

velvet glove. Nursing had but newly emerged from the deepest degradation, and the Matrons could not rid themselves of the idea that only an iron rule would prevent the nursing staff, collectively and individually, going straight to social and moral destruction. I sometimes fear that our fault now-days is too much velvet glove and too little iron hand, and, in truth, both are necessary, for the probationers of to-day would not tolerate the iron hand undisguised, and the velvet glove is certainly inadequate alone.

The material that those Matrons had to work with was vastly different from what we have to do with now. Looking back on more than eighteen years, when I was first Matron at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, nothing strikes me more than the difference in the candidates who enter the service of the hospital as probationers now, and those who did so then. I do not say they are not so good, I only say they are different, and require different handling. Human nature truly changes but little. When we read the plays of Shakespeare, or, to go further back, the dialogues of Plato, what strikes us most is the modern human note. We say people change, but when we look below the surface, we find the change is really only superficial, and that deep down the heart of man has changed but little; that human nature is the same now as it was in the days of the old Greek heroes or in those of good Queen Bess. Believing that this difference is superficial, I believe also that the quality is as good as ever. But as there is undoubtedly some difference in the candidates there must be the same amount of difference in the Matrons. Different methods must be employed in training and moulding the probationers, but I believe that the finest product is frequently as good now, and the average product is better than formerly.

Thirty years ago women were not so independent as they are now, fewer left the home nest till they went to a nest of their own; those who did so from choice were generally of exceptionally strong character. Of course then, as now, there was a large class of women who had to earn their living, and as there were fewer callings open to women, they became chiefly governesses or nurses. The restlessness of the twentieth century had not yet come, and many women were content to stay at home; but now that restlessness is among us, and no one stays at home, everyone fidgets to be at work, either at pleasure or business, and to the women who feel that life to be worth living must be full and useful, and to the women who must earn their living, there are added the restless, the foolish, and the futile, who yearn for something to do. It is this class which make so many people think and say that our candidates are not so good as they used to be. I protest that we have as many of the best now as ever, but as a light attracts insects, so nursing does incapables.

One of the most remarkable differences in the

candidates of to-day is the lack of discipline. When I was young, strict discipline was exercised in the family, children were brought up to fear and respect their parents; and that very fear and respect bred a love and a confidence which gave to the parents a God-like infallibility. Even at that time, when a discipline was maintained which would seem severe to the pampered darlings of to-day, many people sighing deplored the lack of discipline among children. Now there seems to be no discipline, or if there is, it is the other way round, and the children discipline the parents. In those far-off days when I was a probationer, the candidates came to the hospital ready disciplined, prepared to obey every rule, however hard, and to endure every hardship meted out to them.

" Their's not to make reply,  
Their's not to reason why,  
Their's but to do and die."

The probationers of the present day do not know the A B C of discipline, and never take an order or obey a rule without commenting on its reasonableness and on its fairness. Then, again, the prevailing vices of to-day are slackness, casualness. A love of pleasure has laid its hand on us, and entered into our very bones; but I am not so sure that this is altogether to be regretted. England was never stronger or greater than when she was known as "Merry England," and the temper of to-day perhaps resembles the temper of the Elizabethan times, when England postured and danced through life in a light-hearted way which shocked our Puritan forefathers so terribly.

All this serves to make the Matron's work more difficult; it would be much easier to impress the mind of the daughter of a Puritan with the seriousness and the responsibilities of a nurse's life than the mind of her Royalist sister. But I dare swear the Puritan maiden had as many faults below her demure white snood as the Royalist maiden under her curls; so with the maiden of to-day, she would not tolerate the hard discipline or the long dull hours of work of the probationer of twenty years ago, but I am sure the then Matrons were not without their troubles either. If you watch those merry maidens, they will enter on their work with very light hearts; but as the influence of the hospital grows around them and they begin to realise the world of pain and of suffering, of sin and of sorrow, into which they have come, and as the unseen, almost unfelt pressure of routine and discipline moulds and shapes them, you will find that the finest product is as good as ever, if not better than it was, that the average output is as good as the average output of the years gone by, and the residuum is not proportionately greater. The result we get now is, I say it again, better than that produced by the hammer and the iron vice of a day now happily passed.

If this result is to be trained and moulded to

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)