

Miss Isla Stewart's work, with their principal events and their effect on the development of her character and views; Part III, Some of the lessons of her life. From this eloquent Address we publish the following extracts:

INTRODUCTION.

At a meeting of the National Council of Trained Nurses of Great Britain and Ireland, held in the autumn of last year, the question of a Memorial to the late Miss Isla Stewart was discussed.

On the motion of Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, who was in the chair on that occasion, it was suggested, and unanimously carried, that this Memorial should take the form of an "Oration," to be delivered annually on the same lines as those we are already accustomed to find mention of in honour of some great departed leader of the medical and other professions.

I was one of those present at that meeting, and one who supported this Resolution very warmly.

A BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.

Isla Stewart was born in Dumfriesshire in August, 1856. From her sister, Miss Janet Stewart, we learn some interesting details of her early life. The whole of her childhood appears to have been spent in the Scotland she loved so well all her life long. Though her sisters were sent to school abroad, the whole of Miss Isla Stewart's education was carried out by a governess, under the supervision of an aunt, who made her up-bringing her special care. We hear of this governess as being a "delightful, cultured woman," and it is in that early development of her character under these happy circumstances we trace the beginning of the delightful companion, the quick intellect and breezy conversation of our friend of later years.

I should like here to quote you a passage from Miss Janet Stewart's notes to me of this early time. "We used then to spend our summer on an island on the west coast of Argyleshire. No one else except cottagers lived on this island. I often think of Isla as she was then, full of the *joie de vivre*, her beautiful red hair, her hat always hanging over her arm, or more often lost, for it was never on her head, and her joyous laugh, she had such a happy laugh." That is a picture complete in itself, of the early up-bringing of Miss Isla Stewart. Surely, as we look at it, we find it easy to trace here again the influence on her character of this healthy, happy free life, the fresh breezy atmosphere of her well-beloved Scotland, blowing

through the windows of her mind and soul, and to find the result of it in the straight, honourable, just woman who became, from the moment she entered the nursing profession, a leader of women.

When she reached the age of twenty, her thoughts were turned in the direction of nursing by reading the "Life of Agnes Jones," and in the year 1879 we find her entering St. Thomas' Hospital as a Nightingale probationer, under the direction of Mrs. Wardroper. It is clear that even as a probationer she must have shown marked characteristics, and attracted the notice of those in authority, since at the end of nine months she was appointed Sister of the Alexandra Ward, a women's surgical ward of twenty beds, which position she held for six years. It is interesting to note here that, although Miss Stewart was called on, with what to us in these enlightened days was very insufficient training, to direct the teaching of others, and to assume the responsibilities of carrying out orders which meant life or death to the sick people under her care, far from feeling herself fitted for it, or that she had received a worthy preparation for such duties, she devoted herself from the moment she was in a position to do so to secure, for all generations to follow, a minimum training of three years, spent in the wards of a hospital which must be recognised as a training school, as the necessary qualification for the title of trained nurse.

In the spring of 1885, by the direct invitation of Sir Edmund Hay Currie, Vice-Chairman of the Metropolitan Asylums Board, she assumed the management of the Small-pox Camp at Darenth, which she retained for six months.

In 1886, she applied for and obtained the post of Matron of the Homerton Fever Hospital. Her reign there was short, barely one year, for in 1887, in a letter to her mother, which I am able to quote, she wrote: "The biggest appointment in the Nursing World is vacant, I am going to have a try for it."

In 1887, she was appointed Matron of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, which post she held to the day she entered into her rest, March 6th, 1910.

DIFFERENT PERIODS OF WORK.

(The following extract is from a letter from Miss Louisa Hogg, formerly Head Sister of the Royal Naval Nursing Service.)

"When I went to train in the 'Nightingale Home,' at St. Thomas' Hospital, in October, 1879, I found Miss Stewart one of the probationers lately joined. She had been there about two months. She was ten years my junior, but we made friends very quickly. I found her a

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)