

received strong objections to the proposed fund from Irish nurses who are not in sympathy with its inspiration.

A Question of "Class."

BY MISS LUCY M. RAE.

At the present time, when the delinquencies of nurses are so prominently before the public, it is, perhaps, permissible to discuss the question of the class of women suitable for selection as probationers in hospitals; and to note the important part that the matter of selection plays in the profession of nursing generally.

It is an undoubted fact that well-educated women can more easily adapt themselves to their surroundings than can those of the lower classes; consequently the acceptance in hospital of women of education would be one point gained for the welfare of the profession.

It would not be fair to say that domestic servants do not make good nurses; as a matter of fact, many in that rank of life have proved themselves to be excellent practical nurses; but skilful nursing, although a necessary qualification, is not the only one of value for a well-trained woman to possess.

A really good nurse should be as skilful in the use of tact as in the practical management of her patients; and for this reason a woman of gentle birth is more likely to be successful than one of lower origin.

The servant class are as a rule singularly lacking in tact; and even when their intentions are excellent they frequently blunder because of the want of social training and the absence of a little discrimination.

Ruskin asserts that "the essence of all vulgarity lies in want of sensation"; and it is on the point of "want of sensation" that the public complain of the nursing profession.

Following the line of argument, it must be admitted that the finer the organism the more acute the sensations.

This is proved every day by nurses themselves in the matter of pain as connected with the different organisms and temperaments of their patients; and because of this, a well-born woman will more easily enter into the feelings of her patients than a woman who belongs to the lower orders.

Most people will agree with the statement that in the present day domestic servants are—to put it mildly—trying; yet a good many of these trying women are admitted to some of the first training schools for nurses, and the public are expected to receive them into their homes in times of trouble on the understanding that the presence of a trained nurse is necessarily an unmitigated joy!

It may be contended that discipline does much to improve these unrefined women, and that they

are not sent to the public in the raw state of ignorance in which they were received into their training schools.

That is certainly true; and for the marked improvement in the demeanours of these women, the public have much cause to be thankful; but the public do not look at the matter quite in that light, and perhaps it is not fair to expect that they should.

The question is: How does that class of woman come to be in that position; and is it not possible to improve the nursing profession by selecting women of a certain social status as probationers?

The matter could be easily accomplished if hospital officials would recognise the fact that the question of "class" is at the root of the evils in the nursing profession; there might then be some chance of a remedy.

Unfortunately, many in authority still think that it is the proper thing to install these ignorant women in the position of nurses, and the effect on the profession is little short of a disaster.

There seems to be no use in writing to assert that the profession is composed of "angelic" beings.

The public knows better than that, and, instead of these protestations doing good, they only bring down a more complete avalanche of wrath, along with some harrowing facts gleaned from all and sundry who have had experience of some of the blunderers.

It would not be reasonable to suppose that, if the profession were composed of gentlewomen only, it would even then consist of angelic beings; that state of perfection is out of the question under any circumstances; but it is reasonable to say that some of the complaints at present made by the public would never require to be made about a refined class of women.

To obtain and keep gentlewomen as nurses it would be essential to organise the lines of the probationers' lives on a different plan from that at present in vogue; and to accomplish this the hospital authorities would require the co-operation of the public.

If the idea would take root that *all* people wish for reform in the profession—officials and nurses, as well as the public—something of real worth might be done.

As it is, the prevailing feeling seems to be that it is the nursing profession against the public, and *vice versa*; in consequence of which there is much talk and practically nothing done.

Those in the profession who have the good of the work at heart recognise that a great deal of reform is necessary to render the name of nurses free from disparagement, and to gain the confidence of the public.

The complaints that have been recently ventilated show a growing tendency on the part of the public

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)