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EDITORIAL.

A DEFENCE OF THE MODERN PROBATIONER.

The modern probationer could not wish that her defence should be in abler hands than those of Mrs. Paul, Chairman of the Professional Union of Trained Nurses, the last speaker at the Nursing and Midwifery Conference at the Royal Horticultural Hall last week.

Mrs. Paul was particularly well qualified for the task, as she herself trained as a nurse in a leading London Hospital some thirty years ago, and at the present time she has a daughter who is a probationer in a hospital. She thus comes into contact not only with the point of view of her daughter, but with that of her friends also.

The speaker said that when asked to defend the modern probationer she inquired of what she is accused, and was told that she is said to be frivolous, fond of pleasure, and that she thinks more of herself than of her work.

Mrs. Paul confessed to some sympathy with the outlook of Shakespeare :

“ Youth I do adore thee,
Age I do abhor thee.”

Her first comment was that the outlook of the modern girl was different to that of her predecessors of a quarter of a century ago. Formerly nursing and teaching were almost the only occupations open to girls of the middle classes. Now they have a much greater choice of occupations, and it is presumable that they enter a hospital for training because nursing has some attractions for them. It must be remembered that the modern girl when she enters a hospital has not left her school days very far behind; the hospital seems to her rather like a school, and the Sisters and senior officials like schoolmistresses.

In the modern school a girl is taught that

the only true discipline is self-discipline, and with this upbringing she enters a hospital. “ Put yourself,” said Mrs. Paul, “ in the modern girl’s place. The attitude with which she was met was, ‘ What have you done to come here?’ so that it seemed to her almost as if she had entered a reformatory.”

It was not playing the game to enforce discipline by means of petty tyranny; for instance, a probationer may not be allowed a key to her bedroom, and she may be liable to have the door of the room opened at any time from the outside. Hours off duty were not always arranged beforehand, and probationers were unable to make arrangements to visit friends whom they wished to see. They compared this most unfavourably with the position of their friends who were typists, or in other employments who were able to do so, and who regularly had Saturday afternoon and Sunday free. Of what use was a day off to a probationer if she was only informed that she was to have it at ten o’clock the night before? If she had no home in London she did not know where to go, and she probably spent it—well, not in a way her mother would like.

Again, her day off was generally arranged for lecture day, so that she had to be back by six o’clock.

Mrs. Paul contended that hospital discipline was not in accordance with that of modern times. The probationer was squashed, sat upon, made to feel a perfect worm. It was an atmosphere in which she was not comfortable!

The nurses’ superior officers of the last generation might be harsh, they might be stern, but they were not vulgar. Could as much be always said at the present day?

We hope there are not many hospitals where discipline is enforced, and days off arranged, in the manner described.

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