

The Good Name of Bart's Nurses.

"But the cup is broken; and all the King's horses and all the King's men cannot mend it. There—put the fair side outwards on the mantel-piece and the wound will not show."

The Virginians.

It is a pity that the world has for the most part so little understanding for its most precious possessions; like a child it throws away what can never be replaced, breaks what can never be restored.

The end of the Bart's protest has left one with a feeling of bewilderment; it was not unexpected, but it is as if all one's landmarks had been uprooted. In all my twenty-five years' work since I left the Hospital, whenever I met with petty injustice, or tyranny, narrowness, or stupidity, there has always been the firm conviction that things were different at Bart's. Whatever faults Bart's had, and it had few in our admiring eyes, it was loyal and honourable, broad-minded, progressive, and consistent—something you could rely on. The pride, the clean pride in one's Alma Mater, was joined in old Bart's nurses to a passionate loyalty that had the most fervent faith in the loyalty of the Hospital. That Bart's should fail Bart's was a thing not to be imagined for one moment. For loyalty is a reciprocal virtue, and trust and confidence gained through decades are a valuable asset and not to be lightly thrown on one side.

But that confidence has been betrayed, and the Bart's authorities have been disloyal, and have acted with injustice towards their nursing staff. It is easy to say that they have acted within their rights, but the worst injustice and the cruellest wrongs are inflicted under the cloak of legal right. It is easy to say that no harm has been done; it is not true. Not only has the standard which the authorities have themselves planted and in which we were trained not been upheld, but deliberately and to the whole world the Governors have declared that they have trained within the last twenty-five years no woman worthy to succeed their late Matron. They have declared openly to the world that they consider her life a failure, her work a sham, and of all the Matrons she has given to England and the Colonies not one is fit to hold the reins after her, and they have turned to a hospital whose training and views are notoriously opposed to those she held for her successor. And that is Bart's loyalty. If it is ignorance, it is inexcusable ignorance, and if it is simply overbearing folly, it is equally inexcusable:—

"Who steals my purse steals trash;
'Twas mine, 'tis his, and has been slave to
thousands;
But he who filches from me my good name
Robs me of that which not enriches him,
And leaves me poor indeed."

and it is with our good name the Governors have tampered. There are rights in this world that are above all the sheepskins and parchments lawyers ever spoil.

The one good thing about the matter is, that the defeat is a victory. It is the deathblow of the idea that the training of the nursing profession can be dealt with solely as part of the domestic and private affairs of an individual hospital, and that the nursing staff need no guarantee that the standard of efficiency shall not be lowered at the caprice of a Committee. If Bart's was strong for registration before, it will be solid now.

It was a Machiavellian stroke of policy to appeal to the business instincts of the Governors by saying that the 40 years of age limit was to safeguard the interests of the Hospital with regard to pensions. Of the last three Bart's Matrons, whose combined terms of office extend over thirty years, not one qualified for a pension. Heavy must be the amount the Hospital is paying its past Matrons in pensions! Unfortunately we are all perfectly well aware why the forty years' limit really was fixed upon.

A great point has been made in some quarters of the fact that physicians and surgeons have at times been appointed to other hospitals than those to which their own medical schools are attached, but the positions are not in the least analogous. The teaching at the various medical schools does not differ materially, the curriculum is bound to be the same, the examination is a central one. Further, the physician or surgeon is one of many physicians or surgeons; he does not stand alone as the only medical head. But the head of a training school for nurses is responsible in a most marked degree for those under her, and it is not too much to say that she is able to make or mar its reputation. A Matron who is not in sympathy with her nursing staff is bound to be unsuccessful, and had the Election Committee searched all Britain they could not have chosen a Matron from a hospital that has more openly and uniformly attacked and repudiated the principles of the St. Bartholomew's nursing staff and its late Matron. They have in their choice shown an extraordinary want of tact, not to use a harsher term, and a total indifference to the feelings of their nursing staff.

One point that we shall always bear in mind

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)