

Professional Review.**THE CASE AGAINST HOSPITAL NURSES.**

The feeling of the hour in relation to the nursing profession may be gauged to a great extent by current literature, and nurses are well-advised to study this with attention. In the past the facile pen of Charles Dickens gave us the type of his day in a masterly picture of Sarah Gamp and Betsy Prig. Then we passed through a period when nurses were invariably depicted as little if at all short of angelic beings, but of late the tone has once more completely changed, and there is no doubt that the modern nurse is anything but a popular person. While there is a good deal of exaggeration in all the various types depicted, there is generally a germ of truth in each. Mrs. Gamp, extravagantly as she was drawn, is recognised as not an unfair delineation of the nurse of the period. The angelic phase was at its height at the time when the hard conditions under which nursing work was performed proved an insuperable barrier to all but the most earnest and noble-minded women, and those who entered the nursing ranks did so with a high sense of the nobility of the work, and a deep conviction of vocation. They expected little, they poured out a wealth of devotion and self-sacrificing labour on the profession of their choice. Public opinion applauded, and rushing, as is ever its wont, into extremes canonized them forthwith. At the present day the sense of vocation has been to a large extent lost. The modern girl looking around for a means of self support, and weighing the pros and cons of the civil service, the life of a clerk, and the profession of nursing, decides that in a well-appointed hospital and nursing home she will find the most comfortable surroundings, congenial work and personal freedom, and, considering the matter from a purely business point of view, elects to be trained as a nurse. So it comes to pass that the type is once more changed, and once more public opinion veers round. Its latest expression is to be found in an article by Miss M. F. Johnston in the current issue of the *Nineteenth Century*, and is by no means flattering to our *amour propre*. Indeed, considered in detail it is a serious indictment which we shall be well advised not to brush indignantly aside but carefully to consider.

UNPOPULARITY.

In the first place we are told that "the nursing profession is curiously unpopular, and the feeling against it is steadily on the increase. It is the one profession of all others that one would have imagined would have earned the highest respect and gratitude of all men, and yet, as a matter of fact, the exact opposite is the case."

POPULAR DREAD OF NURSES.

Again we read: "It cannot be denied that they (nurses) have saved multitudes of lives, and that they have effected a vast number of marvellous cures; but beyond that their accusers—and their name is legion—have very little to say in their favour and much to lay to their charge. There are many people who positively dread to have a hospital nurse inside their doors, and who feel that when disease invades the sacred precincts of the home, and when perhaps, too, the shadow of death is dimly felt to be hovering near, the situation would be shorn of many of its terrors if only it were possible for them to meet the

exigencies of the case themselves, and not be obliged to have recourse to professional assistance."

SHOP.

Nurses are also charged with being "as a rule 'shoppy' to a degree. The hospital gossip is discussed at length, and the cases dwelt on with a freedom and a richness of detail that leaves but little to the imagination of the hearer."

GENERAL DEMEANOUR.

As to their attitude in private houses we read: "Any fond illusions we may have entertained of hospital nurses as a band of devoted women who had taken up the care of the sick and suffering as their life's work, possessing among other necessary qualifications a fund of sympathy and unselfishness is rudely dispelled. . . . On the contrary, but too often the complaint is heard that nurses are a trial in themselves. They are only too generally wholly inconsiderate in the demands they make and offensive in their general behaviour. Their callousness to suffering, and the indifference they display even in the hour of death (and this is a charge which is frequently brought against even the most skilful and experienced of nurses) amount almost to brutality." We are also given to understand that nurses "require an attendant specially to wait on them," and a further charge is that of "gaining undue influence over their patients, and there are many people who for this reason dread to admit a nurse into their houses." Lastly lest we should plead that these faults are those of the few, and not the many we are expressly told this is not the case. "The faults above enumerated (with the exception of the last mentioned) are characteristic of the profession as a whole, and the exceptions to this rule are in a small minority."

TRAINING.

The question is then asked how it comes to pass that nurses "as a profession, come under such general censure, that they make so many enemies, and have so few friends to speak in their defence. If the fault does not lie originally in themselves, can it be that there is anything in the nature of the work which can be said to have a demoralising influence, or is there perhaps something amiss in the course of training to which they are subjected?" In this connection Miss Johnston is of opinion that "nurses are systematically overworked," and that "it is not to be wondered at if they perform their duties in more of a perfunctory and in less of a sympathetic spirit." The system is at fault, and "'All work and no play' is the best recipe extant for the production of inferior work."

NEED OF A GOVERNING BODY.

Expression is also given to an urgent need on the part of the nursing profession. "It is, perhaps, the greatest of all the many drawbacks to a nurse's training that there is no one who is actually responsible for her efficiency when her apprenticeship is over." Most undoubtedly we need a General Nursing Council, which shall act in the same relationship to the Nursing, as does the General Medical Council to the Medical, Profession. The formation of such a Council would go a long way towards dispelling the troubles of which Miss Johnston complains.

THE TEST OF WORK.

With regard to nurses in training, Miss Johnston asserts, "Every opportunity is given them to learn their work. They do the practical work, lectures are provided for them, and they are required to pass

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