

The Present Status of Nursing.

BY MISS E. S. RUNELL.

DURING the last few years, matters connected with Hospitals, Nurses, and Nursing have been more or less kept constantly before the public. Sides have been taken up warmly, and on every side opinions expressed with an intemperance of enthusiasm that is very significant of the strong personal feeling which exists in many quarters on these subjects. While every one interested in woman's work must hail with gladness anything that will help to raise, and keep up, the standard of Nursing, and improve the conditions under which it is carried out, there is much to be feared from the spirit of controversy which is, at present, so much in the air, lest it should hinder or at least lessen the amount of good which thorough ventilation of any subject may be expected to bring about. Will, for instance, the problem of how Nurses' hours of work are to be shortened without adding to the expenses of Hospital management be brought any nearer its solution by the animosities of bodies which profess to exist for the purpose of benefiting Nurses? Or again, how shall the excitement raised against the autocracy of Matrons help to find a remedy for the diversion of money intended for the sick poor in favour of the better off class who present themselves at the Hospitals for treatment? No doubt the Hospital Commission has done great good, were it only by rousing the public to make a stand against being nursed by inexperienced women when they pay for the fully-trained. But, also, what endless harm it has done! Abuses no doubt exist, but the grievances of the Nurses which come to the front are often more apparent than real, and the worst remains still unearthened.

"Matrons must not be allowed so much power, they are too autocratic!" is the cry inside and outside of the Hospitals. Fancy a private in the Army resenting the authority of his commanding officer! Where would order and discipline be? And where are order and discipline more needed than in Hospital? The only hope for a Probationer is that she be absolutely obedient; the only chance of her learning is that she is entirely under control, but if she once gets into her head that she has a grievance—to the winds with obedience, and control becomes constant friction. I am quite prepared to allow that there are many Hospitals where the Matron is far from perfect, not to say distinctly unwise, and is, alas! heartily disliked by her staff. These may be Matrons who have never themselves learnt obedience, or they may have been in their posts 15 or 20 years. They save their Committees trouble. They do not attempt to reform the little abuses which are connected with

the pet theories of their management. On the other hand, I know Matrons who are adored by their Nurses, and who have the happy faculty of drawing out the best in their workers, but who are kept in misery by the constant worry of getting their Committee to see what is needed. If the Committees who have the selections of Matrons knew better what is really required in a domestic Ruler, perhaps things might be better.

It is nonsense to measure Nurses' work by their hours on duty. I take it, only women to whom the work of Nursing is a delight are (or ought to be) Nurses. Therefore you cannot legislate for them as you would for other classes of skilled workers, who work so many hours, for so much pay. When a woman goes to be a Nurse, she makes up her mind to be absorbed in the work, she renounces her favourite home employments. All know that visiting and social life, so-called, is said good-bye to, and yet, the woman who does this, if she be a true Nurse, does it gladly, and is so happy in her work that she hardly feels the pain of renunciation. It is a right spirit and leads to the best work. Where the superiors and managers are at fault is when they take undue advantage of the Nurses' willing self-sacrifice, and, for the sake of making an appearance of cheap working in their balance sheets, let the willing worker go on working beyond what is right and just. The routine of Probationer work in a really well managed Hospital is a wholesome, healthy life. There are some where "the housemaidening" (in its proper place excellent training) is excessive and a waste of strength; but if a Probationer tries to live two lives—with her heart and chief interest outside while her hands work inside—she, no doubt, will find it exhausting. The real strain comes when the first part of her Probation is over. She is then to a certain extent useful, is put on as "special," is sent from pillar to post. Her "times off" are cut short, her days out curtailed, her responsibilities are greater, and her rest is lessened just when she needs more. In some Hospitals all classes and lectures which Nurses are *obliged* to attend are given in off duty time.

A Probationer or Nurse should have whatever time is allowed off duty entirely to herself for recreation, or study, and, if attendance at lectures has to come out of it, and if, for the same reason, Night Nurses' rest is broken at 3.30 p.m., as I have known to be the case, then indeed there is a want of wise and just arrangement somewhere.

"Don Quixote" may gently, with an almost apologetic tone, head his remarks in the *Queen*—"The anarchy of our Hospitals; one word more on Nursing," but there are many more words to be said. The subject is of far too vital an interest to everyone, and to all classes of society, to be allowed to drop when the first interest in it has passed and

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