

The Royal British Nurses' Association.

FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF A
MEDICAL MAN.



THE man whose energies have been devoted during the last quarter of a century to the Art of Healing can scarcely fail, at times, to count with satisfaction the triumphs which have been achieved within that period, and, of which, he now enjoys the fruits. Here, by small degrees, and there, by bounds, he has seen doubt and empiricism yield before the forces of reason and truth; and he willingly acknowledges that he owes the higher hopes and brighter prospects with which he is able to enter on his daily task to the accumulated results yielded by a school of workers whose labours have been marked by patience in investigation, accuracy in observation, and breadth of view in orderly generalisation. But these alone have not sufficed to provide him with the improved weapons with which it is his happiness to meet the forces of disease. That same period of transition has witnessed the partial evolution of the trained Nurse, who, bringing to his aid a combination of mental and manual culture with habits of patience and obedience before unknown, has become his valued and indispensable ally. It is, therefore, not without reason that the medical profession is devoting increasing attention to the various forces which are being brought to bear upon the vocation of Nursing, and which are, at this hour, giving shape to the future which lies before it; and it cannot be out of place to glance at some of them with a view to gauging the effects which they have produced.

It is within the knowledge of those who are interested in the subject, that Schools of Nursing have grown up under the ægis of nearly all the important metropolitan and country Hospitals, of many of the parochial Infirmaries, and of some of the smaller Hospitals; and there will be no injustice in saying at once, that they are working without any common plan or understanding, with the inevitable result of creating no small confusion. Some such institutions certify their pupils as fully-trained after one year of instruction; some, after two; and some, after three;

while others issue no certificates of proficiency whatever. Nevertheless, pupils of these various schools, differing infinitely in general education, in technical training, in proficiency, in culture, and in discipline, alike claim the denomination of "trained Nurse"—a term which, under such circumstances, is despoiled of definite meaning. For while, in one case it is worthily borne by a capable, and in every sense proficient, woman, in another it is nothing more than the cloak of incapacity. Further, it has to be borne in mind, that the process of selection according to fitness to which all Probationers must of necessity submit, throws back upon the world no inconsiderable proportion of rejected raw material; and it is capable of easy demonstration that a great part of such rejected aspirants console themselves by clinging to the distinctive garb which they have worn but for a few months, or it may be weeks, and succeed by various ingenious arts in pressing into the ranks of so-called trained Nurses, and, in following a calling for which they have been adjudged mentally, morally, or physically unfit.

It has often been suggested that if the service of the sick be performed by an inefficient or otherwise unsuitable nurse, medical men and the friends of patients have only themselves to blame, because the Institutions, which make it their business to meet such wants, may be relied on to supply Nurses who are not only generally proficient, but specially suited to the particular case under treatment. But it may be asserted, without fear of effectual contradiction, that such a contention cannot be maintained; for it is within the experience of many members of the medical profession that it is, in fact, too often those very Institutions that send forth Nurses who prove to be under-trained, ignorant, or endowed with an invincible tendency to foment domestic discord. So surely is that the case, that many medical men endeavour to enlist a certain number of Nurses on whose professional attainments and domestic adaptability they can rely, and to attach them permanently to their service. They have found it to be as inconsistent with their ease of mind as with their professional duty to allow health and life to be jeopardised by such a game of chance as is involved in sending in hot haste to a Nursing Institution. Let it, however, be frankly admitted that, culpably negligent of all but the balance-sheet as some such Institutions are, there are others which are so carefully conducted as to reduce to a minimum the

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