

Whether that tendency is altogether for the good of the patient I am uncertain. Make no mistake. I am a great believer in scientific training for women, for science means accuracy, and I should like every probationer to come to me with a scientific training behind her, not necessarily by any means medical or surgical. During her hospital training she is, as hospital training for nurses is arranged, busy learning the practical details of her work, and having those details explained to her in a general way. She has a great deal to do with Madam How, but only a little with Lady Why, and humanity is the better for an acquaintance with both.

But the result of the probationer's training and teaching must be a feminine appreciation of the helplessness and dependence of sick folk, and the concentration of her trained faculties on their comfort, alleviation, and well-being, mental and physical, rather than the contemplation of an interesting case—or even the pride, great as it is, and natural as it is, of having assisted a great man, ever so humbly, in his work.

The Probationer of to-day—the Twentieth Century Probationer—has more time off duty, more leisure than we, for good or evil, enjoyed. After deducting our off-duty time, half-days and all, and the half hour allowed out of the ward for dinner, we were on duty in the wards twelve hours every day, Sundays included. I do not think any hospital in the Kingdom now works its apprentices with so much rigour. There would be a good deal of grumbling if Matthew at Bart's were run now, as then, with two day probationers, one night nurse, and a Sister. Of course, only one wardmaid.

The probationer, on the whole, is better housed, better fed, better taught theoretically, better treated physically, than we were. The question is, Does she make a better nurse?

Of course, it is the tendency of the age, a brighter, a more considerate, a kinder, a softer age, an age with a kind of conscience—its grandchildren will be able to say whether a wiser age.

Fifty years hence other Matrons, with fuller data to go upon, will be able to discuss the early Edwardian Probationers as a bygone type, as we can the mid-Victorian.

V. The probationer's place as a hospital worker. Time was, when that mid-Victorian probationer first flourished, that she was regarded merely as a kind of interloper, an adjunct to the scheme of hospital work. No regular place in the system of nursing, such as it was, was allowed her. A few ladies came to learn nursing. They paid varying sums for the privilege. They were generally called

“Miss.” They were regarded as extras in the ward—as martyrs and saints by their friends. They were few; they were pioneers. Their promotion was of dazzling rapidity. This is not the time to trace the change that occurred, but the fact remains that probationers are now far and away the most numerous body of workers in a hospital. Under skilled supervision they practically do all the nursing work in the wards. Their value has certainly been recognised by the authorities, who spend three and four times as much on their nursing staff as they used to, whilst the excellence of the lectures they receive, and the number and quality of the books written by medical men for their benefit bear witness to the importance with which their proper instruction is at present regarded. Handsome and suitable homes are built for them. Their off-duty time leaves little to be desired. Their housing, dieting, and comfort generally are matters that engage the profound attention of committees. I do not think there is a single skilled trade or profession, where such an excellent training is given without cost to all suitable young women as in nursing. The work is, of course, exacting, but the training requires it, and all is given free, even pocket money. Whether, however, the time will not come before long when the public will demand that the nursing school expenses shall be kept separate from the expenditure of the funds of the charity, I cannot say. That is another question for discussion, and difference of opinion.

This brings me to the end of what, I am afraid, has been an abominably stodgy and dull kind of paper. I feel as if I had lured you all here under false pretences. As I said before, there is no well-marked Twentieth Century type. Human nature is human nature to-day, yesterday, and to-morrow. We use electricity instead of gas; we have the steriliser in place of the carbolic spray; our surgeons provide us with abdominal surgery undreamt of in the past; but these are all superficial changes; and, as I glance round my little flock, they remind me more than a little of some of my old Bart's friends; there is even one for whom I have a sneaking preference, who reminds me of myself in my old probationer days. She has no idea of it, but I like to watch her, and to hope that in the coming future she will look back upon five and twenty years as happy, as busy, and as full of interest as I have had.

A strong Committee has been formed for the formation of a Glasgow South Stall at the Bazaar for the Nurses' Sick Fund of the Co-operation of Trained Nurses.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)