

## FIVE MONTHS IN A LONDON HOSPITAL.

"Five Months in a London Hospital," by Katherine Roberts, published by the Garden City Press, Ltd., at Letchworth, will be read with interest by a number of people; by maternity nurses because it will furnish many of them with reminiscences of their training days in a large maternity hospital in London, the identity of which is thinly veiled, and by the public because (more is the pity) the picture is in many respects a true one of the manners and customs prevailing in some institutions.

The book is written in the form of a diary, with a certain piquancy, and begins with the reception of the writer by the matron, after which she is "no longer an individuality with a personality, but 'the nurse in Ward 5.'"

The matron having informed the new nurse that work in a maternity hospital was very hard, and so she hoped she was strong, and that she must wear no jewellery of any sort, not even a wedding ring, handed her a piece of paper on which was written "Nurse Roberts, Ward 5, First Floor," and told her to change into uniform quickly and to go on duty at once.

Having donned her uniform, Nurse Roberts relates: "I then proceeded to the first floor, and, having by good luck found the sister, I handed her my slip of paper and said the matron had told me to go to Ward 5. She stared at me for about a minute, and then said, 'Well, go to Ward 5,' I pointed out politely that I did not know the way, so she called to a nurse and instructed her to take me to Ward 5, and tell me what to do there and hurry up.

"The nurse escorted me to a small ward containing one empty bed and two occupied by women obviously from the slums, and two babies, both of whom were screaming.

"She informed me that the first thing to be done was to give the patients their tea, after which I could go downstairs for my own, and then she would come and show me the work, as she was waiting for cases herself.

"I was awfully sorry to see her leave the room, and, not knowing in the least where to get tea, I started by picking up the baby who was screaming loudest in the hope of putting it to sleep. I had just quieted it when the sister came in. 'Put down that baby at once,' she said; 'it's against the rules to pick them up. Have you nothing better to do than play with the baby? Why haven't you brought tea?' . . .

"When the patients were drinking the tea, I informed them that I had just come, and didn't know what to do next. They rose to the occasion, and really, if it had not been for them I don't know what would have become of me. They encouraged me with such remarks as 'Lor', nurse, you'll be all right. You'll get used to them, and don't take no notice of how they speak to you; it's their way here.' Then came the rush of evening work, after which supper of bread and cheese for the nurses. Nurse Roberts relates:

"I was far too tired to speak to anyone; then at nine a bell rang for prayers, and, not knowing what it meant, I remained in my ward till the door opened and the sister demanded why I was not at prayers. 'I didn't know there were any prayers,' I explained, feeling too tired to argue. 'Didn't you hear a bell, and haven't you a tongue that you can ask?' she inquired. 'Do you suppose I have nothing to do but run about after you telling you what to do?' I would have liked to beg her not to exert herself on my account, but, realising the value of silence, said nothing, and now at last I am in my room for the night, and so tired that I can hardly undress, so must stop this."

Here is another example of the method (or want of method) in the instruction of new probationers in their duties:—

"I have had a horrible rush all day, and, unfortunately, this (being Wednesday) was vaccination day, and, naturally, I didn't know. There are no rules or instructions written down to guide one in this place. The first intimation I received was that the door opened with its customary abruptness and the sister looked in. 'Are your babies ready for inspection, nurse?' she inquired. 'Yes, sister,' I replied, not having the least idea what she meant, and she went away. I then turned to the patients and asked them, with the calmness of despair, if the words 'ready for inspection' conveyed any meaning to them. 'Lor, yes, nurse,' said the new patient (who, luckily, has been here before), 'it's vaccination day. Them babies was done last week, and have to be seen this week, just to show as how it took.' Having grasped that their left arms must be out of the sleeves, I hastily prepared them, and had just done so when the door burst open again and the sister told me to take the babies to the doctor at once, and not to stand there looking at her. Feeling no desire to look at her, I picked up both babies at once, and, following some other nurses, found my way to where the doctor was sitting. 'Name?' he inquired briefly, as I handed him one baby at the imminent risk of dropping the other. 'Oh, I don't know the name,' I replied, at which he looked at me with cold surprise, and the sister said, 'Well, find out.' I ran back to the ward, and having ascertained that their names were Samuel and Dorothy, returned once more to the doctor and told him so. He remarked drily that as he wasn't going to christen them that didn't interest him; and then it dawned on me suddenly that of course he wanted the mothers' names, whereupon I did a terrible thing, more really because I was tired than amused. I burst out laughing. Then I realised that there was dead silence and the sister was looking furious. I hurried away, and eventually got the right names. But why, oh, why, can't they tell one before what is expected of one?"

Why, indeed? Lack of method is revealed throughout all the incidents related. A new pupil made at once responsible for the care of patients; a sister with apparently no staff nurse to assist her. These things should not be. As the diary was written nine years ago, let us hope it is not a true picture of the hospital concerned to-day. But

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