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EDITORIAL.

THE SPIRIT OF SERVICE.

Every age has its distinctive characteristics, its virtues, and their corresponding defects. Thus the Middle Ages were times of great self-sacrifice, self-abnegation, and uninstructed devotion to the sick, when lives were needlessly sacrificed from a mistaken sense of duty. From the dissolution of the Religious Houses in the time of Henry VIII, which, whatever their drawbacks, did care for the sick and needy, the care of the sick passed gradually into the hands of ignorant, low-class women, typified by the figure of Sarah Gamp, drawn for us by the unerring pen of Charles Dickens.

By the middle of the nineteenth century nursing in this country had reached its lowest ebb; the sick were neglected, and even robbed, by lazy and callous attendants, who cared for nothing but their own advantage. Then once more a humanitarian and religious influence was exerted by Mrs. Elizabeth Fry, by the Nursing Sisters of St. John, quickly followed by the shining example of Florence Nightingale, whose great strength lay in the fact that she was not only a humanitarian, but a scientist, who formulated the broad principles upon which the care of the sick must be based to be efficient, and also the hygienic principles which must be enforced, in order to prevent people from becoming sick. That was her supreme contribution to the uplifting of nursing: she raised it on to a new plane.

But evolution was still imperative. Once again a wealth of devotion was poured out by women who desired nothing better than to spend themselves in the service of sick humanity. But the conditions of service were such that nurses not infrequently sacrificed their own lives in the course of the restoration to health of their patients, and, short of the sacrifice of life, impaired health, physical deformities and disabilities often resulted. But the splendid spirit of service, which inspired women of the best type of all classes to enter

hospitals, under conditions unheard of at the present day, resulted in the development of a group of pioneers who not only rendered fine service to the sick, but who, observant in all that concerned their life's work, realised that something more than devoted service, however splendid, was needed. They therefore took up the difficult task of the organisation of nursing and nurses, in the same spirit of service to humanity as had animated them in their personal care of the sick.

And the struggle was even sterner than that for the efficient care of the sick. Women might expend themselves for a mere pittance, asking little but their right to serve; they might even win praise and adulation for so doing; but those who entered on the more difficult task of organisation came up against great economic conditions—a fact which at first they only partially comprehended—and the path to the promised land led through a desert infested by the forces of ignorance, prejudice, and self-interest. Now the goal has been won: the Nurses' Acts are on the Statute Book, the Rules based upon the Act are framed, the Register is published. The Profession of Nursing has been founded on a rock.

Conditions of labour have, however, altered—have altered, indeed, so considerably that the danger is that, with less strenuous conditions of work, and improved conditions of pay, the intrusion of other interests may cause the spirit of service to burn with a flame less pure than that which inspired the nurses of the latter part of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century. Let us make no mistake. In so far as the Nursing Profession is animated by the spirit of service it will fulfil its high vocation; if it loses its grasp on this fact, whatever it may gain in material things, even if it gains the whole world, that will be no compensation for losing its soul. It remains for the nurses of the present day to carry on, and hand on to future generations the traditions of devotion to the sick, and of sacrifice for the sake of their profession, of which they now enjoy the fruits.

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