

THE NURSE IN LITERATURE

By MARY MORGAN, R.N.

Kansas City, Mo.

Charles Dickens has portrayed Sairy Gamp and her sister nurse, Mrs. Harris, exactly as the nurses of those days were, they say. Intemperate and indiscrete women they were, who desecrated the sacred name of nurse, for sacred it is, almost akin to mother, meaning to nourish, cherish, foster and raise from a weak condition. Sairy Gamp drank like a fish, ate like a gourmand and confiscated the pillows of her dying patient for her own use. After he was dead, she inwardly quaked with joy at the prospect of a ride to the cemetery!

Some modern writers are not any more flattering to our profession than Dickens was forced to be. In *Elizabeth and her German Garden* the "Man of Wrath" expresses himself as follows:

Gentleness and tact! I have never found those qualities in the professional nurse. According to my experience she is a disagreeable person who finds in private nursing exquisite opportunities for asserting her superiority over ordinary and prostrate mankind. I know of no more humiliating position for a man than to be in bed having his feverish brow soothed by a sprucely dressed strange woman, bristling with starch and spotlessness. He would give one-half his income for his clothes and the other half if she would leave him alone and go away altogether. He feels her superiority through every pore, he never before realized how absolutely inferior he is. He is abjectly polite, contemptibly conciliatory. If a friend comes to see him, he eagerly praises her in case she should be listening behind the screen. He cannot call his soul his own and, what is far more intolerable, neither is he sure his body really belongs to him. He has read of ministering angels and the light touch of a woman's hand; but the day on which he can put on his own socks in private fills him with the same sort of wildness of joy that he felt as a homesick school boy at the end of his first term of school.

To the unimaginative, the professional nurse appears merely as an extremely self-confident woman, wisely concerned, first of all, in her personal comfort, much given to complain about her food and possessing an extraordinary capacity for fancying herself slighted or not regarded as the superior being she knows herself to be.

In the *Friend of the Garden* by Edith Wharton, from the standpoint of the humanitarian, the nurse, Justine Brent, is fine. She gives her incurable patient an overdose of morphine, purposely, and puts her out of her misery. Such an act is the very antithesis of the word nurse and we must condemn her severely.

Then there is Miss Jane in *The Rosary*. She is a lovely lady and nurse, but she is too love-lorn to be practical. Anyone who would

punish herself as she did, to see how her patient suffered, would not be worth shooting. So don't ape Miss Jane.

In *The Christian*, Hall Caine's fertile brain has brought out Glory Quayle. She fits into the book perfectly with John Storm, but not into our profession.

In *The Calling of Dan Matthews*, the author, Harold Bell Wright, has spoiled the nurse, for she influences the minister to leave his profession, the highest calling, and enter the mercantile world.

In *The White Linen Nurse*, Rae McGregor helps the senior surgeon and his crippled daughter out of their cramped lives, beautifully. If the White Linen Nurse had never had her three years' training it would have been very unfortunate for the two afflicted people in the book, namely, the senior surgeon and his disagreeable, crippled, little daughter. All the same there is something radically wrong with the White Linen Nurse. Don't pattern after her.

Is there any character in fiction that could answer to the ideal nurse? There may be, but those we have met are bruised and dwarfed in some way.

Let us turn to the field of non-fiction. "Truth is always stranger than fiction." A most fascinating narrative is the story of the *Red Cross* by Clara Barton. Her personal reminiscences are so clear and you feel so keenly her personality as she describes each great catastrophe that has befallen our land and time. The many lives that have been saved and the suffering alleviated are truly wonderful. This book will commemorate the life work of a good woman and nurse and is indeed an inspiration to all nurses.

Then, the *Life of Florence Nightingale* is equally interesting and beautiful. Her early struggles on the battle field with unorganized nursing, result, in time, in all being changed as we have nursing today, "Is as a tale written by God's own fingers." In reading about her works one realizes they stand as lofty mountains, having for their foundation the universal peace and comfort of all men. We must emulate Florence Nightingale.

In addressing a graduating class a minister said, "The Savior was the greatest physician and also the greatest nurse." In the broadest sense He was, He laid his hands on the fevered brow and brought many from weakened conditions. He willingly touched the loathsome body of the leper, as He said, "Be thou clean." "Clean," the countersign of the nurse, how often He uses that word! "Pray for those who despitefully use you and persecute you," may often mean irrational patients. Little things are of great importance with Him as with all good nurses. The

"cup of cold water" is invaluable. His ethics are the best always. In the long night watch of Gethsemane, they all slumbered, He kept His night watch, a faithful nurse over the sin-sick world, and on the rising orb of Eternity's morn He said, "Father forgive them for they know not what they do." Let us profit more and more from the Savior's example, as the ideal of all literature for nurses.

IMPROVISING

I

SANITARY DISPOSITION OF SPUTUM

BY MARY E. LEWIS, *Winchester, Ohio*

I recently had a bronco-pneumonia patient, seventy-four years of age, who coughed and expectorated much mucus. She was not strong enough to raise her head and expectorate into a vessel; necessarily the mucus had to be wiped from her lips with something soft, which would not irritate the lips. Not being sufficiently supplied with cloths, I began using toilet paper and found it cheap, handy and sanitary. I secured a large paper bag and turned the top over twice forming a cuff at the top and causing the bag to remain open while standing on the floor. When the bag was full I burned it, thus disposing of the expectorated matter in a sanitary way.

II

UNIQUE PLACES FOR THE IRONING BOARD

BY LEONORE L. RALL, R.N., *Colorado Springs, Colo.*

Aside from the undisputed right of the ironing board, this homely piece of furniture has for a time held a respected place in my professional work.

"Six days shalt thou rest, but the seventh day shalt thou be put to the severest tests." There it stood in a corner, dumb and unappealing, with but one mission in life. I saw it from where I sat at the table, absently eating, but busily devising a plan. The doctor's order was, "Move the patient as little as possible." At 8.30 she was to be operated upon. "Move the patient as little as possible," I repeated. Suddenly, as if some creature suggested the idea, I looked again at the ironing board. How simple it was! My patient was placed gently upon it, after being anesthetized, and was again carried to bed. After that I regarded the ironing board as a friend.