

To the probationer-nurses of the Nightingale Fund School at St. Thomas's Hospital / Florence Nightingale, New Year's Day, 1886.

Contributors

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9/22
TO THE

Probationer-Nurses

OF THE

NIGHTINGALE FUND SCHOOL,

AT

ST. THOMAS'S HOSPITAL.

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE.

NEW YEAR'S DAY,

1886.

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NEW YEAR'S DAY, 1886.

MY DEAR FRIENDS,

My first New Year's thoughts are for you all—for dear Matron, Home Sister, Ward Sisters, Nurses, all, Day and Night, all, all. My first prayers are: may the highest blessings be poured upon your New Year. A Happy New Year to you all. And if we really give ourselves to our work in a high and humble spirit, remembering whose "business" it is that we are upon, a Happy New Year will be ours. We thank you all, all, for the progress made. But progress is only a step to more progress, or it may well be going backward instead of forward.

What is giving ourselves to our work? It is when duty, intelligence, humanity, religion (or the tie to God), are all embarked with us in our work. How happy are we Nurses that we can always have this, if we please, in OUR work. *Then* we are always on the winning side. These are our helmet and our breast-plate.

I can remember a famous Teacher of Medicine once saying to his students: [What he said may be turned

even better to the use of us Nurses.] I cannot tell it you half as well as in his own words. So here they are, as well as I can remember :—

After saying that “our” business must be with the diseased body, he goes on :

“This body must be our study and our continual care,—our active, willing, earnest care. Nothing must make us shrink from it. In its weakness and infirmities, in the dishonours of its corruption, we must still value it, still stay by it, to mark its hunger and thirst, its sleeping and waking, its heat and its cold, to hear its complaints, to register its groans.

“And is it possible to feel an interest in all this? Ay, indeed it is, a greater, far greater interest than ever painter or sculptor took in the form and beauties of its health.”

Then he asks, “Whence comes this interest? At first, perhaps, it seldom comes naturally.”

And he goes on to urge the scientific aspect and interest, winding up with, “But does the interest of nursing the sick stop here?” and pressing the “moral motive” of “humanity,” the spiritual motive of “religion,” till he concludes, “Why, then, indeed happy is he whose mind, whose moral nature, and whose spiritual being are all harmoniously engaged in the daily business of his life; with whom the same act has become his own happiness, a dispensation of mercy to his fellow creatures, and a worship of God.”

The man who taught this is dead. But his life lives after him. As he spoke and taught, so he lived and died.

Does it not seem as if this were spoken precisely for us Nurses ?

And, first, we can apply his words to Nurses' care of Patients. Our interest in their weakness and infirmities, our observation of their symptoms and pains, of what they eat and how much they eat, feeding the helpless ones, never leaving their food on the locker and taking it away untasted, giving the drink of milk or of water when wanted ; marking the quality of their sleep, of their several functions ; attending to their warmth, their hot bottles, their fresh air, their cleanliness, carefully washing, when ordered, between blankets ; never weary of changing those who want changing ; listening to their complaints, and caring for all the thousand-and-one petty details which *are* important, which often are *vital*, and which make up the good Nurse ; saying the word in season, scrupulous as to the cleanliness of Ward—its freedom from dust—of utensils, and Ward Offices. For this, the *sanitary* care of Patients makes the difference as to whether "Hospital" does them good or harm.

And never let this interest flag, however hurried and busy we may be.

Our teacher says to his students that this interest seldom perhaps comes naturally. Perhaps not with students. I think it *does* with Nurses. But it must always be reinforced with the feeling of duty, for Patients often are tiresome and we are tired.

Then comes, too, the intelligent interest in the symptoms and varieties of disease, called, rather grandly, the "spirit of science."

And still we ask, Does the interest of nursing the sick stop here ?

No, indeed ; if we deserve the name of women, a thousand times, No.

"Humanity" is our "moral motive," more even than it is that of men.

As one nursing a tedious case once wrote : "Don't let us Nurses look at Patients as merely 'cases.' Let us look at what we can do for them."

[She had been shocked at twice hearing Nurses say of their Patients, 'she didn't care for the "case."']

Here comes in our "humanity," our devotion to our fellow creatures.

And, first and last, last and first, comes "religion."

What is religion ? Some have the religion of ourselves ; some of praise—what people will think of us ; some of fear—what they will say of us ; some of making our way in the world, &c. Whatever is the motive power is the religion. None of these motives are absolutely bad. Our work *ought* to be worthy to command its pay.

