

NURSING AS A VOCATION.

Of the many avenues open to women in these latter days, none presents more *real* advantages than professional nursing. Advantages? queries the critic: Is not the trained nurse's life a particularly hard one from start to finish? From those never-to-be-forgotten days when she is the "little pro," at everyone's beck and call, right on to the time when she reaches the topmost rung of the ladder, and signs herself "Matron," the vocation is one of hard work, worry, and short commons! Is it, my pessimistic friend? We shall see! If the succeeding lines fail to prove you in error, these will have failed in their objective.

In choosing a calling or vocation in life, two issues present themselves: First, how am I going to serve my fellow men in this; and second, how is it going to benefit myself? Pre-eminently the vocation of nursing is a lifelong service to suffering humanity, but the benefit to the aspirant herself is immeasurable. During the hard days of training—no one denies they are really hard—the mind of the individual is being moulded to discipline in every aspect—regularity, punctuality, order, exactitude, observation, keenness, versatility and, above all, the relative value of everything that is best in life. While a similar gradual evolution is taking place in the soul—rare qualities of kindness, sympathy, compassion, charity, are being daily developed. Seldom would one need to say to a veteran nurse: "Judge not that ye be not judged," for, with an overwhelming pity, she tends the degraded and sin-steeped patient in the same tender compassionate way as she does the saintliest of mankind. One had evidence of this again and again during the Great War. What matter whether the wounded soldier was friend or foe, he had the same claim upon her tenderness, and the same share of her ministering help and care. If the walls of those war hospitals could speak, methinks the old, old text would echo and re-echo down the corridors of time: "He came not to be ministered unto but to minister." The glory of self-sacrifice is its own reward. Let materialists cavil and cynics sneer; "Service for Others" is still the wonderful motto of the nursing profession.

Now let us endeavour to "boil down" some facts regarding nursing as a vocation. It is a hard training, says one. It isn't well-paid, suggests another. There is too much red tape, voices a third. All, in a measure, true. 'Tis a hard school. As probationers we have to fetch and carry, scrub and clean, do menial service, endure in silence, often wrongfully, and oftentimes with but little consideration and seemingly little sympathy. But these conditions are graving tools which fashion character, stamina, grit, endurance, patience and pluck. As our training proceeds we realise how necessary, in the main, was the tightening of the screw of service, and live to bless those who applied it most. Besides which the *esprit de corps* of hospital life made us all sharers of one another's joys and sorrows, and many a seeming ill was exploded by discussion.

When the days of training are over and we have "earned our parchment," there is still much to learn in administration, teaching and controlling others, "ruling with diligence and showing mercy with cheerfulness"; and here let this fact be emphasised—that the most obedient probationer makes the most tolerant staff nurse and sister; for human nature is a constant quantity and the attributes of heart and brain and mind which made us successful juniors, elect us as competent and trustworthy seniors. We advance step by step. A long spell of work in the wards is the best qualification for higher posts. The Matron and Assistant-Matron who is most successful with her staff is the lady who knows from intimate experience every difficulty of ward work and administration.

Let us look now at the second objection to nursing as a vocation. It is poorly paid! To this we must reluctantly assent, although evidences are not wanting to-day that this wrong is being slowly righted. The greater the pity that the British public should be so tardy in assigning to the work of its best friend a proper market value. At the same time nurses think less of remuneration than of success in their work somehow, and restored lives are compensation for the lack of "needful," so prevalent among us. Then our third critic says: "There is too much red tape!" If, by "red tape," you mean law, order, discipline, and all that these stand for, then your accusation stands condemned; for again, these are blades in the graving tool, the standard of whose work speaks for itself. If, on the other hand, you mean petty restrictions and endless rules about trifles, you are right; but these trouble the faithful nurse, who does her duty as well as she knows how, and is loyal to her superiors, not at all. They simply don't apply to her, and that's all. Surprising how little trouble we find in this old world, when we learn not to make it for ourselves! The same opprobrium has often been cast on our splendid army and navy, but "facts are chieftains that winna ding." Discipline in its best and broadest sense produced the men who won the war. So our hospital régime produces the women, whose dauntless spirit and power of endurance win the war against disease every time. Nursing as a vocation stands first among the many avenues of woman's work to-day. It is pre-eminently "ours," and methinks yields the greatest satisfaction at the end of the day.

Nursing may not appeal to certain types of femininity, but to the girl of gentle, sympathetic, temperament, prone to dwell on the needs of others, nursing makes a strong appeal. A well-educated, dignified, refined girl may find in this sphere something which appeals to her rather than to another cast in a coarser mould. Both are needed in the scheme of life; but humanity is best served by fitting a round peg into a round hole. So if nursing is your vocation, get busy in learning all its arts and sciences; and be assured that from your ministry to others flows great enrichment to your own life.

A. E. M.

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