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EDITORIAL.

THE SACRED VOCATION OF NURSING.

It is the joy and the pride of the Profession of Nursing that it has great traditions, great examples—traditions and examples which must stimulate its members of all nationalities to great endeavour, so that in these days of fuller knowledge and greater opportunities they may be worthy followers of those who have gone before. Just so far as we strive to live up to this ideal we shall contribute to the honour of the Profession of our choice.

Through the ages such nurses have lived and worked, we are indeed compassed about with a great cloud of witnesses, many of them whose names even are unknown to us, others whose lives and deeds have attained world-wide celebrity. Recently, in Great Britain, some of these were brought prominently before us by the Historic Royal Nurses represented so splendidly at the Dinner of the British College of Nurses on May 4th.

Also in the members of the Religious Orders in many centuries and countries there have been examples of nurses whose devotion to the sick, and personal sanctity, cannot be surpassed.

Came a time when Nursing fell from its high estate into the hands of ignorant and callous persons, and the needless suffering of the sick was intense, but the gloom lifted, and light concentrated about the personality of Florence Nightingale, who demonstrated to the world what could be achieved by one woman possessed of sympathy, knowledge, initiative, courage and determination.

The condition of the hospitals and the urgent need of the sick, as demonstrated by Miss Nightingale, made strong appeal to earnest and altruistic women who, undeterred by hard conditions, poor food, lack of privacy and meagre pay, offered themselves for preparation for the work in ever increasing numbers. The names of Agnes Jones, trained in the Nightingale School, and of Sister Dora, of Walsall, are known throughout the world, but many others, equally devoted, blazed the trail for those who followed, some receiving salaries, others paying for the privilege of training, and the right attitude was defined by Miss Nightingale in a few words, "probably no person ever did that well which he did only for money. Certainly no person ever did that well which he did not work at as hard as if he did it solely for money."

So, highly born, and humbly born, with the inspiration of noble examples before them, and a sense of vocation to stimulate and uphold them, entered hospital wards from 50 to 60 years ago, and first as probationers in training, and then, in many instances, as Matrons and

Superintendents, gradually transformed them from places shunned and distrusted to places of sweetness and light, which the sick willingly entered for treatment, and to which the poor thankfully entrusted their nearest and dearest. Traditions were established. With the passing of the Nurses' Registration Acts there was a general raising of standards of nursing education in the Training Schools in order to meet the requirements of the State Examination, and the general level of competence has never been higher than at the present time.

But evolution is still taking place; nurses, when trained and registered, are needed in increasing numbers, in the Services of the Crown, in the Health Services, in the Colonial Service, in district and private nursing. At the same time, and especially since the War, the age has become more pleasure-loving, demanding more of life, and willing to give less; less restrained, less ready to submit to discipline; and these characteristics of the youth of to-day have affected the Nursing Profession, for it is from the post-war generation that the probationers in our Nursing Schools are drawn. Thus the raw material with which the Schools have to deal has the faults, as well as the virtues, of the present day.

Most girls enter the Nursing Profession with the object of earning a living—a perfectly legitimate and laudable object—but unless there is superimposed on this a sense of vocation, of the sacredness of the work they have undertaken, they can never rise to its highest level. Gradually we are realising that two types of nurse are evolving: the vocationist, and the one who looks on nursing as a job in which she aspires to become technically perfect.

This is a mechanical age, but mechanical competence and perfection do not suffice when dealing with sick humanity, for in rendering service to the body of a patient, unless a nurse realises that body, soul, and spirit are interdependent she may miss an important part of treatment; recovery may depend on the removal of a mental trouble, on which the patient's will to co-operate with the treatment depends.

Sick people are particularly sensitive to the atmosphere radiating from a nurse. "Patience and abnegation of self and devotion to others" are qualities which quickly command confidence, and a sense of restfulness ensues. To such a nurse a patient will often "open his grief" to his great relief and consequent benefit. Let every nurse aim at technical perfection, and spare no pains to attain it, but let her ever keep before her the sorrows of the world, and the special responsibilities placed upon her, by her professional position, to help in their alleviation. Nursing is a sacred vocation, not a job.

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