Address

To the Graduates of the New York City Training School for Nurses.

By Edward S. Peck, A.M., M.D.

That the New York City Training School, attached to this large public Hospital, should celebrate the anniversary of your graduation by public exercises is quite in the nature of things, especially in view of the fact that nearly twenty years have elapsed since its establishment.

Commencement Day! obviously a wrong name for you who go out from under our tuition and guardianship; not, however, a misnomer, when, as on the race-track, another batch of thoroughbreds is started in the race of life, in the competition for supremacy. Anniversary Day! it brings back the old faces, it renews dormant and forgotten attachments, it revives old friendships by instituting new ones, and by making comparisons between the present and the past, "by the aid of those who were what we were, but are not what we are."

Did it ever occur to you how many give out in this race for supremacy, among those ambitious for your honours? Nearly 25 per cent.; in my profession, more than half. These are figures which do not lie. In the first ten years some break down, never mind why—and some bolt. That faithful, diligent, blonde Nurse, ranking among the first third of the class, finds detracting circumstances agreeable and promising, and pans out of the race with her fellows. In twenty years, the keen-eyed, sturdy, nervous, black-haired genius of the class, meets with conditions over which she has no control—and for a few years you do not hear of her at all, until in later life you hear that she is the executive head of a large Hospital training-school, or of a business establishment, or of a school for young ladies. In thirty years, or three-fifths of the race, the round bulbous-headed, chestnut-haired Nurse from New England or Canada, or even the southerly counties of Old England comes to the fore, and you see her year by year lengthening her pace and finding favour with the crowd on the reserved seats. She is like the quiet little filly with the white star on the forehead; and somehow, in thirty years that star has grown brighter and whiter and larger. That is the young colt with "staying powers"; that is the Nurse of whom her colleagues and the teachers and officials will be proud. Forty years go by, and the struggle is not over—those left on the track are still running, and with an even, determined pace, whose every step is firmness, dignity, and conviction—whose life-work is an assured achievement, whose reward is the "Well Done" of the parable. *Forty years*—never mind how old our Nurse now is. Does any one stop to compute the age of Florence Nightingale? Oh no! the thought is an indignity. Fifty years! are they racing still? No, they are not running—they are coming to their goal with an easy, contented walk—no straining, no jockeying, no betting. How many are there? Ah! so few of those that set out in the race ever come to the goal. The early loiterers and bolters, the later invalids and diverted ones, and later still, the discouraged ones, have brought the number down to—did I say, three-fourths? Yes, the figures of training-schools in this country give about this ratio. Do not be discouraged with this simile, nor with these facts. I have used the simile of the race-track to show you that it is not always the prize-nurse that wins the battle of life—and that it is far better to proceed in your work day after day, year after year, by a steady, healthy growth, by a slow and constant increase in work and patronage than to leap into it all at once by favour. The well-rounded life of the Nurse must not be estimated by geometrical, but rather by arithmetical progression. Never forget your duty to yourself; its highest aim is not to get gain or favour; it is above all things to be true to yourself, to seek self-realization, or the highest development of one's inner consciousness. And I would not appeal to you to anything short of this, or less than this. Let me quote that admirable sentiment of Sir Thomas Browne on this head—"Every man truly lives, so long as he acts his nature, or in some way makes good the faculties of himself."

When asked by your Lady Superintendent to give an address on this occasion, I felt then, as I do now, deeply thankful that at length an opportunity had been afforded me, heretofore twice declined by reason of positive pre-occupation, to felicitate you on the acquirement of your diploma, and to wish you all joy in going out from this Hospital life of technique to the larger and more humane life of private nursing and personal responsibility. But when I began to cast about for a definite topic on which to address you, I was forced to make inquiry as to one most suitable. Among other inquiries looking to relief, I asked how long was the address to be. And I gathered confidence in the reply that you were to be addressed about twenty minutes or less. Looking over a number of addresses, prepared for a similar occasion, I found that almost all pointed the finger of duty—Duty! stern guide and arbiter of life!—as if the Nurse must always think of her duty to her patient first, and impliedly to the physician next. I thought that, if it were my *duty* at this hour of this Columbian year of grace, 1893, to lecture this deserving class of young graduates on their relations to the world in general, and to ailing man in particular, they were to be congratulated on a limited dose of twenty minutes, well shaken, once taken. I prefer, however, to entertain you—if I may use the word—by some hints as to what a Nurse may do for herself in life, and as to how she may best attain the high end of a true self-realisation.

First.—Don't grow old before your time, and don't give up your vocation, because you have preferred to hide away the family Bible or the almanac. If, for example, you were born in 1845, by this perennial tell-tale, it does not follow that in the year of grace, 1893, you have had the epidemic disease of old age; yours is a sporadic case; it only means that you are young enough to expect spectacles to help out an attack of limited vision. The *giving up* is only when you are ready to write your epitaph in a few lines in bas-relief—and these lines are not to be headed—"Here Lies, *et cætera*,"—for there is too much *truth* within. Speaking of tombstones and epitaphs, I am reminded of a story lately told me by a Doctor of Divinity, of a tall and angular spinster, who, in due time, was honoured

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