

## Professional Review.

### THE CASE FOR HOSPITAL NURSES.

Miss Johnston's paper in last month's *Nineteenth Century*, "The Case against Hospital Nurses," is this month answered by Miss Isla Stewart, Matron and Superintendent of Nursing at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, and the Hon. Sydney Holland, Chairman of the London Hospital.

MR. SYDNEY HOLLAND.

Mr. Holland sums up the comments on the training given in hospitals, "put into kinder language than Miss Johnston has used," as follows:—"(1) The hours are so long and work so hard that nurses cannot do more than learn the technical side of their work, if they do not break down altogether; that the treatment they receive is harsh, if not brutal; (2) that under such conditions their characters not only do not develop, but deteriorate; (3) that nobody cares if they do deteriorate, nobody caring about the personal character of the nurses provided they do their work; and, lastly (4) that there is no one responsible for the nurse's efficiency when her apprenticeship is over."

Answered *seriatim*, Mr. Holland points out: (1) That the hours are long, but it would indeed increase the cost—and, according to Miss Johnston, the curse—of an illness if three nurses instead of two divided the twenty-four hours.

That though while on duty nurses must be at hand to attend to any needs that *may* arise, they are not working all the time in the sense that a factory hand is; that the rough work is done by wardmaids, and that they have regular times off duty; that it is sheer nonsense to say that because nurses have long hours of duty they have only time to learn the technical side of their work, and that therefore their characters deteriorate. (2) No training, whether long or short, will endow a young woman with gifts which nature has failed to bestow upon her, or make her a good nurse any more than teaching will make her a good mother. That the wholesale accusations of inhumanity of hospital authorities prove nothing, and are grossly unfair; (3) that far more attention is paid to and value put upon the character of nurses than on their success in the technical part of their training; (4) that if the public do not go to the hospitals or good institutions to get their nurses they have a difficulty in protecting themselves.

Having acknowledged so much, Mr. Holland goes on to say that because it is impossible to register character that it is a mistake to agitate for the registration of nurses, which only deals with technical qualifications, as an antidote for present evils. His argument, however, would apply with much force to the registration of medical men. No one can pretend to say that character does not form an important item in their qualification for their profession, yet registration has proved an unqualified benefit, and has not only raised the standard of medical education, but has certainly also increased the prestige of the profession, and in this way has attracted a higher stamp of men to enter it. There is no reason to suppose that in the case of the registration of nurses the effect would be contrary. The attitude assumed by the anti-registrationists who place the hospital in a position of

supreme authority and consider that the graduate nurse should remain attached to it through her after-career resembles that of an unwise mother who endeavours to control her children after they have reached maturity by attaching them to her own apron strings. The wise mother on the contrary, though always ready to help them in any difficulty, turns her children out in the world to fend for themselves, and there is no doubt in the minds of those who have observed both systems as to which plan is most successful, or which system turns out the best and strongest men and women. Miss Dock has told us that chickens which never have to scratch for their food do not thrive, and further it is surely, though doubtless unintentionally so, somewhat of an insult to nurses to suppose that while medical students when qualified can be sent out into the world, and no one thinks of attaching them in perpetuity to their training school, yet a nurse can only be guaranteed as fit if she is constantly supervised by the hospital authorities, who keep her under their own eye, and inform themselves of her conduct when at private cases, not only by means of official reports, but also by asking for confidential reports from patients and doctors.

Another important point usually lost sight of by those who advocate this system is that there is no authority to guarantee the efficiency of the training schools. Each one is a law to itself, and while the arrangements of one may be all that is admirable, another may leave very much to be desired.

Dealing next with the private nurse, Mr. Holland points out some of the difficulties which encompass her. "She is expected to keep the patient's spirits up; she must please but not bore. She must be a diplomat in dealing with the patient whose character is unknown to her, who may be queer, hysterical, a nuisance to his family when well, and worse when he is ill. Her advent is often resented by the patient if not seriously ill, often resented by the wife or daughter whose devotion to the patient is breaking her down, and who has had the nurse forced on her, and too often resented by the faithful servant, whose ignorance of nursing enables her to speak with assurance against any suggestion made by the nurse."

Dealing with Miss Johnston's charge as to the callousness of nurses to suffering, and their indifference even in the hour of death, Mr. Holland says, "I cannot conceive a statement more contrary to truth. I appeal to every one who visits or works in hospitals whether anything can be more touching than the behaviour of nurses in the presence of suffering or of death; whether anything more respectful than the silent, gentle attention they give to the stranger and foreigner suffering, dying or dead. . . . As such recollections crowd upon me . . . I have no words strong enough to refute the cruel injustice of Miss Johnston's accusations, or to deprecate the narrow-minded prejudice which can condemn the many in this wholesale fashion for the wrong-doings of the few."

MISS ISLA STEWART.

Miss Stewart, in a concise and lucid article, puts the case for hospital nurses from the vantage point of one who has had "nearly twenty-eight years' intimate acquaintance with hospital nurses," and who holds the proud position of Matron and Superintendent of Nursing in the first Royal Hospital in the kingdom.

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