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Thoughts of an Incurable

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Part 1



THOUGHTS OF AN INCURABLE.



WITH AN
INTRODUCTION
BY THE
VEN^{BLE} ARCHDEACON SINCLAIR, D.D.



RHN/FU/2/3/20

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INTRODUCTION

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VENBLE. ARCHDEACON SINCLAIR, D.D.

1871

With the compliments of the
Board of Management of the
Royal Hospital for Incurables,
Putney Heath.

Christmas, 1912.

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"WHAT more dost thou want when thou hast
done a man a service? Art thou not
content that thou hast done something conformable
to thy nature, and dost thou seek to be paid for
it, just as if the eye demanded a recompense for
seeing, or the feet for walking?"—*Marcus Aurelius*.

FOREWORD.

A GREAT HOME for Incurables is one of the most touching sights in the whole world, and an object for kindness which every one who knew about it would wish to help. Two hundred and thirty in-patients dependent on your sympathy! Seven hundred pensioners in their own modest homes all over the United Kingdom mainly looking to this generous fountain of Charity for their maintenance! It is a grand undertaking, and every year the Board of Management have to issue a new appeal to obtain fresh supporters to take the place of friends who have passed away.

It is no easy matter for the Board, after so many issues year after year, to prepare a Christmas Appeal which shall be at once arresting, interesting, and calculated to result in response on the part of strangers among the benevolent and kind-hearted public. The ROYAL HOSPITAL FOR INCURABLES, Putney Heath, has

little variety in its annals. Unlike a General Hospital, with all its different cases and medical and surgical investigations and discoveries, it occupies an almost unique place in the great world of Charity; the beneficiaries are all of one physical class; they are "the Incurable"; they cannot help themselves; they are at the mercy of their more fortunate fellow creatures; their needs are the same day after day and year after year. Wonderful operations and exemplary cures are out of the question. The Board have no romantic episodes to describe; their annual story is just the simple, pathetic record of helplessness and need.

The ROYAL HOSPITAL FOR INCURABLES, Putney Heath, is the largest and oldest Institution of its special character in the world; no other approaches its 230 Inmates and 700 Pensioners. The annual expenditure is £35,000, of which the sum of £6,000 only is assured; the huge sum of £29,000, therefore, must be raised yearly from voluntary sources.

On the following pages the "THOUGHTS OF AN INCURABLE" are modestly set forth; there is a thought for every day in the year. I believe these thoughts

Thoughts of an Incurable.

January 1st.

NEW YEAR'S DAY! My New Year's wish is:
"May all sufferers be comforted."

January 2nd.

IF the Board of Management of the Royal Hospital for Incurables were to listen to all the tales of woe they hear with their hearts and not with their heads, there would soon be a muddle.

January 3rd.

ONE of my ward-fellows has a pretty way of never admitting that she is to blame for anything.

January 4th.

THE sound of tears always hurts me, and I often fancy I hear it.

January 5th.

AFTER all, the mystery of pain is no greater than the mystery of beauty.

January 6th.

GOD is good to the Patients of this Hospital, and I think we all ought to be very good to each other.

January 7th.

A BRUTAL experience is sometimes very bracing.

January 8th.

WE Incurables believe many things that we cannot prove.

January 9th.

THE friends we really love most are not those who say all they know about us, but those who do not tell all that there is to tell.

January 10th.

THE birds in the trees outside my window little know for how many hours a day I spy upon them.

January 11th.

SOME misguided people seem to imagine that progress is merely change.

January 12th.

CAN you wonder that we incurables are sometimes ready with our reproaches?

January 13th.

IF my life were a scheme to be benefited by my own ability, how nervous I should be.

January 14th.

"TO-MORROW never comes," but we take care to have some coals in the cellar.

January 15th.

GIVE us invalids the benefit of the doubt, if you are ever disposed to think us impatient or ungrateful.

January 16th.

WE conquer by forgiveness, if only we knew it.

January 17th.

SOME persons seem to suppose that State Aid will take the place of Brotherly Love.

January 18th.

DEALING with some folk is not unlike using too short a bit of sealing wax ; one will probably burn one's fingers.

January 19th.

How terrible it would be if the sky, which I can see through my window, were always one pattern, as is my counterpane !

