

fairy palaces of soap bubbles and crystals with spires and minarets of pure gold; it has to learn that the average house is built of bricks, and it has to come down from being a fairy architect to a simple brick in an ordinary house. It is a little hard. So we will not pin down the poor butterfly or beetle and dissect her, for

“There is so much good in the worst of us
There is so much bad in the best of us,
That it ill becomes any one of us
To talk about the rest of us.”

I shall simply open various points of discussion in the training life of a probationer, and her position in the hospital community, which are of interest to us, set the ball rolling by giving my own views, and trust to you to keep it spinning. The points I shall touch on are:—

- I. Choice of a probationer—raw material.
- II. Whether previous experience is desirable or not, and if so what kind.
- III. Commencing age.
- IV. Teaching and training.
- V. Place as a Hospital worker.

I. The raw material. The young woman who comes to us for training is chiefly drawn from the great English middle class, a class celebrated throughout the world for its sturdy common-sense. They are, roughly speaking, the daughters of small country gentlemen, of military and naval officers, of professional men, of business men, tradesmen, farmers, Government officials, and so forth. Sometimes you will have a probationer from the aristocracy proper; more often from the working classes. Both may make good nurses. But the former, for obvious reasons, do not join in large numbers, and the latter are not by any means always suited for training. Their previous life and education as a class seldom fits them for posts of responsibility, and for scientific training, of course, with marked exceptions, and there are few unprejudiced Matrons who will not select for training, as far as possible, young women of good education and fair social standing, considered in its widest sense. On the whole, and again generalising with the utmost circumspection, these form the best raw material.

Just as one never meets a man who is not an excellent judge of a horse or motor car, so one seldom or never meets a Matron who does not pride herself on being able to judge a nursing candidate at once if she only has a personal interview. I always wonder how the hospital failures ever get accepted. I am more modest. Putting aside the obviously unfit, nothing short of a fair trial in hospital (I make it three months) will really settle the

matter. And that is fraught with great danger. Not once, but half-a-dozen times to my knowledge young women have left me at the end of three months, either because they found the work too hard, or because I thought them unsuitable, and have promptly been received into private nursing homes, or have done private nursing on the strength of “training” at the Royal South Hants. That is, however, a question we must, unfortunately, perforce leave to the future and the Registration Board.

Of course, we all of us know the ideal probationer equipped with every physical and moral quality to make an ideal nurse. Of that type of probationer there is not nearly enough to go round, and it is well that we content ourselves with less perfect specimens. But I think the average probationer who presents herself for training is a very fair type of the average English middle class girl. She comes honestly to be taught a calling, for which she thinks she has a liking, by which she hopes to earn her living. Of course, in some few cases there are other motives, but that is the chief one. She is generally also honest in her desire to learn her profession properly, if in the majority of cases, with as little expenditure of energy as may be, that is only in accordance with the spirit of the age.

II. I touch on previous experience because so many letters on the subject have appeared in the nursing press. I am myself entirely opposed to previous training in my probationers except under special circumstances. I have tried probationers with previous experience time after time, and, except under one set of circumstances, I have found them (as a rule) failures. They seldom amalgamate well with the other probationers; they are seldom loyal, often stirring up discontent amongst the others, pointing out how they did so and so elsewhere; they teach others to scoff and laugh at traditions and rules, and are often stale before they reach the end of their training. The exceptions are those who have been trained under a good Matron in a good cottage-hospital. They are almost always satisfactory, and properly managed cottage hospitals should form most excellent preliminary schools for general hospitals. There is a reality about their work which contrasts favourably with the more artificial preliminary training schools attached to some hospitals. I do not think six months or a year spent in a good cottage hospital under a good training Matron is anything but advantageous to a probationer, but my experience is not, as a rule, favourable to previous training in special and fever hospitals.

(To be concluded.)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)