

The
Royal British Nurses' Association.

FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF ONE
OF THE PUBLIC.



IT may seem presumptuous on the part of outsiders to venture into the arena of debate upon a subject in which they must lack both actual and theoretical knowledge, and it is with the greatest diffidence that I venture to take part in the present discussion. It, however, seems to me not altogether a work of supererogation for one of the public—which is, after all, individually and collectively most deeply interested in the question of Nursing—to be allowed, however imperfectly, to express what the laity feels upon this matter. In all that has been said and written upon it, from the President's paper downwards, one feels strongly impressed by the conviction that all those connected with the Royal British Nurses' Association are actuated by the keenest desire to attain to as high a standard in Nursing as human skill and honesty can devise—and that, without any other object than the benefit of suffering humanity. But I think the public want something more, for English people are practical if nothing else, and want to be sure that they will in everything receive the value of their money. By that I mean, that when we want a Nurse for whom we are only too thankful to pay anything, we desire to be satisfied that we shall secure the services of a woman, not only devoted, self-sacrificing, tender, and trustworthy, but above all, a thoroughly well-trained Nurse. The old Nurse of fiction and tradition has disappeared, and the Nurses of to-day are women, whose adoption of Nursing as a profession implies their possession of those womanly qualities which are the best foundation on which their training can be laid. But it must not be forgotten that a woman may possess all the qualities that appear to guarantee success, and yet that she may not, after all, make a good Nurse; and that there is only one way in which she can be successfully prepared for her duties, and that is by a careful education. No one can learn in a hurry, for knowledge half digested is as bad as none, and,

therefore, women, who desire to take up Nursing as a profession, must be willing to undergo what those who are properly qualified to judge, consider a sufficiently long training to make them thoroughly efficient Nurses. All times of probation or training are slow, and to many, no doubt are, pecuniarily, a serious consideration; but it is the same in all professions. The bar, the church, the army and the navy, all require a long and onerous training; and women, and those who train them, must realise that if they are to attain to the highest positions in their profession they must each work equally with men. The greatest defect in all work now-a-days is that it is scamped—not from any feeling of dishonesty, but from the hurry we are all in to get to the front. In every class of life the temptation is to be superficial, and unless Nurses and their teachers are careful, the same defect will spread to their profession. It is in view of this obvious danger that the public turn with such confidence to the Royal British Nurses' Association, feeling that in the strong position that body has taken up with regard to the length of training of Nurses, lies the guarantee which the public requires of the capacity of the Nurses it employs to carry out their duties efficiently. It is impossible to produce absolute perfection; but we ask for the assurance that the women who nurse those near and dear to us are, by training and capacity, thoroughly able to do their work; for, important as is a doctor's assistance in cases of grave illness, that of a Nurse is not less valuable; and as the chances of life and death depend so greatly on skilful nursing, the public naturally desires the highest standard for its Nurses that can be attained. I do not think it is possible to exaggerate the strong feeling that exists amongst the public on the question of the length of training necessary to give a Nurse that thorough knowledge which she ought to have to fit her for her work. It would be idle to say that there is no woman who could not become an ideal Nurse in a shorter period than three years; there are many, no doubt, with a heaven-born gift for nursing, but it is not for such women that the Association has made three years' training its test of membership. It is for the mass of women who, from necessity, enthusiasm, or want of any other opening, have become Nurses, that the test is required. During that term, how many things may occur to prove that nursing is not their vocation. The strain and fatigue often affects

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