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The President's Page

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In the last issue we concluded with a quotation from the Encyclopedia Britannica indicating that though hospitals cannot be claimed as a direct result of Christianity, it did instill humanitarian views and to make them popular with the civilized people of the world.

That is definite testimony that the Church, in her infinite wisdom, knew that the care of afflicted bodies was an integral part of her God-given ministry—which is to lead men to salvation and the enjoyment of everlasting happiness. The Church, better than any other person or institution in this rugged world, knows that suffering is mankind's inevitable cross. Her Divine Founder demonstrated in a dramatic way that this is true. He is the Lord of Mercy, the Succor of the suffering. She is the handmaiden of mercy—and has been throughout twenty centuries.

This is the great reason why the Church is, and always has been, under compulsion to collaborate with those ministering to the suffering mankind.

In our previous discussions, we have cited historical testimony to prove that the Catholic Church, far from being what her detractors have accused her of being, an enemy of medical learning and progress, is, on the contrary, a true friend of the physician. She has always been a good provider of the means for the development and the application of the healing arts.

The historical witnesses whom we called to testify to these facts are men universally accepted as competent reporters, men free from bias. Among them have been Dr. Fielding H. Garrison, whose "History of Medicine" is a standard work; Drs. Willius and Dry of the Mayo Clinic, and, finally, the Encyclopedia Britannica. None of these authorities is committed by prejudice or predilection to favoritism towards the Catholic Church in their survey of medical historical facts.

In our citations of evidence from these authorities, we have established the truth that the Church, in the infant years of Christendom and in the medieval years of her greatest influence upon civilization, consistently assisted medical men in acquiring medical knowledge and skill. The Catholic Church was instrumental in the development of hospital programs as well as in the establishment of infirmaries and the asylums where physicians could meet and treat those whose afflictions called for their skill.

What is true of the early ages of the Church and of the mis-called Dark Ages is no less true today. It is even more true. For, as Science has explored and extended the frontiers of medical knowledge, the Church has gone along as its counselor, guide and co-worker, as its good provider of facilities in which medical men could administer these new-found techniques and remedies.

Wherever you may go throughout the world, circumstances permitting, you will find the Catholic churches for men's worship, Catholic schools for their enlightenment, and the Catholic hospitals or dispensary for the relief of sore and afflicted bodies. This is true not only in civilized lands; it is equally true in the remotest mission territories, in farthest India, in darkest Africa, in Japan, in the distant islands of the farthest oceans. You will find priests and religious, devoted men and women, ministering to the most pitiable and loathsome of the maladies that befall mankind — lepers in Molokai, in India, in Africa, in the West Indies—yes, even right here in our own United States, at Carville, Louisiana. In fact, I know of no leprosarium anywhere in the world which is not operated by a religious order.

So much for the more spectacular, the more heroic of the sacrificial phases of the Church's hospital work. The more far-reaching service of the Church to the physician and the patient is Her everyday, routine unspectacular ministry to ordinary people beset with familiar illnesses and afflictions who occupy the beds of our general hospitals.

We won't bore you here with long, exhaustive statistics about hospitals in other lands. Sufficient to prove our point will be a few pertinent figures about our own United States.

In the continental United States, there are 1,125 general hospitals under Catholic auspices. But to be very specific, I think a comparison of the number of beds in the Catholic hospitals with that in non-government would be interesting. In 1933 there were 333,573 beds in church related hospitals and 115,840 beds in non-government institutions. In 1950 there were 419,871 beds in church related hospitals, and 150,078 in non-government ones. It is interesting to note that the total number of hospitals in 1934 under church auspices were 769, and in 1951 we have 1,125, increasing the bed capacity from 97,679 to 139,756. This conveys the idea that the hospitals under Church sponsorship are all keeping pace with the needs of the time and attempting to provide the medical care that is necessary for the people of their respective communities.

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