

The Difficulties and Possibilities in a Nurse's Life.*

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In speaking to you this evening I have no intention of enumerating all the difficulties in a nurse's life. Let us rather consider why we have so many, though not more probably than other working women. Is it not often because we will not or cannot rise above the pettiness of our own selfish natures, because we will not take a broad outlook, because we will not realise with Browning "God's in His Heaven, all's right with the world."

In our training we prepare ourselves to become servants of the public, rich and poor; it matters not whether our patients are in hospital or in their own houses, whether they are black, white, red, or yellow in colour, we are set apart to help them in their hour of need, an hour which comes surely and certainly to each one of us, no matter what our station in life may be.

In living this life of service among our fellows we are placed in many different and difficult positions, and we must strive to do our duty honourably and well. As private nurses we are brought into the closest possible relationship with our patients. On the regular staff of a hospital our difficulties lie not so much with the personal life of the patient as with our often apparently fruitless endeavours to get really good work out of the nurses in training, whom we are teaching. By good work I do not mean driving them to fit the largest possible amount of manual labour into the hours on duty, but I do mean the difficulty of making each woman realise how much she is capable of doing in the best way; of developing her good points until we can honestly feel we have made the best of the material given us to work with. Then, in district work we get a real insight into the lives of the poor, and how often they make us ashamed of our own actions by their unselfishness and kindness to each other!

We have chosen to train as nurses in order to help many different kinds of sick people to become good citizens, and incidentally to earn our own living. It behoves us to remember that it takes all kinds to make a world, for many difficulties arise because we forget or ignore this fact, because we want those with whom we come in contact to think and live as we do.

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The power of adaptability to the ways and environment of others is a most valuable asset for a nurse, and a knowledge of human nature and of the world is of the greatest possible use, and should be cultivated by reading well-written books describing modern life, and by using every opportunity for mixing with people of all social positions at home and abroad. Few nurses can afford expensive holidays abroad, but they often get the chance of taking a patient on the Continent or of getting an appointment in the South of France, Italy, or Egypt for the winter. Thus they are able to see some of the beautiful places on God's earth, and to learn more of the wonders of nature. One way and another I have travelled a good deal, and the knowledge thus gained has been a great help to me. Have you ever read the Psalms with the idea of finding out what David thought of the wonders of God as shown in Nature? David lived in a comparatively small country where the hills are not very high nor the rivers very large, but when he says, "I will lift up my eyes unto the hills from whence cometh my help" he shows how the hills in their dignity and majesty may also help us. To enable us to think little of our difficulties and to increase our possibilities of successful work, we should take every opportunity of studying the world in its Divine beauty in the places where man cannot spoil it.

This year I spent some time in the Highlands of Bavaria, where the people are charmingly delightful, and I felt I could learn many lessons from their cheery good temper and uniform politeness.

I do not intend to enumerate all the possibilities any more than all the difficulties in a nurse's life, but they are enormous. I do not think most nurses realise while training that the possibilities in their after life will be so great as we know them to be, and the consequent necessity for stern preparation if they are to be ready to meet them. Also the public undoubtedly expect a higher standard of nurses than of other people, and little things which would be passed unnoticed in others are censured in a nurse. A nurse is expected to be absolutely upright and thoroughly honest in all she says and does, and it not only harms her own hospital, but her whole profession if she falls short of what is expected of her. As the ways of our life open out to us we realise increasingly its great possibilities, and if we assimilate Charles Kingsley's maxim, "Do the work that's nearest, though it's dull at whites," we shall find that the possibilities before us in our chosen profession are practically endless.

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