

THE SOUL OF THE PROBATIONER.

In the bad old days it was an unwritten law that a probationer must put up with all sorts of treatment from those who chanced to be in authority over her, and to complain at all generally meant that she herself was proved to be in the wrong, and that she must either resign or be dismissed. Possibly she was allowed the option of learning to grin and bear it. In a great many cases, fear of what dismissal might mean to their future kept nurses silent, and only in secret could they weep out their terror and their loneliness.

It seems so strange that nurses who have finished their training, and hold some position of authority, should so quickly forget their own struggles and their own unutterable loneliness.

It is so easy when life leads us into pleasant places to put from our memory the struggles of the past, or to allow the remembrance to make us bitter. We may have wrested from the world the position we have long desired, but the knowledge of having attained should make us humble, and make us willing to stretch out hands of help to those who are only beginning to climb.

Naturally a nurse in her first stages is a very awkward person, but the knowledge that those above her will come down on her mistakes in a merciless way does not help away with her awkwardness. And in a "pro's" heart can grow up a very real terror of the unknown—for this is how she reasons. If the little mistakes she makes now bring such retribution, what is going to happen when she gets more responsibility, and makes greater mistakes? She forgets, in the unreasoning terror that comes over her, that before she gets any real responsibility, her first awkwardness will have fled, and the training which now seems so arduous and so far-off from being an accomplished fact, will have proceeded a little farther, and her knowledge will have grown a little more. Cleaning brasses, sweeping floors, carrying in meals, make her back ache, and her feet throb in a way they have never throbbed before, and she sees no end to the three or four years which loom so far ahead.

A little word of kindness goes such a long way—a little word of encouragement makes such a difference.

A hospital should be like a school or a college. At the beginning one enters the lowest grade and works one's way up. A way is made by merit alone—a girl is judged by what she herself is. The best type of schoolgirl sets her face

against all ill-natured gossip, college girls are too busy learning or playing to gossip at all. They have little worlds of their own, comrade chooses comrade, soul meets soul, and over and above all there is the strong feeling of brotherhood—or shall I say sisterhood—which binds scholars or students together. There is no littleness about the spirit of school or college. And why should there be about the spirit of a hospital? Hospital life is such a wonderful thing if one looks just a little way beneath the surface.

The searchlight of the world is being turned upon the question of nurses and nursing. They, to whom the profession is dear, are doing their level best to better the conditions all round. And in the nursing profession we want the best recruits, and—*we want them to stay.*

Women of education, of refinement, of intellect, of broad sympathies and earnest desire are looking for a lifework. What has the nursing profession to offer them? A career—yes, surely; the worthiest career open to women. But apart from the career, what has the nursing profession to offer a new recruit?

Scorn for her ignorance, ridicule for her "slowness," impatience for her mistakes—until the cup of her bitterness seems full to overflowing—and there seems no way out of the muddle but to give up altogether. Shall this be said of us?

"What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" What shall it profit a woman if she find a career, and in her finding lose her soul? What does it mean to lose one's soul? What does it mean to us who are nurses? It means that we have forgotten how to be kind, we have forgotten how to be forgiving, forgotten how to be gentle, and just a little bit merciful.

The soul of a woman shines through her actions. Not long ago I watched a Sister taking charge of a band of nurses during an air raid. She was placing them where they were likely to be safe, and a minute later she herself went out into the open without a throb of fear. I felt glad I belonged to the profession, and as I stood listening to the crash of bombs—wondering, wondering—Death did not seem such a terrible thing after all. Her gentleness is graven on my heart.

Girls, whose lives must be forever darkened by the memory of what they have lost in the war, are looking around for work which will help them to forget. Surely, the nursing profession is the one they should enter. There is work for body and brain, the physical tiredness helping to alleviate the ache of the mind. They

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