

A Question of Common Sense.

I have been interested in a discussion, lately started in the pages of this journal, respecting the best type of woman to choose for probationer. As to the wisdom of engaging in a public controversy of the kind before the eyes of all probationers, actual and potential, I say nothing, but some of Miss Rae's remarks seem to me to require a little elucidation.

Miss Rae insists with great earnestness that intending probationers shall be of "gentle birth." She does not state on what lines she defines gentle birth, a matter which in England, essentially a democratic country, with a democratic aristocracy and society, must always be a matter of great difficulty.

There is a convent in Austria which admits amongst its nuns only ladies who can show sixteen quarterings, eight on the father's and eight on the mother's side. That makes the matter easy; quarterings are readily verified in a country that makes much of such matters. If one demanded quarterings from intending probationers in England, one's candidates would be reduced to an irreducible minimum, though perhaps the Royal Family might provide a few. But there is another simple test abroad. You ask "Sind Sie eine geborene?" (Are you born?). You are, or you are not, "born"—*i.e.*, noble—and there the matter ends.

You may be as poor as you like, you may engage in trade, but you are "born." There is no such test in England.

In England, success is the passport to social standing or to the founding of a family, which may, however, sink back after a few generations. Not necessarily money success, though that is very usual, but success dependent upon ability in some form or other.

A successful grocer, if he spend his money shrewdly and in the right way, may obtain entrance to the most exclusive club in England, may be received into the highest society. I do not say he will be *of* it, but *in* it. The grandson of a clever navvy or mechanic, a good brewer may join the heir of all the Howards in the House of Lords. As all people know, by "parting" with a sufficient amount to your political party you may almost always, if you desire it, obtain rank of some degree or other—and rank, the outward symbol of success, is much appreciated in England.

Eliminate those English dukedoms that owe their origin to Royal favours to ladies not always of the highest rank, and several of their beginnings are middle-class. One of the most popular and successful Ministers at the present moment is not of "gentle birth," but he takes his place in English society.

The English aristocracy is essentially democratic, and constantly recruits its ranks from the lower and

middle classes either by marriages (mesalliances they are called abroad) or by raising successful men to its ranks. A journal, shortly before the postponed Coronation, enumerated those peeresses who had a right to be present in Westminster Abbey and who had previously belonged to the theatrical and music-hall professions. The list was fairly long. No doubt these ladies are excellent in every way, but several of them could hardly be considered of "gentle birth." Still, there they were.

That there are real old English county families, titled and otherwise, everyone allows, but whether there are enough to supply all English hospitals with sufficient probationers Miss Rae herself must admit to be doubtful, even if we could induce them all to come.

What holds good of what Jeames calls "the upper circles" holds good far more extensively of the professional classes. Ability will always force its way to the front, often regardless of other disadvantages. A man who has made money in trade frequently trains his clever son for one of the learned professions, and Miss Rae must be able to call to mind many eminent and prominent men in the medical profession who owe their present position to their personal ability and perhaps their father's money, but not his rank. The highest positions in the professional, artistic, and learned world have always, in England, been open to men of ability of whatever rank, and long may they be so! English colleges and English schools have always provided largely for clever poor men, and the very practical rule of giving "every man his chance" has been very largely developed of late years.

It is not likely that nursing, if it wishes to take its stand amongst the liberal professions, will alone be able to pick its candidates on the score of birth. On the score of fitness by previous training, by personal adaptability—yes, certainly.

When Miss Rae speaks of selecting women of refined character, cultured women if possible, good women always, I am with her; but I should be sorry to think that the profession of nursing should ever become so snobbish as to select its candidates on the score of birth—an almost impossible thing in England, to begin with.

I also agree with Miss Rae that certain callings usually unfit women, for many reasons, for the profession of nursing, so that I, personally, do not engage as probationers those who have previously been engaged in them. This I say without any sneering at them—for any occupation at which a woman honestly earns her bread is honourable—but because the training is not a suitable preliminary for sick nursing. All matrons will think of several.

Personally, I approve of the preliminary training and educational test, backed by private recommendations as to character, and by a medical

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