

The authorities were slow to see how they were wasting their precious material on unsuitable work, or, perhaps, other reasons prevailed; but, anyhow, the fact remained that hospital nursing in the seventies, the eighties, and the early nineties was one of the hardest, most toilsome, and unremunerative of spheres open to women.

Yet, in spite of all this, nursing became distinctly fashionable. For a time, as a natural aftermath of the rich harvest of real workers, the ranks of nurses were largely augmented by others who came, actuated Heaven only knows by what motive, and who soon—very soon, generally—found out their unfitness for the duties required of them—and departed. Disappointed in love; unable, owing to incompatibility of temper, to get on with relatives at home—these reasons, or a restless longing for change and excitement, or a desire to be in the prevailing fashion, brought many undesirables amongst us, though, happily, not to stay. Their spurious devotion vanished, their sentimental ardour speedily evaporated before the uncompromising daylight of stern reality.

The period of sentimental nursing followed that period of heroic ideals into the past, and was succeeded by a sternly practical—one may almost say a commercial—period, which is more or less with us to-day. There is no longer a halo of romance around the head of a hospital nurse now; the public know too much about her for that.

Owing to the flood of countless magazines and daily papers, not a detail of her daily life escapes observation. Her training, her food, her uniform, her hours on duty, her character and appearance, are all freely discussed and mercilessly criticised, each detail being dwelt upon with a thoroughness that leaves very little to the imagination. People are waking up to the fact that a nurse is neither better nor worse than the average woman; that her needs, her tastes, her temptations only differ in degree and not in kind from those of her sisters in other walks of life. Perhaps they do not any longer expect her to combine in herself altogether the best qualities of the highest types of good womanhood, the selfless devotion of the true wife, the patient tenderness of the sister, the faithfulness of the tried and trusted friend. But is it not to the honour and credit of past workers among us that, in spite of the publicity given to our profession, the majority of the public still do expect from us, and nurses still do give evidence of, a desire to attain to a higher standard of character than other women?

Do we want them to lower that standard of what we ought to be? True, we want reason from them; not the exclamation that found its way into *Punch* some years ago, from the friend of a patient who required a nurse to work night and day without rest:—"You want to go to bed? Why, I thought nurses were trained to do without sleep!"

It is no longer, however, the custom in the present day to ignore the physical needs of our common humanity. Not now, in our hospitals, is it true that nurses are overworked, underfed, and underpaid. In some, indeed, the pendulum of change has swung so greatly to the other extreme that there is a danger of a grasping spirit, a wasteful extravagance being engendered by the very plenitude of comfort, nay, even luxury, that surrounds the nurse during her training time.

Her food is excellent, her uniform becoming; the accommodation in the newest nurses' homes leaves nothing to be desired. She has books at her disposal, games are provided for her, a gymnasium is erected where she may practise. There are choral societies, literary clubs, debating associations, and she is invited to contribute to her hospital magazine. Her holidays are ample, her off-duty times long and uninterrupted. She is carefully and systematically taught by lectures, classes, and practical work. Examinations and prizes lure her on to greater efforts. A certificate at the end of her training crowns her with success.

Scrubbers and ward maids relieve her—and very rightly so—of all the rougher duties in the wards, leaving her free to learn her actual nursing work with a spring and energy which could not fail to be absent from those who in past times used to commence their patients' dressings with weary back, flushed face, and aching limbs, after several hours spent in scouring, cleaning, and polishing floors, stoves, and innumerable bright things.

Most hospitals now give a small salary to their probationers while training, and, afterwards, a nurse can command from £25 to £40 as Ward Sister, while Matrons' posts carry with them a salary from £40 to £120 per annum, or upwards, according to the size of the hospital.

So, given the necessary health and physique, combined with the mental and moral fitness for the work, nursing to-day ranks as one of the best, the healthiest occupations for women, offering, as it does, a sure and certain means of earning a livelihood, at once essentially womanly and suitable. It may not, it does not, lead to great affluence; but this world's riches are not what are sought by the best nurses.

Second only to the medical profession is nursing in its opportunities of relieving suffering and giving practical help to the sick and sorrowful.

You, who are just entering upon your career, oh, try to realise the beauty of spirit and motive that may underlie the humblest service you render to those stricken ones, and glorify it. It is so easy to do these things once or twice with heroic resolve and fine feeling. Harder, far, is it to do them with the same gentleness and patience for the fiftieth time of asking, when mind and body are alike weary with a long day's work, and keen-edged nerves are quivering from a continued strain.

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