such women as Miss Nightingale, Miss Dorothy Pattison, Rebecca Lyon, and many another, showing clearly enough that, of all avocations, nursing calls the most imperatively for such qualities as tenderness with the untender, patience with the impatient, combined with rare courage and a rare capacity for firmness when courage and firmness are the only qualities that can save.

The reviewer goes on to add that it has always been recognised that the supreme glory of the female sex is this: that nursing the sick is with all good women an instinct—that often, indeed, it is with the very best women a positive passion—and points out that the exercise of this high function of women, which shed such a beautiful light over the days of mediæval chivalry, has its parallel among races the most primitive, the most barbarous, as well as among the most civilised, for this function, indeed, is but the inevitable outcome of the great maternal instinct itself; but that not until our own time has this feminine impulse had its fullest play and done its noblest work; not until our own time has nursing (apart from the mere Medical skill with which in mediæval times it was allied) been adopted as a labour of love by gentlewomen of wealth and high position—heroines who, leaving the luxurious life to which they were born for hardships which might well appal the stoutest Amazons, have blessed the world by what St. Gregory of Nazianzen would call "the rhetoric of their lives." Among English ladies we have already named two, one of whom has left behind her a name that may almost be called saintly, and the other (still among us), after devoting her life and sacrificing her health in Military Hospitals, refused to accept the £50,000 which her countrymen collected as a testimonial of their gratitude for her services, but suggested the application of the sum to an institution for training Nurses.

The following observations made by the reviewer are of great importance in relation to the more practical side of the subject in which he states that nursing may be said at last to have become a positive science. If it may be said, he goes on, that to all skilled workers of whatsoever kind training is essential—if it may be said that methods are a growth in all sciences and in all arts, and that hence nothing can be effectively done without training—the question, How much has training to do with the efficient nursing of the sick? is most important. "My observation of Trained Nurses," said Professor Humphrey quite lately, "is that the greater the knowledge the less is the presumption, the more they seem to appreciate the very great difficulties that they all feel, or should feel, in tending the sick; it is the ignorant who rashly rush in 'where angels fear to tread.'"

This indeed, adds the reviewer, is only what we might have expected to hear—that in nursing as in everything else,

"A little learning is a dangerous thing."

Here, as elsewhere, presumption is the eldest son and heir of ignorance. To aid us in casting off our natural load of self-conceit—that is the chief work of education. It is the uneducated poet who talks about "Shelley and me"; it is the illiterate novelist or playwright who compares his word-spinning to Shakespeare's masterpieces.

With great truth the reviewer further adds, that true, however, as are Professor Humphrey's words, the fact remains that mere training will not make a good Nurse. It is not only the poet who has to be born before he can be made. With all true workers it is the same. The real inventress of the "division of labour" is none other than the great economist Nature herself. It is not she, but clumsy Convention, who thrusts the round peg into the square hole. Without a strong and special development of what we have called the woman's nursing instinct, how shall a woman hope to be more than moderately successful as a Nurse? And over and above this instinct there must be something else—there must be that nice balance of the faculties, which in all arts and all sciences is requisite before the natural impulsive strength of the individual can find full and sane expression. "For instance," says this able reviewer, "of all the essential requisites of a Nurse, none is more important than that sweet 'patience with the impatient,'" which we have before alluded to—that quality which St. Francis of Assisi calls "courtesy"—"one of God's own properties, who sendeth His rain and His sunshine upon the just and upon the unjust, out of His great courtesy; and verily courtesy is the sister of charity." The poorest, if not the worst, side of an invalid's character is often that which is revealed to the Nurse. No doubt it was through dwelling overmuch upon this—upon the demoralising effect of ill-health—that Carlyle and Emerson lit upon the astounding sophism which confounds good morals with good digestion, the sophism which landed them at last in mere viscera-worship. But let not their insincere and brilliant nonsense cause us to forget the fact that to play the hero to one's professional Nurse is harder than to play the same part to one's valet. The great and beloved poet-painter of our time, who used to say this in his own half-humorous and half-pathetic way, understood the subject well. To realise, however, the fact that the Nurse mostly sees her patient at his poorest moments, requires on the Nurse's part not only a high endowment of dramatic imagination, but also the "charity that banisheth hatred and

previous page next page