

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

WARD TALES. *

This peep behind the scenes of V.A.D. life in the home hospitals, written, presumably, by "one of themselves," will be read with great interest by the nursing world. It naively unfolds the point of view of the V.A.D. which, while it in many respects corresponds with that of the civilian "pro," assumes a self importance which in the last-named damsel is generally kept in the back of her mind, otherwise she might have a bad time of it. We recognise, of course, that this is a chronicle of V.A.D. experience only, otherwise we might be tempted to suppose that the trained nursing staff was of secondary importance, at any rate in the eyes of the patients.

For example—

"The senior V.A.D. was alone in the ward. Sister Renton had left for her evening off, and the staff nurse in the twin ward of B.4 on the other side of the long corridor, rarely came across unless the girl really required her help.

"This was Peggy Vaughan's happy hour, the happiest in a happy day, for the wards were her life, and her 'boys' filled her every thought. She loved her thirty grown-up babies. She knew in her heart that here was her true vocation, and these evenings when her little kingdom was all her own were hours of complete happiness.

"To-night she clucked over her big brood like any little mother hen."

The reader will wonder if Peggy has been true to the vocation now that the glamour has been removed. It is to be hoped she has, for she seems a nice little girl.

The chapter headed "A Conference on the Powers" is illuminating.

"First year of the war I remember writing to a fearfully swagger matron, and I just *grovelled* on the chance of getting abroad to do some real work. She answered it. She said there wasn't the *slightest* chance of any untrained woman ever *smelling* France, much less nursing there, but if I were a good girl and waited long enough, I could doubtless do some quite good work helping the real nurses at home. Reads a bit funny now, doesn't it?"

Henson, who had been bombed in France and torpedoed in the Mediterranean, grinned appreciatively.

"Quite funny, really, but there is a side to it that isn't funny, you know, Podgie. There was such lots of enthusiasm at the beginning, and yet everyone got so choked off that it isn't much wonder that they have to appeal and appeal all the time for more V.A.D.'s. They're all gone to do other kind of war work where they aren't treated like pariahs." Then she proceeds to utter a bit of sound common sense. "It does seem as if the War Office people ought to have had a bit more foresight. Then they could have worked at some plan for a definite war-time training

* By E. Chivers Davies. John Lane, Bodley Head.

for us, not left us to work out our own salvation, as most of us have had to do."

"What I can't fix up is this," said Henson. "We haven't any sort of *guarantee*. Remember when I was on night duty in B.4, Podgie? *I had a big ward absolutely on my own with heavy surgicals.*" (The italics are ours.) She goes on to relate how, in the next ward, she is set to wash walls and polish floors, and then, "Sister Perkins likes me, and as the staff nurse is a lazy sort of girl, *I do staff nurse work if I like.* That's what I can't stick, and that's where the blessing of a three years' certificate comes in, for they can't play up the trained people like that."

Henson apparently is unconscious that the three years' certificate carries with it other advantages.

Pamela, in her turn, relates a disgusting scene which took place in a marquee of sick coloured men.

"I yelled at them in Serbian, then I made them hop into one bed—they went like lambs and I just bumped their two frizzy heads together till they rang. Give me a nice rowdy surgical block with nobody too ill in it to enjoy the fun. We *have* had some days" We imagine, indeed it is to be hoped, that Henson has since discovered that perhaps after all she had no vocation, but it would not be fair criticism to leave the reader to suppose that the predominant note of the book was the rowdyism described in this chapter.

Here is a picture that will appeal to night nurses and reveal the strain of responsibility on an untried girl.

"At the small hours of the morning her restlessness increased. She knew the symptoms only too well. By every means at her disposal she fought the terror which invaded her mind, and strove to keep at bay the oppression that filled it. Half-past one struck and she moistened her dry lips. God! how long the night was. Picking up her book she read desperately for a few minutes, listening for a sound that never came."

The nameless dread found its justification later when the exhausted girl was told "My leg's kinder funny. I think its bleedin'."

The book teems with incidents grave and gay connected with ward and staff routine. It is brightly written and very readable. The sympathies of the reader are constantly enlisted, either for the patients or on behalf of the war probationer, who at any rate seems to have fared no better than her civilian sister in regard to creature comforts.

The remark of Medenway, "I don't eat nowadays, I just stoke," will find echo no doubt in more than one hospital.

The V.A.D. uniform comes in for its share of opprobrium.

"Cheap and nasty, like the rest of the outfit," said Henson. "I'd like to get hold of the woman who invented this rig and ring her yellow neck."

Presumably the author is "demobbed." Candid criticism is always refreshing and for this reason and others the book is to be commended.

H. H.

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