

nurse can testify. The regularity of hospital life atones for much of its hardness. The irregularity of private work is its greatest trial. The private nurse can, no more than the doctor, command her hours of sleep. What *can* she do when, as often happens, she is the only capable person present, the case a critical one, and the means of the household too straightened to afford a second nurse? Yet under the combined strain of work, anxiety and insufficient rest and sleep, some nurses break down who have withstood successfully the test of three years' training.

It is sometimes asserted that the training is too rigorous, and sensational reports of over-work come to hand, generally from nurses who have failed, or from their injudicious friends and sympathisers. Two articles on "The Life of a Hospital Nurse" have appeared recently in the *Humanitarian*, representing the life as one of unmitigated slavery. But the writer (for both are from the same pen) is evidently not a nurse, and the exaggeration of her picture is too obvious to call for serious criticism. The same note was struck at the recent conference of the National Union of Women Workers, by two speakers, who dwelt upon the over-work of nurses in hospitals, especially during the period of training. Here, also, the objectors were not nurses, and their protest, therefore, lacked the authority of experts.

If it be conceded that a test of strength and endurance is necessary, the question at issue is this: "Is the test now imposed too severe?" And from a somewhat long and varied experience I answer "No." The three years' training, as at present practised, is more obvious, but not more real strain than the after-life, and she who cannot stand the one is not fit for the other. An engineering simile may prove a fit illustration. Bridges are tested, on completion, by being subjected to the strain of a very heavy weight, much greater than they would be called upon to bear in the ordinary course. But this concentrated strain is necessary, for if the test of an ordinary weight only were applied, the bridge would probably break down before long under the strain of daily wear.

In the early days of trained nursing the service was far more laborious than now, tending to the exclusion of all but the physically strongest. But if the test were formerly too much one of muscle, it is not so now in my judgment. Our hospitals are much better staffed, consequently there is more sub-division of work, and more liberal leave and vacation. Also, the comfort of the nurses off duty is cared for in many hospitals in a way which leaves nothing to be desired. We do not claim perfection for any system or finality in development, and some hospitals are, of course,

behind others; but it is indisputable that, on the whole, immense advance has been made in the training and care bestowed upon nurses. Yet under the older system, with all its hardships, was evolved a type of nurse now too seldom met with. The price we pay for improved conditions is the loss of some of the high resolve and missionary spirit of former days. It is inevitable, but we may well be anxious that our standard should not be lowered.

And this brings us to a consideration of the test of character. Nursing is not simply manual work. There is no calling in which personal character tells for more. It is not work for the idle, self-indulgent or frivolous; and while no conceivable test will succeed altogether in excluding the unfit in character, yet a life of hard work, preceded by three years of severe training, is not designed to attract or hold such. The present war in South Africa has afforded an object lesson in this respect. Under the influence of the prevailing excitement and war fever, many women, untrained and utterly unfit, for whom the work of nursing at home would have had no attraction, flocked to the Cape to nurse the soldiers forsooth!—to masquerade in a travesty of nursing uniform, to harass the doctors and trained nursing sisters, to obscure the really good and devoted work of the latter, to prove themselves a nuisance all round, and elicit the scathing but deserved reproof of Mr. Treves, "the plague of women and flies!"

We hope to be spared a repetition of scenes so little creditable to us as women, and that such shallow enthusiasts, mere sensation seekers, may never be admitted into the ranks of trained nurses. I appeal to all who have the honour of the nursing profession at heart to unite in upholding a high standard and severe tests. Without the latter the former is impossible, or remains at best but the aspiration of the few.

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### We Beg to Announce.

In reply to many suggestions that the Lectures which have appeared in this journal by Dr. Bedford Fenwick should be issued in book form, we have pleasure in announcing that "The Nursing of Chest Diseases" is now in the press, and will be published early in the New Year.

It also affords us pleasure to announce that, commencing with the New Year, we shall publish a series of valuable Lectures on the Nursing of Children, specially written for the *NURSING RECORD* by Dr. J. P. Parkinson, Physician to the London Temperance Hospital, and Physician for Out-patients to the North-Eastern Hospital for Children.

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