

### The Thorny Paths of Charity.

I received the other day a German book with the title, "Dornenpfade der Barmherzigkeit" (The Thorny Paths of Charity), a most depressing and sad journal written by a German nurse during the six years of her nursing career. It is preceded by an excellent preface written by Sister Agnes Karll, who vouches for the truth of the diary, which was written without any idea of publication. But the work itself bears the stamp of being a genuine production on every page.

The writer first gives a sketch of her life, beginning with the words: "My whole childhood and youth was a longing for love," and goes on to describe an uncongenial home, with a stepmother and a father with whom she was not in sympathy. Her parents were in easy middle class circumstances; she received a good education, and seems to have been a clever girl, with a talent for languages and music. Naturally warmhearted, she was full of sympathy for the poor, and shared the Socialistic views of her young brother—views which are so common amongst the youth of Germany. On leaving school at 16, she owns to a catholic taste in careers; sick nursing is her first choice, failing that, music-hall singing or circus riding. Her father, with manly contempt, vetoed her "ridiculous ideas," and took her to Berlin to live with an aunt to learn book-keeping and housekeeping, with a view to assisting him in his business and her mother in the house. Thereupon, one December night she attempts to commit suicide, plunges into the river, is fished out by unsympathetic policemen, and taken to the police station and hospital. When her father comes weeping to her bedside, and she learns that on hearing of her attempt her stepmother had a stroke, she is satisfied that she is not indifferent to her parents, gives in, and becomes a book-keeper for a couple of years. As a reward, she is sent to study for a year at Geneva to her great joy. On returning, she becomes engaged to a young doctor, but breaks off her engagement as the idea of being married and spending her whole life in cooking and housekeeping is intolerable to her.

Being now of age, and owing the bewildering sum of £2 16s., she comes to Berlin and enters a training school, recommended by the family doctor. Here the journal proper begins, on the 25th April, 1896. From the moment she enters the hospital training school, which, according to our ideas, seems atrociously badly managed, every page of the book depresses you more and more; everything goes and drifts in the wrong direction; everything be-

comes gradually more and more sordid; she is overworked, undertrained, even the cheerful egotism of youth, which is hers in a large measure, cannot dispel the gloom. Whilst you cannot but admit that she is not personally what one would consider "a suitable candidate," one feels heartily sorry for the unfortunate girl.

She begins by saying that the hospital staff consists of fifty nurses and ten probationers; but the nurses "are almost always at private cases, so we have to work with the wards-women in the wards, which is not very pleasant for us."

She breaks down more than once during her year's training, but manages to struggle through with difficulty, taking private cases at times when ordered a rest, starving at others. Taken to a general hospital "for the poor," retrieved and sent to the seaside by her indignant family, she finally returns to her training school to complete the missing two months, only to break down again, this time mentally, and to be sent to an asylum. When better, she goes partly as a nurse, partly as a convalescent, to a "sanatorium." At the close of her time there she has, however, definitely to sever her connection with her hospital. I may mention, *en passant*, that the Matron tried, and, I think, justifiably, to cut short her nursing career before, but seems to have been overruled by the Committee. In spite of all the difficulties, hardship, and overwork, you gather that she has an affection for her hospital, that she is interested in her patients, that she is intelligent, and that the glamour of the work is upon her.

She now starts private nursing, and I can only say that the diary now becomes a record of a steady loss of ideals, of deterioration personally, of a growing intimate acquaintance with all that is sordid, depressing, and mean in human misery. Hardly ever does she describe patience, longsuffering, or courtesy in those with whom she has to deal: petty bickerings with husbands, maids, companions, little trivial difficulties, lack of necessary conveniences for sickness, want of food or sleep or fresh air for herself, fill many of the pages; or congratulations when she has a light, a comfortable, case. Then there are the scandals about the other nurses in the home, and mean little rows about nothing. How Swift would have chuckled over her unvarnished account of the human race! She makes some terrible charges of immorality against some of the nurses, describes the suicide of some, and moralises, not unnaturally, "that the disappointment of finding one's ideals not materialised in one's profession is for some

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