

PROFESSIONAL REVIEW.

A NURSE'S LIFE IN WAR AND PEACE.

Miss E. C. Laurence, R.R.C. (late Matron of the Chelsea Hospital for Women) has given to the public an interesting account of her nursing experiences, which have been unusually varied, including training in a children's hospital and a large general hospital in London—(readily identified), private nursing in Egypt, responsible work as Sister and Night Superintendent in her former training school, and the superintendence of the nursing department of a hospital in South Africa during the Boer War,—a record of work which seems to have been as satisfying as it was varied.

It is always interesting to know the motives which lead women to enter the nursing profession, and Miss Laurence's first impulse was occasioned by her desire to win the Royal Red Cross, so it must give her considerable satisfaction to have the right to write the honourable letters R.R.C. after her name, and to know that the ambition of her girlhood has been fulfilled.

In 1888 she wrote: "I think you know that some years ago I determined that I would be a nurse. To be exact, it was in 1883 that Queen Victoria instituted the Royal Red Cross, and in the same year I was grieving over the fact that none of the professions in which my brothers were distinguishing themselves would be open to me, as I was "only a girl," so I at once decided that I would try to win the Royal Red Cross."

But as she was still in her teens, her purpose was impossible of immediate fulfilment, and circumstances gave her the opportunity for the "wander-jahr," which is so desirable a part of the education of youth of both sexes.

Next we find her a paying probationer in a children's hospital, and though, at the end of her month's trial, "they were not," she writes, "enthusiastic in telling me my services were invaluable, their only cause of complaint appeared to be that I was slow. So they were graciously pleased to accept my fifty-two guineas (in instalments), and for that sum to allow me the privilege of working hard and fast for an average of eleven hours a day (paying for my own laundry, and buying my own uniform) for the period of one year."

Others who trained in those days have left on record the fact that they were "always hungry," and Miss Laurence writes: "In looking back upon my first week in hospital, the thing that impressed itself upon me more than the trouble of early rising was the fact that during the first month I was always hungry! I have got over the difficulty now, as a weekly parcel of 'tuck' arrives from home. . . . Nearly all the nurses either have food sent or else buy a good deal." She reports dinner at 6 p.m. as the best meal of the day "as the Matron sometimes comes to it." Lunch, a scramble some time between 10 and 12, consisted of just chunks of cold meat and (every

other day) bread and treacle. Butter was issued twice a week, $\frac{1}{4}$ lb. to each nurse, in a little tin mug, and "we have to carry this mug about for weeks in the dining hall and in the ward kitchen for as long as it lasts. But if you don't keep a sharp look-out on your mug, it often becomes empty in the first day or two, and you stand a good chance of having to eat dry bread for the days before the new butter is put out. I very much dislike coffee, but there is nothing else provided for breakfast but coffee and a loaf of stale bread, and our own butter (if we have any left), so we don't seem to start the day very well."

After some experience in a medical ward, Miss Laurence was sent on duty in a surgical ward next the theatre. "I went up rather in fear and trembling, as it was noted for being the hardest ward in the hospital, as the nurses were responsible for the theatre as well—and I didn't see how I could squeeze more work into the days than I had been doing on the medical side. But I received a nice welcome from the Sister, and soon found she was one of the best. She didn't wait for us to do things wrong and then scold us; but she took pains to show us the best way to do them, and then woe betide those who didn't do their best!"

At the conclusion of her year's training at the children's hospital, Miss Laurence paid a visit to a brother at Kimberley, an experience which was to stand her in good stead in later years, and on coming home began her general training. Of a surgical ward to which she was sent she writes: "It took me some time to find out why the ward was always in a state of chaos, and it is only because you are so far away that I can safely tell you the reason. I believe it is simply and solely because the Sister, though a fairly good nurse, is really no good as a Sister. I am sorry to say it, as she has been very nice to me, and the poor thing tries her best. She runs about, and does many things that the junior probationers ought to do, but she has no idea of looking after the nurses, and as the staff nurse is rather a shirker, and is very fond of chattering to the dressers, the probationers who are keen to work are rather overworked, and those who are not keen don't work. Also, if there is a rush of work, Sister rather loses her head, and runs about in an aimless sort of way, and in the theatre if anything goes wrong, and they want things in a hurry, she always seems to hand the wrong thing."

At the outbreak of the South African War Miss Laurence had the good fortune to be appointed Superintendent of a hospital in Natal, supported at first by a patriotic private individual, and afterwards taken over by Government.

For her account of the work during that eventful time we must refer our readers to the book itself. It is published by Messrs. Smith Elder & Co., 15, Waterloo Place, London, S.W., price 5s., and, like all books written by those who have an intimate knowledge of their subject, is eminently worth reading.

M. B.

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