

## WE THAT WERE YOUNG.\*

By IRENE RATHBONE.

This is a most arresting book. It describes the war-time work of a group of girls who would normally have "come out" about the time war was declared, their home circumstances, their love affairs and the terrible ravages of the war and, almost more cruel, the post-war influenza, in the ranks of their men-folk, their brothers, cousins, friends and fiancés. Then, ten years later, one has a glimpse of them in bleak maturity, their lives unsatisfied by the home and social work of spinsterhood, or moderately happy with an elderly husband. One realises afresh the criminal waste of war, though the book hardly touches on the even more hopeless loss and grief of mothers and middle-aged widows. "We were the youth of the world, we were on the crest of life, and we were the war. No one above us counted, and no one below. Youth and the war were the same thing—youth and the war were us." . . . "Our hearts are there—unwillingly—for always. It was our war."

The girls turned from one phase of war-work to another—it would sometimes have been a relief to the trained nurse to do so.

We are shown life in a Y.M.C.A. Hut in France, in a Munition Factory in England, in an Officers' Hospital and a Territorial Hospital in London, and on a War Pensions Committee after the Armistice. The author has a great gift for vivid, detailed and absorbing description of routine conditions, a wonderful memory and power of observation. She must certainly have been a V.A.D. The work of a Hospital ward, day and night duty, medical and surgical work, wardwork, the patients, their dressings, emergencies, progress or deaths, all are vividly brought before us, always interesting and well told.

But what will most strike the trained nurse is the arraignment of the professional by the V.A.D. It is terrible and heartsearching. How far was it, and is it now, true?

With one solitary exception, the Sisters are represented as either callous, cold, unimaginative, surly, rough, inefficient, or more interested in church services than the welfare of the men. They held the doctors in "extraordinary reverence," but—"This intense hierarchical consciousness manifested itself, of course, downwards as well as upwards. Inasmuch as the Sisters cringed to their superiors they treated their subordinates with severity. They had always done so in the civil hospitals, where they had been trained, and now in the military hospitals they continued in the same way. But there was this difference; the nurses whom now they bossed being temporary, non-professional and well-educated, an element of resentment crept into the hitherto simple and not unfriendly tyranny. The genus 'V.A.D.' was suspect; and though unfortunately at present it had to be endured (there was a war on), it was none the less uncomfortable to have about. And the fact that it worked hard was not so entirely in its favour as might have been supposed, for it did so in an unorthodox spirit, and for unorthodox reasons. It was courteous (Oh, very!), it was sympathetic with the patients (too much so), it was willing, and it was intelligent, but it was not *serious*. It had blown in from the outside, and the sooner the war was over and it blew back again the better." From experience, I should not say that the V.A.D.s were regarded in this way in France. We were glad of their help.

What is quite indefensible is the description of the Matron of a Territorial Hospital, of which the number is given, in absolutely offensive terms. Presumably names of the sisters are fictitious, but there is no disclaimer of the characters being drawn from life.

The V.A.D.s, of course, are represented to be all that the

Sisters are not, but the later recruits were not always up to standard.

Here is a good story. "We've got some pretty awful new V.A.D.s. One of them is in my ward. What do you think she said on her second day? It was after she'd been put on to the job of washing one of the men all over. 'There!' she exclaimed, 'the crowning incongruity of this war has happened, since a General's daughter has washed a Tommy's feet.' 'Phipps. I *don't* believe it,' cried Joan. 'Perfectly true,' put in Fry. 'Tell her what *you* said, Phipps.' 'Well, I happened to be washing the man in the next bed, and I remarked to him in an undertone: 'It might be interesting to know whether it's her father or her mother who's the 'general!'"

"Joan" is warded at Barts. for a time with a septic arm, and it is quite a relief to hear that "the nurses were brisk and kind," though too busy to give her special attention.

We shall all endorse her opinion of "the men." "In all her long months of intimate contact with wounded soldiers Joan never saw one indelicate gesture, one suggestive look. But in after years she sometimes wondered how much to attribute it to the hospital atmosphere, how much to the decency of the men, and how much to a certain English directness and innocence in her young self. Possibly her own experience had not been quite so common as she then assumed it was. However, to her . . . the memory of the men was sweet for ever."

Here is the amateur's point of view—"It was, of course, love of the Tommies that carried you through, otherwise hospital life would have been dreary indeed. How anyone could choose nursing as a profession was a source of wonder to Joan, and that in spite of the fact that she had discovered herself to be rather surprisingly good at it."

Perhaps with all her young wisdom she had only looked at the profession from one angle, and so had a distorted view, but we should read the book and judge for ourselves.

K. M. L.

## WELL-BALANCED PERSPECTIVE.

"Always upon the nurse there is an emotional strain. As the student nurse, unaccustomed to strain, turns from the ward, from suffering and sometimes from death, she needs something to stabilise her emotions. She needs first to be sure that she is receiving a training in the principles of nursing so superior that she will be able to minister so far as is humanly possible to a patient's needs. Yet she needs more than skill and training in nursing technique. If emotions, stirred by hospital scenes, are to be controlled and sublimated, a student nurse must have a well-rounded education. Sociology, psychology, cultural subjects—history, literature, art, music—all these melt into a background, against which events of the day that have assumed an abnormal importance, recede from their position in the foreground and assume a proper perspective. The nurse needs such an education to save her own soul, and she needs it as a citizen of the modern world; for she must be able to meet on equal ground men and women of other professions."—*Ruth Bower, R.N.*

## BRITISH PROVIDENT ASSOCIATION.

The cost of Hospital Treatment for middle class people—or rather for people with moderate incomes is becoming more and more urgent every day. Schemes are constantly being considered and hopes raised but it is usually found that the provision of skilled medical and Nursing attendance cannot be provided without very considerable expenditure. The British Provident Association has now prepared schemes for solving the hospital problem for men and women of moderate means, and those who wish to co-operate in making use of them should write for details to the Association's Offices, at 30, Lancaster Gate, W.2.

\* Chatto &amp; Windus. Price 7s. 6d.

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