

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

THE NIGHT NURSE.*

To the mind of every nurse it will be at once apparent that this book is written from within the gates.

There can be no doubt of its genuine first-hand manufacture. The familiar hospital phraseology, the personality belonging peculiarly to that circle, the atmosphere surrounding the book from cover to cover, none of it overdone or strained, is set forth by one who knows, that is certain. To those whose hospital life has become a memory only it will stir the old eager and tender memories bound to be associated with the days when youth and enthusiasm went hand in hand with love and skill to conquer the enemy.

But it is not all praise that we have for this work. We are not prudish enough to suggest that a nurse may not rejoice in the love of an honest man as do her fellows; yet even if the ideal of love and marriage were kept at a high level we should still resent its apparent domination in the very precincts of the serious and sublime.

But what are we to say of the level to which love is reduced in these pages, and why we ask, should the writer have taken pains to reveal the sordidness and undisciplined adventures of members of a calling of which he is so evidently one?

But there is so much that is delightful, and so much to be regretted, that either unqualified praise or blame would be impossible.

Perhaps the key to the tone of this book may be found in the following extract:—"It is a fixed law of all hospitals, unalterable as that of the Medes and Persians, that nurses are not permitted to give supper parties to the residents on any pretence whatever. Such things are forbidden because it is the object of every matron to train her staff into a nun-like unconsciousness of man?"

Surely it is a slip of the pen to find the illicit entertainments given by a night nurse, Nurse Otway (known as "Otter," and so addressed by the residents), as "pleasant *al fresco* suppers in the kitchen."

Here is a specimen of one of these entertainments:

"Half an hour later Connellan followed Fitzgerald into the kitchen with the cautious air of one who knows he has no plausible excuse, should the Sister be present. He was a house-physician, and No. 9 was a surgical ward.

Presently Nurse Otway "rustled in from the ward. 'Hello, Conn! 'llo Fitz!'

"'I say! I've got no biscuits,' she exclaimed.

"'I think I know where I can raise some,' said Connellan.

* By the Author of "The Surgeon's Log." (Chapman & Hall, Ltd., London.)

"'Well, buck then!' said Fitzgerald, seating himself comfortably at the fire. . . .

"'You're a very satisfying woman to look at, Otter,' he murmured, idly, breaking the silence.

"'So they tell me!' she answered, with a sidelong glance.

"'How is the love affair getting on?' he queried.

"'Which one?' she murmured, demurely.

"'Oh! the last; Bunny Rogers, wasn't it?'

"'Oh! that,' she pouted; 'I thought you meant—; that's all over a week ago; I've promised to be a sort of step-sister to him. . . .'

"'Can't make out why I am not head over ears in love with you myself, like most of the others!' he said, lazily."

Read the episode where the two men pretend to perform artificial respiration on the nurse, only stopped by the approach of "Night Sister."

Nurse Otway "rapidly cleared away the incriminating cups while the sound of skirts came swishing up the corridor.

"'Just in time,' she thought, with a sigh of relief, as the Sister entered—a thin, ascetic-looking woman, with sombre, melancholy eyes, suggestive of the soul, cold-blooded, fanatical within. Spectre-like she glided along the dim-lit corridors, which seemed to be her normal habit at night. She was so essentially of the shadows that it was only by a stretch one could imagine her living by the light of day."

This, unlike the rest of the book, does not ring true. After all, Sisters were once "pro.'s"—maybe, even charming "pro.'s."

We cannot quite believe that it is generally the custom for residents and nurses to address each other indiscriminately by their Christian and nicknames.

Here is another instance:

"The buzzer sounded clearly in the ward, bringing him sharply to himself by the call of duty! She watched his face. The professional mask had fallen over it. Everything else but the call in hand had been forgotten.

"'Good night, Otter,' he said, mechanically.

"'Good night, Fitz,' she answered, her eyes following him down the corridor, curiously."

Fitzgerald strikes at a truth, when he remarks:

"'Bother the matron, and all other women who overwork their fellow-women'; but he should have included a wider circle in his condemnation. Usually the Matron, where nurses are overstrained, is expected to make bricks without straw, and the committee is primarily to blame.

The heroine of the story is Nora Townsend, known as "The Duchess," for a certain aloofness.

H. H.

COMING EVENTS.

April 6th.—National Health Week begins. A crusade to make the public acquainted with the latest developments of hygiene.

April 22nd to 25th.—Annual Exhibition and Nursing and Midwifery Conference, Horticultural Hall, Westminster, London.

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