

AN interesting letter of the Princess Christian, on behalf of the British Nurses' Association, calls attention to the weak places in one of the most important and altogether satisfactory movements of the last half-century. It is often being said that the works of Dickens have come to require a voluminous glossary and commentary to enable readers of the next, and even of the present, generation to understand them. At any rate, it is certain that to most people, in any rank of life, the class of Sick-Nurse whom he described in "Martin Chuzzlewit" must seem a monstrous flight of fancy. Yet she none the less existed within living memory, and the chief marvel about her is that anybody who fell into her clutches should be alive to remember her. And another incomprehensible phenomenon of medical history is that the doctors themselves remained blind for so long to the all-importance of intelligent and otherwise efficient Nursing as an element in rational treatment. The whole system, or rather want of system, as it existed in pre-Crimean days, was worse than merely ignorant and stupid. It was corrupt, rapacious, sordid; it surrounded the patient not merely with worse horrors than those of the sick-bed, but often with human nature at its worst and meanest. Thanks, in the first instance, to the brains and hands of Florence Nightingale, and afterwards of hundreds like her, the poorest Hospital patient is a thousand times better off than the longest purse could make its owner half a century ago. The vocation of the Sick Nurse has become both a science and an art, which educated women of all classes are honoured for following. It has become a recognised branch of the medical profession; and a capable Nurse is no longer a contradiction in terms, but is as familiar and indispensable in any serious case as the physician himself.

Nevertheless, the system is still very far indeed from being as perfect as it ought to be and could easily be made. Princess Christian estimates the present number of trained nurses at some 15,000—a very large number indeed, on the supposition that the word "trained" always carries with it an assurance of competence. Unfortunately, the supposition cannot be accepted. The word "trained" is used in much too loose a way, and implies no certificate of proficiency in one of the most difficult of callings—a calling which requires not only the natural disposition for it which most women possess, but a long period of probation, health, strength, good manners, brains, and certain special qualities which are indefinable, but which everybody can feel and understand. It is the probation which is the most important; and herein it is that the weak point of the system is to be found and strengthened. Very many women

prove, on trial, to be unfit for the duties they have undertaken, and are either rejected from the institutions they enter, or leave it after too short an experience to be of any use to them. But of these too many nevertheless pursue the vocation of "Trained" Nurse; nor is there anything to prevent them, or any means of differentiating them from others. The Hospitals can protect themselves from incompetent Nurses; but private families are at their mercy.

And what is said of the Nurses themselves must in like manner be said of the agencies which supply them—there is no security that an agency applied to in a hurry will supply the Nurse who is wanted by an employer unable to judge beforehand of her qualifications. What is imperatively required is a system under which by the title "trained" Nurse shall mean one who has reached some recognised standard of capacity which shall carry its authority upon its face, so that those who employ a Nurse without such evidence shall have themselves alone to blame for the very possible consequences. It is at the grant of such authoritative evidence of capacity that the Association in question is aiming, and hopes to accomplish on the foundation of a Royal charter. If its plan is carried out, a proficient Nurse will be able, by means of registration, to produce documentary warrant of her proficiency, while those who cannot do this will be legitimately presumed to be insufficiently qualified. In short, the scheme is the recognition of Nursing as being what it really is—a skilled calling, from which the unskilled should be, in the public interest, as rigidly excluded as in the case of the medical profession. The unfit would have no more right to complain, than a medical student who is unable to obtain a place on the medical register. Possibly the number of thousands would be considerably reduced for a time. But in such a matter as this, quality is paramount—quantity will always be certain to follow the demand, no matter how high a standard may be imposed.—*The Globe*.

A GERMAN SISTERHOOD.

BY MISS LENA MOLLETT.

VERY few of those who have stayed for any length of time in Hanover have failed to have their attention drawn to "the Henriettentstift," and all their powers of admiration and reverence appealed to, on behalf of the Sisterhood it shelters.

It is with some reason that the Hanoverians are proud of their hospital and its workers, and point out the fine building with "citizenly" satisfaction. If a town have any just subject for pride it is in

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