

HOSPITAL WORK IN THE MIDDLE AGES

HUMANITY'S DEBT TO THE RELIGIOUS ORDERS

Dr. James J. Walsh, Ph.D., LL.D., of Fordham University, delivered recently (says the *Philadelphia Catholic Standard and Times*) a lecture on the 'Organisation of Hospital Work and Nursing in the Middle Ages.' The lecturer took his audience first to the three pagan nations most distinguished for their humanity to the suffering and their reverence for the dead—Egypt, Greece, and Ireland. He spoke of the scientific status of the medical profession among the Egyptians; of the new readings of long-buried papyri, which reveal and conceal so much as to make a modern reader conclude that these intellectual North Africans were proficient in the science of prevention and in the art of healing. He showed that the open-air cure was no novelty in ancient Greece; that vapor baths were prescribed by Irish physicians even in pagan times, and he mentioned 'The House of Sorrow'—one of the earliest hospitals known, which was founded and maintained by the Red Branch Knights in Emania (Ulster) 300 B.C.

Recognised the Brotherhood of All Mankind.

Early attempts to care for the suffering, as Dr. Walsh demonstrated, were dictated by mere prudence or by family affection. Only with Christianity came the practical exposition of the greatest of all virtues, charity—charity recognising the brotherhood of all mankind rather than of one family or one class, and claiming a most affectionate kinship with the poor, whom Christ recommended so tenderly to the mercy of His followers.

The lecturer then traced the organisation of hospital service through the foundation of the religious Orders, the members of which obeyed literally the injunction of Our Saviour, 'Go sell all thou hast and give it to the poor, and come, follow Me!' The miracles of healing wrought by the Divine Physician inspired His followers to effect countless cures through the miracle of patient love. The religious specialised in medicine; one Order, devoted solely to the care of patients afflicted with erysipelas, prevented the spread of contagion by isolating the sufferers—a system only recently advocated by modern doctors. More familiar is the story of the extermination of leprosy by the same methods of segregation. This terrible disease was once as common as tuberculosis is with us, but the lazarettos or leper colonies established by the monastic Orders practically drove leprosy out of the world.

Among the Benedictines, nuns as well as monks, were scholarly and efficient physicians. The speaker instanced St. Hildegard, the famous Benedictine abbess, who made so many valuable contributions to medical literature, and who is said to have discovered the secret of the circulation of the blood centuries before Harvey's time.

Early Anaesthesia and Antisepsis.

Anaesthesia and antisepsis, the two major triumphs of latter-day surgery, were anticipated by the doctors and nurses of the great Middle Ages. Dr. Walsh told of the washing of wounds with heated wine and the successful closures following this process. He described the mediaeval method of superinducing temporary unconsciousness by using inhalations of mingled opium, hemp and mandragora. With these simple methods surgical operations were clean, comparatively painless, and amazingly successful. The closing of the monasteries and the secularisation of the religious hospitals following the 'Reformation' wrought a thousand times more woe to the perpetrators of the wrong than to the scattered, exiled, and martyred religious, whose lives had been devoted to the alleviation of suffering. We hear no more of chemical cleanliness or of the mitigation of pain. Operations became butcheries; septicemia carried uncounted thousands to untimely graves. Not until the middle of the nineteenth century were anaesthetics and antiseptics rediscovered, and our much-vaunted 'progress' in this direction is merely a reversion to methods in use five centuries ago.

The Middle Ages were ages of civic pride. There were no large cities as we estimate size nowadays, and

at that time quality rather than quantity counted. Every 'little city' of five thousand inhabitants had its own hospital, with resident and visiting physicians and trained nurses. Artists decorated 'the long, bare wall of the hospital' with beautiful frescoes, that the eyes of the sufferers might have the comfort of beauty in their lonely hours. At one end of each ward was an altar, where Mass was celebrated daily for the benefit of the patients. By means of sliding partitions private rooms could be converted into wards and wards into rooms, as occasion required. Beautiful colonnaded galleries and terraces were built for the benefit of convalescents recuperating in the open air. Of these magnificent hospitals Pope Innocent III. alone established 117 during his pontificate. One of these hospitals, 700 years old, and still 'as good as new,' was recently pulled down by the present Italian Government because—because it obstructed the view of a statue of Victor Emmanuel.

America's Oldest Hospital.

The oldest hospital in America, established in the city of Mexico by the great Conquistador himself, still flourishes under the patronage of a direct descendant of Cortez. Religious hospitals were established throughout Central and South America by the Spanish in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. In the same period the French founded hospitals in Canada; the famous Hotel Dieu, established by Mlle. Jeanne Mance, was the first in Northern America. The first in the present United States was the Charity Hospital in New Orleans, founded by the French Governors of Louisiana. Modern hospitals in the large cities are of comparatively recent foundation; the oldest dates from the eighteenth century.

MANIFESTO TO THE IRISH PEOPLE

The National Trustees, Most Rev. Dr. O'Donnell, and Messrs. J. E. Redmond, M.P., and John Fitzgerald, M.P., have issued the following manifesto to the Irish people:—

Fellow-countrymen,—Once again the duty devolves upon us of making an annual appeal to you for subscriptions in aid of the Home Rule Fund, and never before have we felt greater confidence that your response will be worthy of our race and nation, and of the great cause of national self-government, upon which our hopes are set, and which is now at last within measurable distance of final and satisfying victory.

For more than 33 years, since the inauguration of the present Irish movement, you have maintained an independent, unpurchasable, and incorruptible Irish representation in the British House of Commons in order that your Constitutional demand for land and learning and liberty should be enforced.

None of the funds now called for will be needed for the maintenance expenses of the members of the Irish Party attending the House of Commons. Those expenses are now provided out of public funds. The sums, however, hitherto provided from the National Funds for this purpose bore only a small proportion to the general expenses of the movement, and this year the expenses of carrying on effectively the National movement in Ireland and Great Britain will be enormously increased. Already, we are informed, the Unionist Party in Ulster have raised £50,000, which they propose to increase to £100,000 shortly, for the sole purpose of carrying on the propaganda in Great Britain. A multitude of their paid agents are at present swarming over every constituency in Great Britain, visiting the houses of individual electors and pouring poison into their ears. Tons of literature, millions of leaflets are being distributed all over Great Britain, and a Press campaign has now been inaugurated against the Home Rule movement and the character of the people of Ireland unparalleled for mendacity and sheer ruffianism since the days of the Parnell Commission.

To carry on the Home Rule propaganda efficiently in Great Britain, and to hold the ground already won in the constituencies, it will be absolutely necessary to