

PRESENT DAY CIVILIZED NURSING

THE STERILIZER'S WORK IN IT

A doctor writing in 1909 on Modern Surgical Nursing says: "The nurse may congratulate herself equally with the surgeon on the great discovery of Lister."

The nurse contributes to the success of every surgical operation in no small degree; the knowledge, therefore, of her value and importance in modern surgery should stimulate her to a keen interest in her work and a thorough mastery of it. By rendering the environment of the patient as far as possible germ-free and by the substitution of the antiseptic heat for chemical antiseptics,—the aseptic system of surgery has been evolved, whose aim is the exclusion of all germs from operation wounds, thus doing away with the necessity of using chemicals for the destruction of germs which are not present. The preparation of the patient alone takes several days. It does not only consist in the disinfection of the operation area, it is important that the patient should be properly dieted; that the kidneys, skin and bowels, should be functioning properly; that the mouth should be clean, etc.; and these details cannot be satisfactorily accomplished in the course of twenty-four or even forty-eight hours.

"Disinfection of mouth, of nose, of eye, of stomach, of intestine, etc., are elaborately described; the preparation of every part of the theatre and all furniture and basins; the costumes of the operators and theatre sister who must wear masks, caps, gloves, goloshes, gowns. Any visitor or any of the staff visiting the theatre are obliged to remain shut off from the well of the theatre by means of a glass screen, to prevent any septic germs entering the theatre. For all operations these precautions are taken. The air of the theatre is continually changed by being drawn in by an electrically driven fan at the basement, and extracted by a similar apparatus in the roof. It is filtered at its inlet by passing through a screen of muslin and warmed after this by passing over copper radiators which should be on hinges, so that they can be moved out and cleaned.

So it is that every detail of nursing before and after operation, to make it free from danger from the outside air, is carried out by the present day nurse.

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**Book referred to—*"OPERATIVE NURSING AND TECHNIQUE." By DR. C. F. CHILDE. Bailliere Tindall and Cox, Publishers, 8, Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London, W. C.

waved his hand and said, 'This is your ward; I leave you in charge.' In 1871 the new palatial Saint Thomas's on the Embankment and the Nightingale Training School were opened. The home was refined and comfortable and provided accommodation for 40 probationers. The *Times*' reporter seems to have been lost in admiration of the sisters and nurses in their dainty uniform flitting about the wards and corridors.

It was said of the training of St. Thomas's in those days that it was "calculated to turn the young women into automatic machines—discipline was so severely directed against natural affection." In 1873 Miss Maria Firth was moved with a desire to improve the condition of nurses, who she felt did not receive adequate remuneration from the institutions and hospitals which they served.

In a booklet "The Hospital Nurse," printed for private circulation, Miss Firth gives some of the experiences of the then hospital nurse. "No, I don't complain of the pay itself (from ten pounds to twenty pounds per year) though it was hard-earned," said one, "but I didn't like hospital work all the same; an' I don't think nurses get a fair chance there. I know when I was night nurse I'd to come on at 11 p.m., an' stay till 4 p.m. on the following day. I'd to give the patients their meals an' medicines, cook my own food an' some of the patients', an' do all the dressings an', ma'am, I think it was too much for one woman to do properly. As to my meals, I could hardly get time to take 'em at all. It was generally a chop or steak, because that took quickest to cook; but bless you, m'm, it was often as not got charred up to a cinder an' then as cold as ice twice over afore I'd time to eat it, an' then only by a mouthful at a time. As to vegetables, they were out of the question; an' the tea stood on the hob all day simmerin' and stewin', till it was more like boiled cabbage leaves than anything else." Such were the conditions of a nurse's life in the good old times! Miss Firth began the experiment for the amelioration of the nurses' lot in her own home in London, where she received seven or eight nurses. She found them private work, and allowed them to take the whole of their earnings subject to a small commission for office expenses and advertisement. The numbers grew rapidly. Great care was taken in the selection of nurses, and in suiting the nurse to the special patient. Miss Firth had the faculty in a very marked degree of creating an *esprit de corps* amongst her workers, and they regarded her with peculiar love and veneration.