

## On some Aims and Conditions of a Nurse's Life.

HERE is no doubt that the Nursing profession has of late been making more openly progress towards a higher standard of life and work, but such periods of advance are not without their danger. For some years after Miss Nightingale, Miss Agnes Jones, and other heroines of the Nursing profession, had made Nursing to be recognized as a field of work for educated women, those who devoted themselves to it were exalted, and looked on as angels of charity and goodness; but it is to be feared a reaction followed, and there have been of late such revelations made as tend to show that some, at any rate, find the air of the heights of self-sacrifice too rare for their comfort.

Like all pioneers, the first educated women who entered on the work had many hardships to endure, and many difficulties to overcome; but as was certain to be the case, in the hands of earnest and true women, these real difficulties have been overcome, and their quiet patience and tenacity of purpose have found their reward. The work has gone steadily on, blessing the suffering, and giving joy to the women who have found in it a scope for all that is best in womanhood. While I am prepared to allow that the managers of Hospitals have traded, and do trade, on the devotion and self-sacrifice of their Nurses, I cannot feel that the spirit in which the Hospital Nurses' grievances have sometimes been brought to public notice is likely to result in much good. The sentimental "piling up of the agony," which is the tone of a good deal of writing on the subject, must make all right thinking Nurses pray to be delivered from their friends. That some of the conditions enumerated by these writers are evil, no one will deny; but the cure for such ills will never be found in the invectives of outsiders, but only by combined and organized action on the part of Nurses themselves. This, at last, Nurses are learning. It does not come easily to women, and least of all to those engaged in a work of so absorbing a nature as Nursing.

One writer of the type I have referred to gives the key to the mistake so many make, when, having stated that, "Nursing presents itself to many women as the only means of earning a livelihood." She goes on to announce that it "requires no capital and no special knowledge or qualification." That there still exist those who hold such an opinion points significantly to the fact that the Nursing profession is still far from being understood, and we have need to insist that Nursing is a profession requiring a definite gift, as much as music or painting does; requiring qualification of no mean kind; and a

training and teaching in special branches of knowledge as careful, though perhaps not so protracted, as painting or music. Perhaps it is the mistaken idea that Nursing may be undertaken by those who can do nothing else which has flooded the profession with unsatisfactory Nurses, and grumbling malcontents. Certainly no woman would choose to work, and work cheerfully, twelve or fourteen hours a day under conditions such as we know to exist unless she had some higher motive than "earning a livelihood."

During the years I have had to do with Nurses, it has been to me a study of no small interest to sift their motives in offering themselves. Some were "unable to get on" at home; some thought it a step up in the social scale, with the chance of captivating a house-surgeon thrown in. Of the latter type must have been a girl whom I once asked "What induced you to try to be a Nurse?" and she replied, "Oh, I thought it would be so romantic." Such as these will never make the best Nurses. Only the women who bring to the work a true conviction that they have a God-given vocation, which they are determined, at any cost, to fulfil, can be truly noble good Nurses. It is very necessary if the standard of the profession is to be kept up, that Matrons should thoroughly test, and accept for training only those who are really in earnest. Earnest women will not shrink from work entailing some hardship. As womanly women, they will take delight in self-sacrifice. If they do "give up ten years of their life on entering this profession"—what then?

"A noble life before a long."

It is quite true that this type of Nurse will suffer, without a word, many hardships, which are, in reality, unnecessary.

The work, even without these, is a heavy strain on the conscientious and interested worker, but I cannot accept the novel theory of the survival, not of the fittest, but of the "laziest easy-going drudge." Alas for the Nursing profession were this proved to be true! It is, indeed, time that all Hospital managers realised that they have no right to take advantage of the willing self-sacrifice of their best Nurses. Such Nurses, realising that they are, *firstly*, servants of the sick; and, *secondly*, servants of the committee, will meet the directors half way and make no excessive demands to cripple the already over-taxed Hospital funds, which they believe to be the money of the poor.

In considering Hospital work, it is very necessary to distinguish between the Probationer and the Nurse. For the Probationer eight hours only in Hospital would be excellent, and is not so uncommon an arrangement as some would have us believe. The Probationer's morning hours are devoted to cleaning, dusting, and polishing, in the discharge of which duties she learns to use her hands with

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