January 20th.

THE wind blows to-day as if it had been lazy of late and was determined to turn over a new leaf. Foolish wind, in January all the leaves are old ones.

January 21st.

THERE is always some kind friend who will scoff at a new departure.

January 22nd.

TURNING misfortunes into capital is as rare as it is excellent.

January 23rd.

SUNSHINE to-day. The sky is clear and the tall poplar trees point towards Heaven without any hesitation whatever.

January 24th.

GOD sends the early Spring flowers and how marvellous it is that He should have colours left over for the Autumn tints.

January 25th.

GOSSIP in a Hospital is like sand in an egg-boiler ; it runs so quickly from one department to another.

January 26th.

MY prayer for to-day is : Give me a charitable mind in a body that is kept by Charity.

January 27th.

PAIN brings dark thoughts to me which are no more voluntary than are my sleepless nights my desire.

January 28th.

IF I could find it possible to be always good and always kind, I think even my pains would not make me very unhappy.

January 29th.

SOME persons look forward to a good dinner ; some Incurables are grateful if they can enjoy and digest a basin of bread-and-milk.

January 30th.

"GOD made the country and man made the town," and the Royal Hospital for Incurables stands between the two !

January 31st.

SOMETIMES I wake up suddenly in the morning and blissfully think I am quite well and strong, but, a moment's reflection, and I am a chronic invalid again.

February 1st.

UNWELCOME truths and thoughts will out : my poor body is a heavy burden to-day.

February 2nd.

MOST human questions are only like sparks that fly up inquisitively and die without being satisfied.

February 3rd.

SOME good, faithful souls tell all their friends that they are determined to persevere, and yet they live and die apparently unsuccessful.

February 4th.

HAVE you ever seen a tender blade of fresh green grass growing bravely in a foul and dismal spot ?

February 5th.

MEMORIES may sadden some and gladden some : I am glad my mother was a good woman.

February 6th.

I WOULD rather see the sunrise from my window than any pantomime : but, then, I am no longer young.

February 7th.

I AM glad to have a soul at liberty, although my body is, as it were, a tethered goat.

February 8th.

SYMPATHY brings in to the Royal Hospital for Incurables £35,000 a year.

February 9th.

I CLAIM no place in the history of the world, only let me say that I love the flowers.

February 10th.

THE flame of the sunset sets me thinking : flames will spread, but they do not always consume.

February 11th.

THE cleverest of us are utterly puzzled sometimes, else the medical profession would cure all Incurables.

February 12th.

To be stricken down by an incurable disease is something like the condition of a tree that has been struck by lightning.

February 13th.

SINCERITY always pays, even in advertising.

February 14th.

THE stronger your case is, the more you can afford to your opponent.

February 15th.

IF a man has to rule and advise others, an india-rubber attitude is no good whatever.

February 16th.

IF I had less pain my readers might have more, for my Diary would be fuller!

February 17th.

HOSPITAL patients are not unlike tame domestic animals: they become very observant.

February 18th.

I SOMETIMES wonder why so many men who own beautiful homes spend so much time in stuffy railway carriages.

February 19th.

SURELY a certain tendency is a certain weakness.

February 20th.

VISITORS' eyes are all different: some eyes speak of sympathy and others speak only of curiosity.

February 21st.

SOMETIMES the dawn drives away my fears, and sometimes the dawn only brings with it the dread of another weary day.

February 22nd.

I CANNOT always trust myself to write, because to-day, for instance, my bondage is so heavy.

February 23rd.

THE trust of a little child is no sweeter than a sense of pain banished : both are delicious.

February 24th.

A MISCHIEVOUS thought came to me to-day : even we Incurables have our blessings ; for example, nobody dreams of borrowing money from us !

February 25th.

MY pains and weariness are sometimes as persistent as a playing fountain.

February 26th.

IF one has a vast number of letters to write in the hope of pleasing all the recipients, one needs supple dexterity and an uncommonly big vocabulary.

February 27th.

MENTAL comfort and physical torture lie huddled together in my bed.

February 28th.

THE application of knowledge is all that matters ; knowledge that is not applied is of about as much use as an unlighted candle in a dark room.

March 1st.

