

it is quite as arduous, and "once a nurse, always a nurse," so the impulse to heal and alleviate brings her much gratuitous nursing work still. Far from regretting her solitude, she revels in it, and has discovered a long list of advantages in the possession of a house all to oneself. First on the list comes the bracing effect of having to think out and decide the many questions which arise daily, and in which one is commonly guided by consultation with others. The absolute lack of such moral bolstering has bred in her a much-needed self-confidence, an ability to control her too sympathetic and responsive nature, and to decide questions by the promptings of reason rather than by those of feeling; also, when occasion demands it to "dare to be a Daniel," and stand firmly alone in the face of almost overwhelming opposition.

A trained nurse who is now successfully running a perfect London boarding-house was lately discussing nurses. She was struck by their want of initiative, of *savoir faire*, and sometimes of integrity, when they are suddenly deprived of all the props which have surrounded them during their three years' hospital training. In many ways they are too much like children. Often method, punctuality, neatness or self-control drop from them when they are no longer enforced by hospital authority. Many of us have noticed the same thing. It is never good to get into a groove, and the groove which hospital life may form is no better than the groove which some people make of a life lived alone.

Not the least of the advantages of living alone is that it constitutes a touchstone for one's principles. To have a domestic life immune from the criticism and stimulation of any human presence means either that many of one's principles crumble and vanish, or that one learns to live ever in the presence of invisible critics.

I have seen the opinion expressed by one who has tried it that it is terrible to have to prepare one's own meals and to eat them alone. That, of course, all depends on the position meals occupy in one's perspective of the day. The solitary nurse aforesaid has become aware of the undue amount of time and energy ordinarily devoted to meals. She has realised that the maximum results of proper feeding, with the minimum output of expense and labour, can best be secured by regarding the physical body as a wonderfully intricate and delicate engine, which must be fed and treated scientifically if it is to run well. Pure food of simple quality and simple preparation meets this requirement, and to the type of woman who can live a

solitary life a good book provides a perfect accompaniment to a meal. There is no need for such simplicity to be sullied by slovenliness. One can serve one's own meals quite daintily in restaurant fashion, which saves much labour by reducing the number of requisites.

An illness alone sounds rather dreadful; of course, much depends on the nature of the illness, but I know one who has had many illnesses alone, preferring that to available assistance, as well as with others round her, and she invariably recovered far more quickly on the solitary occasions, because she was free from the fret and worry of adding to the burdens of others, and from constant disturbance by chatter. This more than balanced the exertion of getting her own nourishment. There is nothing more recuperative than to spend hour after hour lying in blessed silence in a dim, airy room, with no one near but one's guardian angels.

Perhaps the greatest luxury of all in a solitary home life is the opportunity to find oneself, to think out things, uninterrupted by the necessity for small talk. To a certain type small talk is an utter waste of energy. For them it oils the wheels of life at too great a cost. One loses the discipline of give and take in this particular way, but the balance is kept by other means. If one could choose as house-mates only those who would uplift one, and call out all the strength and sweetness of one's nature, then associated life would offer the greater advantage. Otherwise, there is more growth for soul and mind to be found in the intimate companionship of oneself and the thoughts of the world's greatest writers.

Earth life is like a garden, and we humans are as plants. Some plants, as the exquisite little *linum grandiflorum rubrum*, need to grow closely together in patches, supporting each other, if they are to flourish and beautify. Others, like *mignonette*, require to be planted singly and given ample space, if they are to attain their full height and fragrance.

We cannot all choose whether we will dwell solitary or in families. To those compelled to isolation by death or circumstance, after years of continuous and appreciative companionship, Emerson's words on such a revolution in our way of life may bring comfort:—"The man or woman who would have remained a sunny garden flower, with no room for its roots, and too much sunshine for its head, by the falling of the walls, and the neglect of the gardener, is made the banyan of the forest, yielding shade and fruit to wide neighbourhoods of men."

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