

### Annotations.

#### WOMEN AND MENTAL STRAIN.

The tragic fate of the missing lady doctor, Miss Hickman, after weeks of uncertainty, is now established beyond doubt, and all sections of the community will join in offering their sincere sympathy to the bereaved relations in the peculiarly harrowing circumstances. When the first shock is over, we believe that the certainty of the present, sad as it is, will be a relief after the suspense of the last two months.

It is not surprising that those who are averse to the admission of women to the medical profession should avail themselves of the present opportunity to promulgate their views, and "a hospital physician," in a letter to the *Times*, asks whether it is "seemly and becoming for a tenderly-nurtured woman, from the age of twenty-one to twenty-five years, to be brought in contact with the scenes which are of frequent occurrence in the casualty rooms of hospitals in large towns." In answer to this "one of the surgeons to the Royal Free Hospital" aptly answers, "It is difficult to understand why scenes that are considered to be degrading for women who are medical students and doctors should be thought seemly and becoming for the similar class of young women who happen to be nurses." In the last quarter of a century it would be interesting to know how many medical men have raised their voices against the conditions under which trained nurses work. The better organisation of the work of nurses, shorter hours, better conditions of labour, better pay, and the relief of physical and mental strain have been gained for them, step by step, by Superintendents of Nursing against much opposition. We have no hesitation in saying that no medical student or junior house officer is subjected to the strain which devolves upon nurses. What nurse could not tell of long night hours spent alone in charge of thirty or more patients, including cases of acute pneumonia, enteric, and other diseases, some delirious, not all under her eye at the same time? of the strain on her physical strength in keeping cases of delirium tremens and erysipelas in bed? of her struggles single-handed with a patient who has suddenly developed acute mania, and is trying to commit suicide? of attendance night after night in the casualty ward? of the long night watches in lunatic wards? Even now the only skilled nursing attendance in any of our general hos-

pitals is that given by women, for in none is the training of men undertaken. Right nobly have women grappled with these duties, and a mental breakdown is of rare occurrence. Why is it never suggested that nursing is an unsuitable occupation for women? The obvious answer in the past, and in part at present, is that the hours are long, the pay meagre in proportion to the responsibility incurred, the work so arduous, that no one but a woman would undertake it. Hence nursing has always been regarded as an essentially feminine occupation.

#### THE VALUE OF SYMPATHY.

Dr. Warre, Head Master of Eton College, said some wise things when he distributed prizes last week to students of St. George's Hospital Medical School, which may be applied with advantage to the profession of nursing also. Enlarging upon the value of sympathy as a personal influence in the noble profession to which their lives and energies would be devoted, he said:—Many men were completely unmanned and unnerved by the first sight of any severe operation. Yet emotional feelings were not helpful or useful in inspiring them to relieve suffering. Such feelings had to be schooled and disciplined if the public were to have physicians and surgeons capable of fulfilling the high and arduous duties of their calling. But it was no part of sound training to repress those feelings altogether. Sympathy was not limited to passive impressions, which diminished as active habits increased. Active sympathy was something wider, something higher, something far more richly endowed with power for good. In the great treasury of professional success there were many chambers, each of which had its own lock and its own key. Knowledge and skill, patience and accuracy—each of these opened a door, and each brought its own reward to successful labour. But the innermost chamber of all could only be unlocked and entered by those who, through self-discipline, had gained the golden master-key of active sympathy. A doctor in actual practice was called upon to minister to the necessities of all sorts and conditions of men. If "the proper study of mankind is man," he had the greatest opportunities of knowing what mankind was. The key to that knowledge was sympathy, and he ventured to claim a place for it in their equipment as medical men, feeling sure that the possession of it ennobled life and consecrated success.

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