, well fed, comfortably housed and adequately paid, for although money should never be her first consideration, the vocational worker, from whom great demands are made, should not be imposed upon and her health should be considered.

Training for the nursing profession should be progressive and conducted on a wide basis. It should not terminate when the nurse has graduated, but a central post-graduate college should be provided for administrators and sister-tutors, and refresher courses should be available. Before we can make adequate progress, we need to work for a sufficient proportion of nurses to patients, and of trained to untrained staff, and for adequate nursing supervision in all hospitals. Nursing Superintendents should be given and be capable of taking full responsibility for the nursing administration. There should be an Assistant Nursing Superintendent, a Home Sister, a Sister-Tutor, and one Sister to 25 or at the most 30 beds, who is capable

of following up the Sister-Tutor's work by giving bedside teaching to the student-nurses as well as detailed supervision to the ward. The ideal ratio of trained to untrained staff is one trained nurse to $2\frac{1}{2}$ students, and when the whole of the nursing personnel is counted, there should be one nurse to $2\frac{1}{2}$ patients. At first sight these figures may seem high, but they allow for an eight-hour day or ninety-six hour fortnight. It should be remembered that no one can be on duty for twenty-four hours and that this ratio prevents the student-nurse from being used as a form of cheap labour. It would also help to do away with the apprenticeship system, which tends to keep many of the best-educated girls out of the profession.

The Trained Nurses' Association of India does not make these suggestions with ulterior or selfish motives. A larger complement of nurses does not necessarily mean light work, but better training and sufficient time to give adequate care to the patients, which is quite impossible under the conditions of understaffing which exist throughout India. We need to hasten slowly, and to bid for quantity before quality, in an effort to enlarge the staffs at once, would be absolutely fatal. We fully realize the many difficulties to be faced by the authorities while funds are low, but the people have become hospital minded so rapidly that it is impossible to keep pace with them, therefore overcrowding is most difficult to prevent and each individual nurse should be determined to do her best, however great the difficulties.

The Trained Nurses' Association of India has already opened negotiations for a central post-graduate training college, and in the meantime student-nurses of the highest possible educational standard are urgently needed, and college graduates particularly with science degrees would find it well worth while to make nursing their career. Above all, we need people of vision, strength of character and endued with a great spirit of service.

Although money has never been the first consideration where nursing is concerned, yet "the labourer is worthy of his hire", and we pray for the time when all nurses will be adequately paid, well fed, safely and comfortably housed, and treated by every member of the community with the respect due to women who are ready to give their lives in the service of humanity and to help to build an international civilization founded on love and service, which can not be shaken by envy, hatred and malice.

When we study the history of nursing we find that Moses, the first great sanitarian, mentions midwives in his laws, which were written in 1300 B.C., but the first record of actual nursing is to be found in ancient Indian history during the time of Asoka, who reigned in 250 B.C. They were apparently nearly all young men of the sub-priestly caste who were helped by a few old women, and their code of ethics was a very high one. Unfortunately the great era of civilization which existed during this period came to an end. Nursing as an art and vocation vanished with it until after the birth of Christ. Early in the 1st century A.D. Phoebe came

forward as a visiting nurse, and organised nursing was started under the guidance of the early Christian deaconesses who were followed by Roman ladies of high degree, amongst whom were Fabiola and Marcella, who turned their mansions into hospitals during the fourth century and nursed the sick poor with their own hands. After the fall of Rome both nursing and civilization were retarded until the formation of the monastic orders in the sixth century, but the efficiency of the profession remained stationary until 1095. During this era, which is known as the age of chivalry, when the spirit of service flourished and men took oaths that they would protect all women, and aid the afflicted, civilization began to reach a high level and the military nursing orders of St. John and St. Lazarus were formed. The members of these services were recruited from knights and ladies of high degree who did the nursing themselves and built many excellent hospitals, of which one still stands. They created interest in the profession, the Deaconesses were revived, and nursing reached a high standard of efficiency which continued during the Renaissance, when a wave of culture and education swept over Europe, in the thirteenth century. During this period St. Francis, St. Claire, St. Elizabeth and St. Catherine took a leading part in nursing, and Queen Elizabeth of Spain formed the first ambulance service.

In the fifteenth century Europe was overtaken by a wave of barbarism, civilization declined, the monasteries were closed, and had it not been for one nursing order in France, nursing would have become extinct. Superstition, witchcraft and greed took the place of skill and an ideal of service. Nursing was considered work only fit for the most degraded women and these dark ages persisted until the nineteenth century when Florence Nightingale, Elizabeth Fry and others revolutionised nursing and, and social service, laying a strong foundation for the profession as we have it today: a vocation, an art, a science, and a profession.

We may well ask ourselves, now that the greatest war that has ever been fought is being waged against the most hideous barbarism, whether we are to stand by and allow civilization to vanish. With all our hearts, we answer "NO".

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