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## EDITORIAL.

### THE FOURTH CHRISTMAS OF THE WAR.

A Merry Christmas—a past good wish indeed in the fourth year of war, with so depleted a fireside and so many heads bowed in grief—to be merry is not possible, excepting to the callous of heart. But we may wish one another a Happy Christmas because true happiness is only attained in the service of others, and this is a privilege enjoyed at this season by all true nurses; indeed, we are especially blessed in that those afflicted in body and mind are always with us, and our sympathy and kindness is their light of day.

Again, so many fatherless children will need cheering at Christmastime, that every effort must be made to gladden their hearts and make them realise that patriots who die for their country are the most blessed of men, and for life their children exist in their reflected glory.

Already good will in Great Britain is international—we hear of many plans for the welfare of the stranger within our gates—and of offers of hospitality from them in return.

The God of Battles has a great heart.

### THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT IN HOSPITALS.

BY THE LATE MISS MARGARET BREAY,  
S.R.N., F.B.C.N.

We wonder if the complaints which we have received from a few nurses—that “the rules of this hospital ignore our spiritual life,” that “there is no promotion in the upper ranks in this hospital for Catholics,” that “my religion militates against appointment as Matron in an English hospital,” are justifiable complaints, or if in a Protestant country preference is not given to those of that faith for the maintenance of the general well-being of the institution.

Nursing is undoubtedly a vocation which has been evolved largely from the humanitarian motives inspired by strong religious conviction, and, indeed, until within comparatively recent times it has been almost entirely in the hands of religious Orders. There were advantages and disadvantages in connection with this condition. The disadvantages were that the members of religious Orders, being bound to work wherever they were placed by their superiors, it follows that if the head of a community did not possess both a knowledge of, and a love of nursing, sisters might be deputed to nursing work who did not possess the nursing instinct, and did not bring to it that devotion engendered by a definite permanent dedication to nursing.

The science of nursing, though the most sweet and lovable of mistresses, is an exacting one, claiming whole-hearted allegiance, and anyone desirous of serving her must be prepared to make many sacrifices, and to bring many costly offerings to her shrine. It is even claimed that the vocation of nursing is so absorbing as to be incompatible with the discharge of religious obligations. If we examine the question further, however, we shall find that when the work of nursing was dissociated from religion, and handed over to seculars who regarded it simply as a means of livelihood, the standard both of work and of morality sank very low indeed, and that at the beginning of the last century it had sunk into such disrepute as a calling that it was almost exclusively in the hands of the ignorant and incapable, a condition most detrimental to the well-being of the sick and standards of national health. It is noteworthy that our profession was raised from the low and degraded level to which it had fallen by the efforts of women inspired by strong religious convictions. Friederike Fliedner, Elizabeth Fry, Florence Nightingale, Agnes Jones, were all actuated by the highest motives in their endeavour to raise once more the vocation of nursing to its proper place, and they gathered around them bands of noble and devoted women inspired by the same strong religious motives. There is no doubt that many of the brightest examples of the nursing profession are those who have received their inspiration from their religious convictions, and that many excellent women are working devotedly and unobtrusively in our hospitals whose motive power is their religious belief.

It behoves committees of nursing schools, therefore, to be tender with regard to the religious convictions of these nurses, and not to put unnecessary obstacles in their way in the fulfilment of their religious duties or professional advancement. Such difficulties, we believe, are more often caused by want of thought than want of heart, but they press none the less hardly for this reason.

Many nurses, for instance, value highly the possibility of attending an early celebration, or a mass. There are many nurses who derive strength from attendance at such services, which is not only a benefit to them but incidentally to their patients.

There is no doubt that hospital authorities, who, by their regulations, make such attendance impossible, will lower the standard of the nursing staff if they drive from its ranks conscientious women to work elsewhere, where religious privileges which they value are attainable.

In these material days, when the profession of nursing is being adopted less as a vocation than as a means of livelihood, everything should be done by managers and matrons to encourage *conscience* in young student-nurses, and give facilities for their spiritual life.

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