

The
Royal British Nurses' Association.

FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF A
TRAINED NURSE.



THE Registration of Nurses means more to the Nursing world than can possibly be estimated by the outside public. The Royal Charter, so graciously, so opportunely granted, has in effect raised the work of Nurses from that of a casual calling of irresponsible women, more or less trained and trustworthy, more or less *dilletante* and untrustworthy, into that of a recognized body of skilled women, educated to an accepted measure of competence, and responsible to a great Association and to each other, for the maintenance of a high standard of professional efficiency and of moral rectitude.

The Register cannot guarantee that the members enrolled shall be Heaven-born Nurses, nor can it undertake that they shall be women possessing the unequalled, and it must be confessed, conflicting virtues that the writers of Nursing books urge as a *sine qua non* in the novice who seeks to become a Nurse. No official body can guarantee that its members shall be persons of unique moral attainment and heroic conduct; but an Incorporated Society such as the Royal British Nurses' Association can, and does, ensure that its members shall have gone through the necessary training and discipline needed to fit them—if anything will fit them—for the profession they represent. By making it imperative that a Registered Nurse shall have passed through the training and discipline enforced by a three years' residence in a general Hospital, the Association ensures a great deal. The personal education of such a training, the self-restraint and self-denial practised, added to the strength of character acquired during this probationary period, are in most cases as much needed to prepare the Nurse for her after-duties, as are the powers of trained observation and the knowledge of facts gained by her practical experience in the wards.

Of this the outside world has no conception. There exists, and one hears expressed, a vague notion that since Nursing is a womanly occupation, therefore all women are potential or actual Nurses. Nothing could be farther from fact. One might reason with the same show of truth, that because Art work is a womanly occupation, therefore all women are artists.

Moreover, this natural aptitude for Nursing in born in many women, to become of value, must be educated, must be cultivated. In the home circle, care and observation, quickened by devotion, may do much for the amateur Nurse that will stand her in good stead of systematic teaching; but, trained and developed, the faculty must be; and, for nursing the general public, it must be Hospital-trained. Only in a large general Hospital, where she is brought into contact with many and various shades of character, can the Nurse learn how to best deal with the many types of sick people likely to come under her care; only in a large general Hospital will she be enabled to see the Protean shapes Disease assumes—the different diseases resembling each other, similar diseases presenting different aspects, complicated cases baffling the skill of the most skilful; only with prolonged experience of such cases, can the Nurse learn how misled the novice is when she believes she can diagnose disease and probably cure it; only, in truth, by some such training, can the Nurse learn that Nursing is not diagnosing disease, nor treating it.

The patient is the Nurse's care. The disease belongs to the doctor. The power of caring for the patient and dealing with him, individually, constitutes the unwritten art of Nursing; and this, the outcome of a special faculty, joined to the technical knowledge of her craft, marks the qualified Nurse.

But the public, friends and relatives of the sick, know little of the necessity of these qualifications, and has not, in consequence, insisted that the Nurses sent out from Hospitals and Nursing Institutions shall be properly instructed in the duties they undertake. Illustrations of this fact are too numerous to need quoting. One occurs to me which is an example of the manner in which Nurses for private cases are manufactured. A lady in Lincolnshire, wife of a Canon of the Church of England, had a housemaid scarcely strong enough for her work. She, therefore, determined to become a Nurse, and, on the recommendation of her mistress, who, herself, gave me these particulars, entered an Infirmary for aged and chronic cases, and, at the expiration of three months, was accepted as a *trained Nurse* by one of the most respected and oldest institutions in the county.

Until I pointed it out, the Canon's wife saw nothing of the immorality of the proceeding, nor of the danger to the helpless patients who would be committed to the care of this incompetent young woman. So incredible is the ignorance of the public with regard to Nursing, except—and here mark the difference—except that section of the public that has been victimised by the sham Nurse. These, doubtless, do not recognize the worst results to the patient, but they will tell you, with many

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)