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## Editorial.

### THE DUTY OF THE PRESENT.

When we look back over the last forty years and contrast the position of nursing then and now, we must realise that, in spite of disappointments, in spite of opposition, the progress made has been immense, and warrants hopefulness with regard to the future. One of the most pleasant facts to contemplate is that the improvements which have so far been achieved have been for the most part the direct result of the work of leading nurses. They it was who insisted that the service of the sick demanded the best that the highest type of women could bring to it, and that nursing was not a suitable occupation for the outcast and degraded. They entered hospitals as nurses when the conditions were far different to those which obtain at present, in order that they might learn as far as possible the practical duties connected with nursing, and then as matrons they attacked the problem of the purification and elevation of nursing schools, and their organisation on adequate lines. The magnitude of this work can scarcely be realised by those whose lot has fallen in times when organisation within the principal training-schools has been to a great extent accomplished, but it was herculean; and both the present generation of nurses, and the sick poor owe much to the women who strove, and in some instances laid down their lives, to achieve the necessary reforms.

At the present day the post of Matron of a hospital is a pleasant and honourable office, and it is only necessary to note the numerous applications when a Matronship is vacant to realise that to obtain such a position is the ambition of many women, and that there are more competent and highly-trained nurses seeking these appointments than there are vacancies.

But, if the position of a Matron at the present day, though it undoubtedly has its own

special difficulties, is on the whole a pleasant and desirable one, yet surely she, like her predecessors, has her duty to the sick. To the sick in hospitals good nursing has been secured. The lines of organisation have been laid down for the efficient working of the nursing departments day by day, and a methodical Matron can usually get through all her routine work, and the incidental calls upon her which crop up from day to day, and still have time to spare which she can utilise for the benefit of the sick at large. For it appears to us that as a profession we should now turn our attention to the problem of how best the condition of the sick outside hospitals can be improved. Here, again, the work to be done is colossal, but women whose predecessors have shown us that they could deal effectively with the nursing conditions in hospitals forty years ago need not fear to grapple with it, for we refuse to believe that our profession does not produce as good women now as it did then.

Efficient nursing, then, having been largely secured to the sick in hospitals, it becomes necessary to ensure the same efficiency to the sick at large. In our view this desirable end can only be successfully accomplished by the adoption, by common consent, of a minimum curriculum of nursing education, of a State examination of nurses prior to certification, and by the subsequent grant of a registrable diploma by the State. In this way, and this only, the term "trained nurse" can have a definite meaning, and the public can know that when they engage a nurse she has passed successfully the educational and other tests required by a State Board. That nurses cannot be made perfect by Act of Parliament is, of course patent to all. There will always be some who are more acceptable than others. But when nurses are registered by the State, the public will at least have a guarantee that the nurses they engage are not ignorant of the duties they undertake. They have no such guarantee at present.

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