IT is our Committee's fault if our thanks are not as warm as they should be to those who keep up this National Charity.

March 2nd.

AN appeal for funds is often tearful ; I think it ought to be masterful. Folk don't obey what is matter-of-fact ; they need overpowering.

March 3rd.

IF I could always smile when I speak, visitors would say I am too proud of my thankfulness.

March 4th.

THE choicest art is not always recognised. If the lamentation of a soul could be put down on paper it would be termed "femininity."

March 5th.

GROANS and tears are not wanted. Hospital visitors prefer to be cheered up !

March 6th.

I WOULD give all the money I shall ever have to hear the sea ripple up on the Yorkshire coast once more, but I'm in Putney.

March 7th.

I LIE here quietly in my bed in the Royal Hospital for Incurables, Putney Heath, and watch the tragedy and the comedy of human life.

March 8th.

WHEN I die I will leave my little personal trifles to somebody who was always kind.

March 9th.

THE sky is blue to-day and I am very grateful for it. This is not a great thought—it is a modest one. Who was it who said that modesty is the last refuge of mediocrity?

March 10th.

It is difficult to set a good example if one does not feel good, unless one is a born actress.

March 11th.

How busy the rooks are in March; they are more intent upon courtship than upon corn.

March 12th.

Is not a smoky lamp like a bad-tempered human being; it is not at its best, and it offends.

March 13th.

It ought not to be necessary for the captain of the ship to clean the lamps.

March 14th.

A LADY—young and pretty—came and sang to us in our ward to-day. I am not envious; I am very grateful for the sight of a pretty face and the sound of a beautiful and disciplined voice.

March 15th.

A FELLOW patient died to-day. Parting from a friend for ever and plucking a flower (tearing it away from its home) are not dissimilar.

March 16th.

THE glad smile on the face of a visitor whom one loves is as good to me as a line of fine poetry.

March 17th.

Bits of gossip! How swift and how magic they are; we feel guilty, and yet we cannot help it.

March 18th.

GETTING ready for a Bazaar is almost as fatiguing as worrying over the performances of the Boat Race crews.

March 19th.

A STIFLED cry in the night, or a splash of vivid colour in a famous picture, is open to many interpretations.

March 20th.

THE blank surprise of the under-paid cabman is not to be compared with the disappointment of the Incurable whose promised visitor does not come.

March 21st.

THE March winds are nearly over and the April showers are here. I wonder if the little flowers really care; if they are eager to see the world to which they are about to be born.

March 22nd.

I CANNOT help wondering whether character or complexion is the more important when I read some books.

March 23rd.

THE tenderest Charities in all Europe are surely the care of Little Children and of Incurables. I put the Children first because they came last.

March 24th.

I LIKE a man to be rude rather than colourless, and a woman to be colourless rather than spiteful.

March 25th.

IT was Meredith who said "There is nothing the body suffers that the soul may not profit by."

March 26th.

SOME of my friends say to me: "be steadfast; never waver." Possibly they think I'm an iron-railing.

March 27th.

I WAS once enthralled by seeing an angry man put down the stick he was going to strike his wife with, just because the canary started to sing.

March 28th.

SOME folk say that the art of faith is in full swing after dinner.

March 29th.

INTELLIGENCE is all very well, but give me intuition.

March 30th.

LITTLE honesties are habits, and so are little dishonesties. You are dishonest to your better nature if you give nothing to Charity.

March 31st.

I SOMETIMES wish we could write letters to the friends whom we believe to be in Heaven.

April 1st.

THE finest face I ever saw in my life belonged to a dear little silver-haired woman who had had a very troubled life.

April 2nd.

I KNOW some faces and I cannot help thinking of them as faces with greedy eyes.

April 3rd.

SOME of us would give more to Charity if the year's total was stamped upon our foreheads on the last day of the year.

April 4th.

AT school we only get exercises ; it is in later life that we get lessons.

April 5th.

IF we were always kind I think we could not be very wicked ; it seems to me that real kindness is the only real goodness.

April 6th.

WHEN my heart aches I think most gratefully of my kind friends, not of my good friends.

April 7th.

APRIL showers don't improve the Spring hats of our lady visitors, but what do the flowers in the garden care ?

April 8th.

