

## The Twentieth Century Probationer.

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I have been asked to contribute the address I gave the other night at the Matrons' Council to our Journal. I cannot remember it, but from my notes, etc., I think this is about what I said:

I feel rather a fraud, as if I had brought you together under false pretences, for I cannot find any Twentieth Century Probationer to talk about. Human nature is human nature, and the Twentieth Century Probationer differs little from her predecessor of the Nineteenth. I shall, therefore, with your permission, discuss probationers in general—let us say, probationers of the present day. There is a verse from one of the most lovely poems ever written in this world with which I should like to begin: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass and as a tinkling cymbal." When you are young you do not understand it, but as you grow older you begin slowly to grasp the value of reticence, of restraint in judgment, of, in short, charity in your dealings with your fellow workers. And it is difficult to imagine a subject the average Matron has to approach with a larger measure of sympathetic charity than that of the probationer, twentieth century or otherwise; for the trouble and worry that cheerless, unconscious, and often excellent young person frequently prepares for the unfortunate being who is officially responsible for her training, is great.

Now I do approach this important subject in a properly sympathetic frame of mind, especially to-day. For I remember that five and twenty years ago to this very day a nervous, lanky, distinctly surprised young woman made her first acquaintance with a hospital, made her first beds in Matthew Ward, Bart's, duly entangled her broom round every locker, and emerged very hot, flushed, and triumphant from her first day's ordeal, having laid the foundation stone of an affection for hospitals and nursing work, that has lasted her to this day. Across the gap of a quarter of a century I feel sympathetically towards the girl who made so many mistakes, committed so many blunders, was so far from being the ideal probationer, and saw things through different glasses from those of to-day. I know she meant well, and I am not sure that she did not sometimes see more rightly, with that clearer vision of youth, that has nothing to do with expediency, and little with tact, and

that lasts so few of us through the grime and dust and disillusion of life. So I really have a kindly fellow feeling towards probationers, and, as I said before, approach my subject sympathetically, especially to-day.

A friend of mine, of considerable experience in nursing, said to me that she could not understand what a Council of Matrons could find to discuss in such a very unimportant hospital item as a probationer. Now, I do not agree with my friend. Individually, the probationer is a thing of little worth, but, taken collectively, she is a very important asset. Shut your eyes and imagine for one moment your hospital swept clear of its probationers. The vision is appalling! And taken as a pupil, an embryo Sister or Matron, her individuality becomes of great importance. Why the future Matron of St. Bartholomew's may be struggling under your rod! To the Matron, the responsible head of the training school, the pupils of her school are not a trifling item, and the modern hospital is now so organised, that it depends very largely for its labour on its apprentices, i.e., medical students and probationers. Therefore, I think we may well devote our evening to threshing out our opinion on the subject of the latter. But I should just like to state first that I am always opposed to hasty generalisation, or, indeed, any generalisation—it is so often misleading. One is so apt to fasten on to one of two coincidences, and generalise to suit one's own theories.

When we talk of probationers, for instance, we are not talking of a body of women one as like the other as peas in a pod. Nurse Jones is timid, gentle, and dreamy, and looks at the world through the stained glass of cathedral windows; Nurse Brown is breezy, cheery, and self-assertive, and looks out at a brisk and bustling world through wide-open casements—each a good woman in her own way, and each with her own faults. And they all come, or should come to their work with an ideal, for life is not worth living, and work is not worth working if it does not contain a living germ of idealism. By this, of course, I do not mean foolish sentiment, silly gas, or hypocrisy, but just that belief in the worth and value of our labour, and its inner life, that makes it worth doing. It is a dull grey sort of toil that is not lightened by the craftsman's pride in his task, by his innermost belief in its value and beauty.

And we receive within our hospital walls all these different kinds of young women, with different past lives, approaching one object from different points, and these different types have to be welded together in a community to work together for the common good. It is not always easy, for youth wants to build

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