

London. Christmas Eve - 1877.

My very dear "Nation" Miss Fisher,

I give you joy this first blessed  
Christmas of your charge - & joy to all who are in  
your charge. May your Christmases be many  
& each a new Christmas - & a really new year - a  
new year of progress. My very dear friends I say,  
Hurra for a hard beginning, some progress, & a  
blessed end. That is the true sign of a good beginning,  
as said, (not exactly in these words) one great founder  
some 300 years ago. And when was any good  
work done for God without troubles - especially at  
the outset? So,

Forward the Light Brigade

O the brave charge they made!

No pains will be spared to make the trained  
Nurses of Britain worthy of their brave charge - their  
great career. You have yourselves a beautiful  
Hospital, a beautiful Medical Staff, & a

beautiful nation. Will you spare  
no pains to answer to the pains?

Use then every day more & more real, honest  
thorough nurses in your nursing. O fie to a careless  
nurse! When life or death depend upon it.

Always Forward: Forward: always bring your  
nursing to the bar of your own conscience. even when,  
or rather more when, Head nurse, Matron & Doctor  
are not there to judge it.

I, in my old age, do this. Do it all your lives, do  
it with all your might, if you would be good nurses.  
A good nurse will make progress, & learn something  
to the last day of her nursing life.

There is a great temptation to a young Community  
to be in a hurry, to scratch the ground & not to  
dig deep - to do surface work - to put in cut flowers  
instead of growing flowers & fruit from the seed.  
Strike your roots deep, rather than spread your  
branches too far - Stick together & stick to  
your Superintendent like a bundle of faggots -  
you know the fable.

For this purpose I will tell you the rule which exists

in a community, & trust. They read once a week the verses about charity in the famous chapter in Corinthians - & 3 or 4 times a day they just think to themselves - Am I doing that? if not, I am a nurse like a tinkling cymbal.

Now dear friends, will you make a bargain with me. I will do this till next Christmas, (if I live so long, for I am very ill,) if you will -

Wish well to every other trained, training & "in training" nurse in the country. O that a good thing is friendly rivalry!

In past days the utmost that was done for a nurse was to expect from her obedience; she was simply told what had to be done, & ordered to go & do it. Now - the utmost pains are taken to show her why it has to be done & how. [Is it not then much easier now to have the spirit of obedience?] This then is what is called training. Training which is given her, & experience which she nurse must give herself every day of her life, & which her training shows her how to give herself, so to make the good nurse.

Let your experience cast its light before, so as to

give light to the path before you - not only to the path behind, - which, as S. Paul says, you must leave behind. That is a melancholy sort of experience. Show that you have been with Jesus - don't be afraid of seeming unlearned & ignorant. I feel every day of my life - though perhaps I number as many years of experience as you of life - how ignorant & unlearned I am. The best trained nurse is unlearned & ignorant. Do you remember what it says in Acts about S. Peter's & S. John's wonderful influence, & all coming from this, that though they were unlearned & ignorant, people could see that they had been with Jesus. Can our patients so sharp to see, & our assistants see in us that each day we have been with Jesus? Each one of us may in her life perhaps remember some one of whom she always felt that she had been with Jesus. What an influence she had! What a shame it is that I & every one of us cannot say this of herself! What shows that I have been with Jesus today? A really great man who lived long ago - one of the first of the trainers both of missionaries & of nurses - his nurses still number some 20,000.

& I have worked with them myself - used to say  
 to his hainers - You will not sin them by saying  
 fine things. & I add - You will not sin them by  
 saying hard things - Perhaps they know more than  
 we do, or perhaps we can tell them nothing that  
 they have not heard or read before a hundred times,  
 but it is what they see that hains them.

Dear Nurses all, by all means let us mind what we  
say, but still more let us mind what we do - let  
 them, our Probationers only, see in us what they had  
 better do themselves, & never what they had better  
 avoid. What we wish them to do let them see us  
 do. Let them, our Patients only, see alike in  
 Nurses & Probationers what will do them good to see.  
 And for this end let us never do anything but  
 what we should wish to be seen - And for this  
 end let us be with Jesus every day.

Now I dont want to preach but to practise, & if you  
 knew me you would know that I need to practise  
 perhaps more than any of you -

But I dont mean to give in - I mean to reform -  
 please God Almighty yet, that I may glory in  
 my infirmities. Will you excuse an old, old

hospital nurse like me - who lived before  
training was thought of - for saying what I think  
the most dangerous flaws in trained nurses now.  
You, a young community, have not felt them yet -  
but if you live as I wish you Jacob's 144 years  
you will have to avoid them -

One is complaining

The other conceit.

Be watchful be vigilant,  
Danger may be  
at an hour when all seemeth  
securest to thee -

Complain, what business have we to complain? Is  
that brave? is that making a brave charge?

Qui se plaint pèche.

(The Superintendent will tell  
you what that means, she never  
complains.

Trained nurses talk a great deal about being  
Pioneers - & yet the first trouble or trial we have -  
the first discomfort do we say - O this is not like  
the place I was accustomed to! or This is not  
what I expected! or (we may be ordered to do  
something different or something we don't like)  
This is inconvenient! we never did so, this is

not my place - this is unfair - this is putting upon me.

If we feel or talk thus, then all our fine words about pioneering or God's work, are, of course mere rant & cant, & we are only hitting cymbals.

Conceit. Is that brave? Did we ever know a really brave man conceited? Any conceit is the result not of training, but of defect of training - & when a trained nurse is conceited she shows herself untrained. Is God conceited? No

What then are we cleverer than God?

And now - Forward the Light Brigade of Cambridge. May you all be able to say at your first New Year in another world - "O the brave charge was made!"

May we all be soldiers of God!

Your affectionate servant

Florence Nightingale