

they wished to adopt; and, worst of all, it is claimed by a few unworthy women who have been guilty of serious offences, or who have obtained certificates under conditions which will not bear investigation.

No thoughtful person will deny that, in a very large number of instances, the comfort, the welfare, the recovery, the life of a sick person rests more in the hands of the nurse than of the medical attendant. But what would the public think of a state of things which allowed a heterogenous class of men to call themselves qualified practitioners, some of whom had received a qualification from a Medical School after one year's training, another after two, and others after three or four; who had obtained recognition of their efficiency from no independent body, and under a system—or rather no system at all—which offered no guarantee that they had undergone any training whatever?

Such considerations as these led a number of Physicians, Surgeons, Matrons, and Nurses, to band themselves together under the name of the British Nurses' Association. Their common aim has been to bind Nurses together for purposes of mutual assistance, to raise their standard of general education and professional training, to foster among them an *esprit de corps*, and, eventually, by their united efforts and with the generous assistance of an enlightened public, to raise them to the position of an organised and recognised profession intimately associated with, but in action always subordinate to, that of medicine. And I could even venture to say that such an aim is so noble, and is fraught with consequences of such incalculable importance, as to claim the sympathetic co-operation of the whole nation, and especially of British women. For, although we do not wish to close our eyes to the wider aspect, it is essentially a woman's question. Just in proportion as Nursing has justified its claim to be looked on as a science, have its ranks been more and more monopolized by what—without disparagement of male Nurses—must be regarded as the gentler sex. Few would now be prepared to deny that Nursing is, above all others, a vocation for women. Do they not excel in sensitiveness and fineness of perception, in capacity for observing and mastering details, in patience, unselfishness and endurance, in deftness of hand, gentleness of touch, and noiselessness of movement, and in the power to bring all these qualities into harmony with the one great crowning

and essential virtue of sympathy? None who really know and understand women will deny the justice of such a plea.

Further, most readers of these lines will agree that any pursuit which, either morally or physically tends to impair a woman's fitness for the sacred and honourable duties of married life and motherhood, cannot be regarded as really suited to her sex. But the qualities which I have so imperfectly sketched as being those which, in a Nurse, should be brought to the highest possible perfection, are those which, of all others, are able to shed light on the hearth and fill the home with sweetness.

I do not for a moment wish to assert that all women are so endowed. In some, many of these qualities, perhaps in a few all, are wanting. But such disqualification, though far from involving disgrace—especially if it be natural, or the growth of circumstance—in themselves unavoidable—leaves a woman wholly unfit to minister to the sick. What gifts she has should be cultivated, and, for her own sake, as well as for the happiness of others, her steps should be directed into some other of life's many paths. Not every one can be an artist, a musician, a sculptor, or put great thoughts into becoming words. How few can even prepare a meal to satisfy a discriminating palate? Neither, then, can all women nurse, and here falls a heavy responsibility on Matrons and Sisters. They, and they alone, have power and the opportunity of doing the needful sifting, and by kindly disillusioning the Probationer who is labouring to misapply her gifts, to save her from the bitterness of a wasted life. It is from the standpoint of such considerations as these that I have always regarded the Presidency of the Royal British Nurses' Association as one of the highest honours which it is my happiness to bear.

I am deeply penetrated with the conviction that it will create for women a recognised profession which will give scope to all that most adorns their nature; that it is destined to take an honoured place amongst the many great institutions of our country, and that it will be laden with blessings to future generations. With all my heart I devote to it such loving thought, labour, and strength, as I have to give.

President of the Royal British Nurses' Association.

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