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### Editorial.

#### DEVOTION TO THE SICK.

One of the characteristics of the nurses of a quarter of a century ago was their tireless devotion to the sick. The public feeling had revolted against the type of woman inimitably depicted by Charles Dickens in the nurse, who, handing over the patient to her colleague for the night remarked "The easy chair an't soft enough. You'll want his (the patient's) pillar." Nursing had no attractions to offer to refined and educated women in the "sixties" and "seventies" of the last century. It was in the hands for the most part of a low class of woman, the details were sordid, the work—combined as it was with a great deal which more properly belongs to the sphere of the char-woman—to a great extent repugnant. It was their love of humanity which led earnest minded women to volunteer at that time for hospital service, to overcome the obstacles placed in the way of their doing so, and, once they attained their object, there seems to have been no limit to their devotion to the sick, even to the risk of their health, and the loss of their lives. Thus Agnes Jones, who died of typhus fever, which she contracted while endeavouring to introduce a better system of nursing into the Liverpool Workhouse Infirmary, sacrificed her life for the benefit of the sick as truly as did the martyrs of old for the cause which they espoused. Later the absolute self-abnegation of the nursing pioneers was splendid, though some of it was unnecessary, for it was the conditions under which they worked, conditions which the authorities should not have allowed to exist, which caused the wreckage of health and mortality in their ranks.

We have entered into the result of their

labour, and the well-organised nursing schools of to-day have many more applicants than vacancies for training, for a career which is one of the most useful, as it is undoubtedly the happiest, that a woman who is suited for it can take up. Do the probationers of to-day always realise that the spirit which transformed the gruesome hospital wards of the past into the places of sweetness and light which they are to-day was that of selflessness and devotion to the sick? Scarcely, or we should not so often hear that private nurses so readily give up cases where they are personally not comfortable, though the sick person needs nursing care, or that a senile patient is a "mental case" for which a fee of three guineas should be charged, although the nurse may have had no special training qualifying her to undertake the care of such cases, or to ask the higher fee for the special skill required. It can never be too strongly insisted that the first essential of good nursing is to consider the patient first and oneself second. It is this quality which has raised nursing from a calling regarded as suitable only to the lowest and roughest, to one, now so expert, that it is worthy to rank with the skilled professions; and it is just in so far as this spirit permeates nurses, that they will win and retain the respect and the confidence of the community. By all means let us endeavour to maintain standards of reasonable hours of work, adequate rest, and sufficient pay; they are necessary if our service of the public is to be continuous, and not crowded into a few short years with a wrecked life at the end of it; but let us never forget that when we entered the service of the sick we were thereby bound to put personal pleasure and ease in the second place and, before all things to consider the well being of those entrusted to our care.

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