THE ROYAL HOSPITAL FOR INCURABLES stands on the top of a hill, but we get deep shadows here sometimes.

April 9th.

I WONDER if the nesting birds have little girl and boy babies who are sometimes good and sometimes naughty.

April 10th.

THOUGHTFULNESS, it seems to me, is not valued nearly enough. If the gardeners were not thoughtful in good time how poor our flower-beds would be.

April 11th.

IF I could paint, I would try to catch the delight and apprehension on an apple-stealing boy's face.

April 12th.

IT is so easy to believe that the British public is the best and most generous in the wide world, because we all know it for a fact.

April 13th.

BEFORE I became a chronic invalid I was a critic ; now I am an admirer of everything good and I hope the best for everything that is not good.

April 14th.

How difficult it is for a poor talker to charm a listener's lips to silence, but folk who visit the Incurables are very tolerant.

April 15th.

THE true disciples of a great living man will listen to nothing nasty about him ; all men who are higher in brain and deed than the ordinary men have their jealous slanderers.

April 16th.

A HOSPITAL committee must have strong faith nowadays, as well as a good cause.

April 17th.

A SOCIAL habit is not to be despised : earnestness needs diluting in nine cases out of ten.

April 18th.

IF there were as many new thoughts as there are new books what a time readers would have.

April 19th.

EFFORT and struggle are my daily lot, and I am grateful to those who by their gifts to this Royal Hospital express their practical sympathy.

April 20th.

THE tediousness of an old friend is better than a draught—when one has neuralgia.

April 21st.

THE story of my days is written, but not in ink or pencil ; it is in my mind and some of the chapters are more familiar to me than others.

April 22nd.

How refreshing it is to live through a day when the day before a new and pleasant influence came into one's life.

April 23rd.

WE Incurables often draw faithful pictures and all the pleasant pictures have the figure of a subscriber to the Hospital in the foreground.

April 24th.

SOME of the imperishable things in English literature were written—so we are told—by bad-tempered men. I gratefully forgive the bad temper.

April 25th.

ANY human conduct that is original is certain to be criticised ; some people say it is wrong conduct and some say it is odd conduct and some say it is amusing conduct.

April 26th.

I SUPPOSE there are as many emotions in a hospital ward as in a theatre.

April 27th.

WRITING laudatory notices of the Royal Hospital for Incurables ought not to be necessary, but unless it is done the Board of Management have to borrow money from the Bankers.

April 28th.

THE good people who tell us that the Voting System is all wrong have higher critical than creative faculty, for they tell us how to forfeit at least half of the Hospital's income without telling us how to make up what would undoubtedly be lost.

April 29th.

FACTS are often dull, just as fancies are often dull and just as figures to the thriftless are staggering.

April 30th.

SOME thoughts are built out of Hate and some out of Love : this Hospital was built and is kept going by thoughts that are built out of Love.

May 1st.

I DO not trust the details of history, but I do believe England is great because of her history.

May 2nd.

WE Incurables would surely be stealing the gifts of the charitable were we not to be patient and were we to indulge in grumbling, or in fears of a diminishing income.

May 3rd.

IN the name of Christian charity every thought and action should bear scrutiny.

May 4th.

WE cannot hope to help in piloting the souls of our fellow creatures to Heaven if we do not make it our practice to think the best about our own friends.

May 5th.

"THE law made nothing perfect." It is the gift of love that maintains this National Charity and that prompts its unpaid and paid officials to do their best for us.

May 6th.

IF a friend frowns when I smile I feel that I have misunderstood. Incurables are always sensitive.

May 7th.

SWINBURNE lived on Putney Hill, and when he died I felt that we had lost a friend, as well as a neighbour. Neighbours are not always friends.

May 8th.

IF we bind the Future with the Past we do the Future a grave injustice.

May 9th.

WE Incurables have dropped faintly out of the course.

May 10th.

I WONDER if it is a mistake, yet I feel that popular people must often be lonely and sometimes very sad. They must suffer from mental depression, or they would not be bright enough to be popular. The swing of the pendulum again.

May 11th.

IF the birds of the air, who have no settled income, no certain home, can sing so hopefully and so gratefully, how great a lesson we in-patients of the Royal Hospital for Incurables should learn from them.

May 12th.

