

## Standing the Test.

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THE Nightingale Training School for Nurses was founded in 1860, but for some years its progress was slow. The enthusiasm which greeted Florence Nightingale and her co-workers on their return from the Crimea had subsided, and the later enterprise in the direction of providing trained nurses for work at home received at first but a limited measure of public sympathy. While the value of trained and skilled nursing was beginning to be realised, the supply for long fell far below the demand, for the prejudice which, strangely enough, ranked the nursing of the sick in the lowest category of unskilled labour, had not died out, and the undoubted hardships of the life acted as a further deterrent among the educated classes of women whom the promoters of the scheme especially hoped to reach. But the movement received an impetus when, after the death of that noble woman, Agnes Jones, Florence Nightingale wrote the "In Memoriam" entitled "Una and the Lion" as a tribute to her memory and a call to the women of England to follow in her steps. The final words of that eloquent and touching appeal were: "Oh, daughters of God, are there so few to answer?"

The response was immediate and overwhelming. Popular imagination and sentiment were touched by the silent heroism of that life and death, and the honoured name of the writer added force to her pleading. From all quarters applications, nay, earnest supplications, flowed in, and St. Thomas's Hospital had no longer to complain of a dearth of candidates. But out of that crowd of eager enthusiasts, few who were accepted came to stay. The hard work, long hours, and distasteful, often repulsive character of the duties demanded were too much for those whose purpose was founded in nothing deeper than an easily stirred emotionalism. They could not stand the test.

The result was a separation of the wheat from the chaff. Those who remained were strong of purpose, not easily discouraged, possessed of love for their work, which could triumph over difficulties, ready to endure hardness as good soldiers. Such women are wanted in every kind of earnest work, but in none more than in nursing.

The same process of natural selection takes place to-day, but under less rigorous conditions. The number of candidates for training is far in excess of the vacancies for pupils, but of the former a large proportion are unfit, either in character or physique, or both. Nursing (in

idea) seems to have a romantic fascination for the sentimental enthusiast, an attraction quickly dispelled by contact with the reality. Even to the earnest aspirant, the first actual experience of hospital life is apt to come with the shock of a cold douche upon her glowing aspirations. But, to carry the simile further, as the physical shock is succeeded by reactionary warmth and vigour if the system be healthy, so the very trials of the probationer serve to brace and stimulate the earnest student. But there are some whose will is good, and who possess many of the qualifications which make a good nurse, but who lack the physical strength. Such are bound to fail, sooner or later. We may regret such failures, but must recognise the fact that nursing makes such demands upon our physical powers that none but the strong ought to, or can, undertake it.

A double test is therefore necessary—a test of character and of physical strength. Let us consider the latter first, for although physical strength may be the lowest qualification for a nurse, it is nevertheless absolutely indispensable, and the foundation of much besides. Many of our virtues depend largely upon health—many especially of those most necessary in the moral equipment of a nurse, e.g., patience, good-temper, cheerfulness, courage and self-control. Moreover, the very presence of a healthy, vigorous personality has a magnetic influence upon those who are ill. Only the healthy should have charge of the sick.

Under any circumstances, whether in hospital, district, or private work, nursing must prove a severe physical and mental strain. In addition to the actual labour involved, there is a constant giving out of sympathy and vitality, for the merely mechanical nurse, however skilful she may be technically, is only half a nurse. To meet the demands upon her a nurse must possess a good constitution, average muscular strength, and staying power. This last quality cannot be tested simply by medical examination. Many who come armed with medical certificates of competence, fail in endurance, while a slighter, apparently more delicate woman, will succeed. Only a long and searching test can demonstrate satisfactorily the fitness of a candidate for work which must always be arduous. It is a mistake to imagine that the life of a nurse after training (if undertaken conscientiously) is easier than before. What is lost in mere muscular exertion is more than made up for by increased responsibility and other trials. The work of a private nurse, for instance, with only one patient to attend to, may seem to an outsider much lighter than that of her hospital sister. That it is not so, every private

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