

Concerning the Question of Class and Character.

(A REJOINDER.)

I have read with much interest the article by Miss Mary Gardner on "A Question of Character," published in this week's BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING; and as I fully appreciate the justice of two sides to every question, the perusal of the "Character" question afforded me much pleasure, although the view taken by the writer was, on some points, opposed to my own. To quote from a letter written by Miss Thornton, and published on July 5th in the BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING: "Opposition is necessary to progress, and, failing the stimulus of such, we might settle down fairly content with ourselves."

Miss Gardner contends that the root of the evil—by which is meant the deficiencies of the nursing profession—rests on "character."

I must do myself the justice to point out that the entire object of my former article was to suggest a remedy for the improvement of character in the nursing world. Therefore on this point Miss Gardner and I agree.

The point on which we disagree is: from what class is the individual with the character necessary for a really good nurse to be obtained?

Looking at the analogy between "class" and "character," we must go rather deeply into what class is, and in doing so we are bound to admit that class very often determines character, while character rarely, if ever, determines class.

When I use the word "class" I wish it to be clearly understood that the word in my vocabulary means "gentle birth," and that wealth has of necessity no part in its meaning.

It seems glaringly apparent to my intelligence that a woman who comes from generations of gently-born people will necessarily possess traits absolutely different from a woman whose mother, grandmothers, and great-grandmothers—if she could trace them—were charwomen and costermongers.

I have no hesitation in asserting that I consider the woman whose evolution has been accomplished in the company of these charwomen eminently unsuitable to enter the nursing profession.

What are we to believe of all the talk of the Evolution of Man? Is it not that the ages that are passed, carrying with them the refining influences of environment, education, cultivation and moral discipline, have presented to us a being in all ways different from the primeval savage of ancient days; and has that fact not forced us to admit that the higher the evolution the more perfect the creature?

There certainly is truth in Miss Gardner's contention that many noble women of fine character exist in the lower orders; at the same time, a

person of fine character may be possessed of very disagreeable manners and vulgar ways that would be offensive to refined natures.

Richard Cœur-de-Lion was no doubt a man of exceptionally fine character; still I feel sure that if it were possible to spend an hour in his company—as he was—our present-day sensibilities would receive some extraordinary shocks.

Except in a few instances—and I grant there are some instances of Nature's gentlewomen—refining influences are necessary to refine character.

In the lower classes these influences are, to a large extent, not within their power; the housing of families alone forbids refinement of mind.

It is appalling to think that in the profession of nursing there are women whose environment has not taught them the necessity for modesty, that most essential attribute in the nursing of every patient.

Yet how can we expect those who are brought up in crowded homes, where girls and boys are jumbled together promiscuously, to feel as we feel, who from our earliest years have been taught by precept, example, and environment a proper respect for the proprieties of life?

We cannot expect it; and because of that I contend that those who are in positions of responsibility should not place these unsuitable women in such difficult situations.

Let me put the matter logically and see how it reads:

All nurses should be refined;
The lower classes are not refined;
Therefore, the lower classes should not be nurses.

The conclusion reads quite reasonably.

I can hardly understand Miss Gardner's point of view when she says "Culture and refinement are good; but in so far as these form but the superficial polish, they are not essential"!

I contend that they *are* essential; and unless they are acknowledged by the heads of the nursing profession as absolutely essential in those whom they appoint as probationers, the profession is likely to remain in a state of imperfection.

I see no glory attached to the admission that the nursing world is composed of all sorts and conditions of women, some of whose illiterate minds and vulgar manners endanger the reputation of the whole profession.

In my opinion, those who attend the sick—be they poor or rich—should be the picked women of our country; if possible, the *crème de la crème* of Britain.

The neat housemaid who captivates Miss Gardner's fancy might no doubt be an excellent person—in a word-picture—and the characteristics she possessed would be invaluable in the dusting of one's drawing-room and in the service of "the

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