But true religion is *life* in its highest form. True religion is to do all that we are doing to the best of our power. Will God say of *us*, religion was their life ? not

merely crying Lord, Lord, but inspiring what we do and how we do it, inspiring the *daily business* of our lives.

In *our* work we can be always "worshipping" God, without turning aside a hair's breadth from our daily business.

Like the cabin boy on board the man-of-war the whole night before the battle. When he was kept incessantly on his feet, running, fetching, carrying, he was "alone with" his God for an hour "in the crown of his cap," as he told the mate, who said that during the battle there was not an experienced old tar cooler or readier for everything than he.

That is a very good thought we say, always to be worshipping God in our daily-work. Such worship is always acceptable to Him.

But do we live it as well as think it?

Do we each of us, as we think and speak it, do each of us live it? and when we come to die, like the Teacher, shall we die it?

This is my New Year's prayer for you, that such may be your "happiness," such your "mercy," such your "worship." And do you pray for me, for I am grievously wanting, that, in this New Year, I may find "happiness," "mercy," "worship," in my work.

And here I must implore you to remember that God commands us Nurses to keep a sensible but not selfish care of our own bodies. For how can we serve our

Patients well, or glorify God in our work, when half-hearted, weary, and dull, as is so often brought on by lack of proper care of the wants of our bodies, fresh air, regularity in going to bed and getting up, taking proper and sufficient food to nourish us, for in a few months you will all be out of this Home. And this caution is needed most by those out of the Home.

And to all who have ever been in this Home I am sure we send a greeting.

You all of you know the precautions against finger poisoning, against breathing "corruption." Try yourselves—you *know* it all—whether you *do* it.

2. A man whom we can scarcely even now mention without tears, a hero who fell at the post of duty, fell with his falling Khartoum, after sustaining a siege of eleven months, unparalleled—in history, a saint whose first anniversary in heaven is on the 26th of this month—General Gordon—said of himself, how he prayed daily that he himself might be "humbled, these poor people blessed and comforted, and God glorified."

And don't think that this sounds dismal. Happiness does not mean self-satisfaction. Always an element of true happiness must be humility, especially in us Nurses. Do you remember how in "Pilgrim's Progress" the "valley of humiliation" is so "soft and green"? The valley of humiliation *is* the valley of happiness. It leads us to the Almighty Father, our strength. Our greatest hero,

Gordon, explained that *why* he wished to be “humbled,” was that then he felt the “indwelling God” more. How true that is !

Don't you remember how “Humility scoops away the barren sand of our self-conceit, that so our foundation may rest solidly upon the Rock.”

“Of humility there are many steps. Lay the first solidly, and God will lead thee onward.” “The first step is to know seriously, truly, sincerely, thine own nothingness.”

3. And how are we to keep these qualities alive, which we may call the “spiritual life” in ourselves, and what is almost equally our duty, in one another ?

By using all opportunities of getting a fresh supply from God, by private prayer, by praying together. As we work for one cause, let us pray together for the welfare of that cause.

On New Year's Day I always think of Christ's parting promise and parting command. The parting command was “to teach all things whatsoever He has commanded” us, each one of us to each other ; the parting promise to be with us Himself, with each one of us, *always* “to the end of the world.”

What a promise !

Let us, then, pray together for the welfare of the cause, striving to fulfil Christ's last command “to teach all

things whatsoever He commands"—in the strength of His promise "to be with each of us."

And how are we to "teach," every one of us? How are we to teach the poor Patients, and ourselves, and each other? Not by preaching; by example, by *being* it *ourselves*.

How is every thing spiritual best taught?

We often wonder why it is so much easier to teach what is not good than what is good. Why, but because we teach by *being* it. Nobody *preaches* what is not good. But we teach it, alas! but too successfully by *being* it.

It has often been remarked that an alley in London, a court, an institution, a household, always tends towards the worst instead of towards the best members of it.

But to return. We cannot train others in anything whatsoever without knowing how to do it ourselves.

How much less can we teach goodness, unselfishness, which is the essence of goodness, except by *being* it ourselves!

We may be—we *are*—an example of what is good, or of what is not good, to the Patients every time we pass a bed.