WE Incurables are not so dull ; we know that the colours of the rainbow are not there by chance.

May 13th.

I CANNOT play, but, thank God, I can see and read and I think I know goodness, because I so often come across it.

May 14th.

THE Hospital grounds stand whitely in the moonlight and at such times as the moon shines I think of my closest friends and wonder what they are doing.

May 15th.

THERE is no lake in the grounds of the Royal Hospital for Incurables, but Heaven is reflected in the grateful hearts of the in-patients.

May 16th.

WHEN the Bishop of London came to the ROYAL HOSPITAL FOR INCURABLES he quoted to one of us : "Look straight into the light, and all the shadows will be behind."

May 17th.

WHEN the strings of the beloved fiddle are broken the old musician still has his memory ; the tunes which are unplayed are perhaps as sweet as the ones which once won him so much applause.

May 18th.

IT is strange how the Sunrise and the Sunsets vary ; no man's temperament is so wonderful. I sometimes think that the greeting from the East is not so beautiful as the farewell from the West, and, again, I sometimes think that the band of timid wooing light in the early morning is more exquisite than the burning good-bye of the evening.

May 19th.

LOVE ought to make us all happy, but I am told it has its very unhappy victims.

May 20th.

WHAT is it all to an Incurable if a great prize-fight, or a running-match, is not so successful as its promoters hoped.

May 21st.

THERE are times for all things : I cannot say that I appreciate the singing of a lusty thrush outside my window at 5 a.m.

May 22nd.

"£35,000 A YEAR" is often in my mind. It is as constantly with me as my brush and comb, yet I regard it as certain to come to this Hospital because we Incurables need it.

May 23rd.

I hope I have a soul which is deeply stirred when I dwell upon what is, as well as upon what might have been.

May 24th.

IF I see an old friend in a dream it is sometimes enough to have a press of the hand; there is not always the necessity for a single word.

May 25th.

LIFE ought to be one long deliberation, whether Death is sudden or not.

May 26th.

I might have lain for years, wretched and uncared for, in the back room on a high floor of a mean house in a squalid street, instead of in a bright clean ward of the Royal Hospital for Incurables, where there are green fields and stately trees beyond my window.

May 27th.

My friend and visitor's hand was warm in mine one day, and now she has been stricken down, and we never meet except in prayer and in faith

May 28th.

WHEN sorrow treads upon our heels the very flowers bend their tender heads in sympathy, and when joy comes to us the flowers bow their heads as if they confirmed the cause of our joy.

May 29th.

To span the years with service for others is surely an ambition we might strive for. Invalids who are well-to-do, but beyond active duty, might remember always this Hospital and Home.

May 30th.

THE sky does not question the sea, nor does the sea doubt the sky; the one reflects the other, and if one frowns, the other lashes itself into a fury.

May 31st.

THE Summer and the Winter are divided by the Autumn, and the Spring and the Autumn are divided by the Summer, but they are all good friends and all work together for mankind. Politicians ought to imitate the Seasons.

June 1st.

THE laughter of the breeze and the whistling of the wind and the song of the birds are all expected by the man on the land, and he goes his ignorant way as if he would be as happy without them.

June 2nd.

HAPLY to Heaven many prayers for financial help go from those who have not themselves the means to support the Royal Hospital for Incurables.

June 3rd.

I AM very ill and weak to-day, but I must write "God is Love."

June 4th.

TEN men were once (for the sake of argument) imprisoned in an absolutely dark room, and the one who never spoke a word was the one who was most looked up to by his companions upon release.

June 5th.

IF a hundred years could band themselves together and take up a pen and write the truth about any one subject, what a wonderful book we should have!

June 6th.

MODESTY does not imitate ; it ennobles.

June 7th.

IF "obligation is a pain," some of us seem to look very well while suffering.

June 8th.

SUCCESS colours life, but our failures sometimes encourage friendships.

June 9th.

SOME men's reputations grow as quickly as garden weeds—and they go under as quickly.

June 10th.

A FRIEND who kneels and watches and speaks words of hope and patience should always remember that the invalid may still have a sense of humour. God gave some of us humour as well as piety.

June 11th.

MY own grief should not stay my sympathy for the grief of others ; it should intensify it.