

State Registration.

A BRILLIANT SUMMARY.

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The survival of ideas developed in a former period, after the conditions with which they were in harmony have passed away, is strikingly exemplified in the mental attitude of a considerable element of the public toward the movement for State Registration of Nurses.

And not only by the public, but also by a number of nurses of the most unquestionable purity of motive and nobility of life and purpose is this question seen entirely through the veil of inherited ideas which arose and developed under the monastic system of the Middle Ages.

For hundreds of years the organisation of the convent was the only form of organisation open to women.

The average woman without family ties could find no possible outlet for her energy and altruism save in the systematised activities of the cloister.

As an opportunity to express herself in useful work, in the care of the sick, the foundling, and the destitute aged, as an opportunity for quiet, perhaps, for study, for acquiring skill in compounding drugs and restoratives, for cultivating garden plants and balsams, and, above all, for the orderly, peaceful, and regulated life which women love, the cloister must have seemed a true heaven in comparison with the semi-imprisonment offered to women in secular life in the good old times, to say nothing of the blessing of being able to escape thus from obnoxious marriages and unpleasant relations.

The vows of obedience and poverty were useful and necessary, because they were adapted to the times. The latter was only relative, not absolute poverty. The convent was rich, although the individual members gave up their wealth. Wealth was pooled; so to speak, but not discarded, a fact which is often lost sight of.

Admirably adapted as was the cloister to the needs of the personality of women in the Middle Ages, it is fast becoming an organisation form completely unfitted to the vastly changed conditions of modern life. It is needless to point out that hundreds of independent careers are now open to women, especially in Anglo-Saxon countries, while even among those of the south and east of Europe the doors of workshops, of business houses, and of universities are opening to women. Every group striving towards these different openings is making unceasing effort toward the better education and preparation of its members, and, as a German physician says, "those groups have made the most progress who have succeeded best in preparing and in educating their members."

Yet the handicap of mediæval ideas rests with discouraging persistence upon the progress of women, and especially is this the case in the world of nursing. Let us see why. First, as a result of the long-prevalent cult of ignorance in mediæval times, science, as is well known, was regarded as the arch-enemy of religion. Scientific investigators were burned or banned, and deep ignorance alone was admirable and lovely. Hard indeed has been the struggle of medicine, which is based on the study of nature, against such repression; and naturally, where there was no scientific medicine there could be no demand for what we to-day know as skilled nursing—namely, a nursing which is based upon an intelligent understanding of the laws of health and of disease.

Secondly, as a result of mystical ideas and a belief in the supernatural.

Humanitarianism does not appear to have been a strong feature of mediævalism, and especially was the care of the sick regarded as so especially loathsome in those robust times, that people who were naturally attracted to it could only be explained by the belief in a supernatural sanctity. Nursing was regarded as the most meritorious and extraordinary of all the virtues. The proposition that nursing the sick could really be considered interesting and satisfying for its own sake, and that it was natural for a kindly, practical woman to be happy in nursing, would have been considered not only preposterous, but an insult to the saints or to the knights who went forth in search of opportunity for noble deeds.

With such ideas one must readily see that the simple willingness to so serve was all-sufficient. Base ingratitude, indeed, would it have been to require educational standards, preparatory teaching, arduous study, and the like.

Thirdly, as a result of the belief that piety was inseparable from poverty (personal poverty, be it remembered, not communal poverty).

These three ideas—the heresy of knowledge, the supernatural character of humane, natural feelings, and the merit of poverty, have, with belated and dogged persistence of dense irrationality, filtered down into the minds of twentieth century people, where they lie like lead at the bottom of many curious and illogical contradictions of our so-called reasoning. So do we inherit, perhaps unconsciously, a strange and otherwise unaccountable prejudice against education, and most especially against all that we call "scientific" or "technical" education, with its corollary, an illogical exaggeration of the potency of what we call "vocation" or "calling."

So do we still find, in our free Anglo-Saxon minds, the belief in the virtues of poverty (for other people) with its necessary corollary of institutional control, the personal and financial dependence (serfdom) of the worker, and the subordination of

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