But you will say that Probationers are not so liable to hurt the Patients morally as each other. They impress their "morale" or tone on each other, and so raise or lower that of the School. Still more this is the case

when you have left the School, and are in positions of some authority. Staff Nurses, Sisters, please remember that then you can and do help the cause or—do it infinite harm.

I remember when the Commander-in-Chief, the Duke of Cambridge, on inspecting the cadets at Woolwich, was congratulating and thanking them that latterly they had been following the example of the wise cadets, and not of the foolish ones. And the seniors, he said, must set a good example to their juniors. And he ended by saying, “And if they are tempted to be foolish by one mischievous and foolish fellow, they must keep him in his place, and sit upon him.” The cadets laughed and cheered. “Yes,” he said, “SIT UPON HIM, RATHER THAN LET HIM SIT UPON YOU. That was a far better way of doing it. The fashion had changed, and foolishness, which was a very bad fashion, had gone out, to be, he hoped, no more revived.”

And we, too. Shall we, for “wise cadets,” put the “wise virgins?” May we say, we have good fashions now, thanks to those who set them; a fashion is always set by somebody—a fashion of obedience, of willingness, of order and discipline, and teachableness. And *we* may be those who set the fashion. As a woman, who founded Institutions some hundred years ago, said “*You* may all be ‘founders,’ each one ‘founds’ the fashion of her time.”

Our seniors set an example of this, of thoroughness to their juniors, and let the New Year set us a better fashion still.

To sum up : we teach unconsciously that which we are, whether this be good, indifferent, bad. We do not teach what we preach, but what we are.

4. Let the lessons, the training in each item of Ward nursing and Ward work, be ever more and more a very serious business in this New Year. Let the lessons in Class and at Lecture be more and more a very serious business, as serious—as what shall I say ?—as any Royal Prince's at Berlin, as serious as our Princess Royal gives them “at a Court which, we are told, is itself a First-class in one vast National School—a Court where no Prince is suffered to be idle”—where the Examinations of Princes are as hard as those of any man being examined for his profession on which he is to live.

Every Prince in Prussia must learn a trade. Let us learn our trade, our practice of Nursing, like Princes.

5. Did you hear of the young naval officer who was appointed by Lord Wolseley to guide the troops in that dark night of Tel-el-Kebir in Egypt, by the light of the stars, to the enemy. He led them to the right spot straight as an arrow ; the action began : he was the first to fall, mortally wounded.

The moment the battle was won, back galloped Lord Wolseley to see him once more. What were the dying man's first words ? “General,” he said, “didn't I lead them straight ? ”

He lived to be carried on board the Hospital ship where two of our Sisters were Nurses, but not to reach England—

not to see again his young wife waiting for him at Portsmouth—not to see his little child born after his death.

But he had “led them straight.” May we be able to “go and do likewise !”

If we are to act straightly, and lead others straight, we must be prepared to go wherever, and do whatever our superior officer bids us, and, also, we must stick to our posts.

If we are to act straightly and lead others straight, we must learn each detail of Ward work and of Ward order and cleanliness, with as much thoroughness and conscience we must attend to each rule and regulation, and never evade any, with as much honour and truth, as if we were of an army being led not to defeat but to victory, as indeed we are.

The life and death, the recovery or invaliding of Patients, depend generally not on any great and isolated act, but on the unremitting and thorough performance of every minute's practical duty.

I began my “Notes on Hospitals” with “the first thing in a Hospital is that it should do the Patients no harm.” The first thing for a Probationer is that she should do the Patients no harm. She will always be in danger of doing them harm, noticed or unnoticed, if she is not thorough and perfect in every detail of Ward work, of order and cleanliness, and down to the temperature of a hot water bottle (or “up,” which you please) or of a poultice. The smallest thing is important to a Patient, to that most

delicate instrument, the human body. We are justly horrified at a mistake in giving medicine or stimulant. We are not perhaps so horrified as we should be at mistakes in fresh air, feeding helpless Patients, cleanliness, warmth, order, and all the rest of what we are taught are the Nursing helps to Nature and the Physician and Surgeon.

It is straightness that is so much wanted : straightness of purpose, work, conduct.

I have said nearly these same words before. But let us *do*. Let each of us at the close of every day of this New Year be able humbly to ask of OUR "Great Commander,"—and to lead straight, we must go straight ourselves—did I lead them straight? Did I go straight, and lead straight, in my day's work?

God bless you all.

FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE.





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