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EDITORIAL.

NIGHT DUTY.

It is a truism that one half the world does not know how the other half lives, and certainly few people comprehend the unceasing work in hospitals and infirmaries, where day nurses pass on their duties to night nurses, and night nurses report on the night to day nurses, with monotonous exactness and regularity.

Yet it is this very regularity which makes night duty in institutions, hard as the work often is, so much less trying than the comparatively lighter task of similar work in private houses where, as a rule, a nurse goes from one acute case to another. In hospital, night duty is generally undertaken under suitable conditions, for a definite period. In private houses, unless absolutely necessary, it is natural that the relatives should desire to avoid the expense of a second nurse, in which case the one who is single-handed is never free from anxiety, sleeps lightly, and, perhaps, gets up more than once during the night to attend to the patient's needs. If she goes on regular night duty it may be for a week or a few nights only, so that she has scarcely become accustomed to the change before she once more is recalled to day duty, and the habit of sleeping regularly is often broken, and digestion impaired, by the constant changes, and the effort to adjust her life to these constantly varying conditions.

Whether night duty appeals to a nurse, or whether she shrinks from it, is largely a matter of temperament.

To some the hushed ward, the solitude, with only the sick and sometimes the dying for company, are repellant; they long for the rush, the life, the colour, the companionship, associated with day duty.

To others, although these things also appeal, the constant publicity and contact with others are real trials. Spells of quiet and solitude seem necessary to the welfare of some natures, and many who have gravitated to the towns for training—irresistibly impelled by the call of the sick, a call as insistent and compelling as that of music, or painting, or the drama, to any one with the true vocation—look forward to night duty, with all its hard work, as affording the solitude, and the opportunity for capturing that serenity which formerly they sought in wide moorland spaces, or amidst the silence of the everlasting hills.

How few people see the dawn! How much they miss as the day breaks, and the shadows flee away, those who keep watch by night could tell them. Whether it comes gradually, as in temperate regions, or with the dramatic suddenness of tropical splendour, the dawn of day is a thing to be remembered with thanksgiving. Busy as the night nurse is at that time, the sunrise rarely fails to afford her at least a momentary delight.

Last, but not least, nothing affords a greater test of a nurse's qualities than night duty. There is nothing spectacular about her work, there is so much that she can do, or leave undone, which affects the welfare of the patient. The poet's instinct was moreover sound when he put into the mouth of a nurse the words—

"I am sure that some of our children would die
"But for the voice of love, and the smile, and the
comforting eye;"

and nurses know well that adults, when ill, are mostly big children who need mothering and comforting, and that the strength and sympathy of their nurses, on which they quickly learn to depend, are potent factors in the fight with death, which takes place over many a sick bed in the still hours of the night.

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