

Women In White

By Jane Swamy

SOMETIME or other, most of us find ourselves, our relations or friends in hospitals and nursing homes.

Unless one is totally submerged in a private world of pain, lying in a sick-bed is a sharp reminder of each individual's debt to man's humanity to man. It is impossible to escape the nuisance-value of being an invalid, dependent on the ministering hands of others for the most personal and intimate of bodily functions ; begging to be freed from discomfort ; striving to rid of this enforced surrender of the will to act and do for one-self.

At such a time as this, one is deeply grateful for the presence of the "women in white". From where do nurses get their indefatigable energies ? Watch them hurry down the length of a ward, pop in and out of private rooms, accompany the doctors on their rounds. In the middle of it all they dispense potions, straighten pillows, gently move a body from back to side, assemble lunch trays, and file reports. None of this is even the half of it.

A great deal is the daily drudgery of routine—morning and evening sponges, enemas, bed-pans. Or, it's a matter of preparing the patient, 'dressing' the patient or getting the patient plastered. The monotony is relieved only by the taut tension of high drama when for a while, they become involved in emergencies, and life and death struggles.

What a life ! On all sides nurses find themselves surrounded and pulled apart by demi-gods—their demanding patients ; their powerful superiors, the surgeons, physicians and specialists ; and threatening, bemoaning relatives. Through the breathless maddening whirl they will smile, or most of them will, with only an occasional frown, impatient word or careless slip.

Acquaintances will often admit that they don't mind their daughters becoming doctors, nurses.

It is over a half century since professional nursing services were established in the country. Senior members of the profession living in retirement today, recall with affection the dedication and discipline of the pioneering British women who trained them.

They remember with pride, the milestones. One reflects with 'national' satisfaction on how she became the first Indian Theatre Sister of the J. J. Hospital. Another glows at the recognition accorded to the profession by the government when she was awarded the Padma Shree. A third is happy that she and other Indian nurses have been presented with the

International accolade of the Florence Nightingale medal.

As many nurses themselves say, "nurses are born, not made". They, probably are referring to those gentle, selfless souls, who are prepared to serve, without much thought of financial reward or career successes. Nonetheless today, nursing is a profession with considerable scope in many fields such as Public and Rural Health, Family Planning, Nutrition, Social Welfare, Nursing Administration and Training.

The country has several excellent schools and colleges of nursing that offer diploma and degree courses. There are opportunities too, provided by international agencies like WHO for further experience and specialisation abroad.

Legendary and classical Indian heroines, have been admired for their great inner reserves of strength and fortitude. Nursing is a profession for the strong of heart, head and limb. From all accounts, this country is exploding with the unfulfilled talents and energies of our young men and women.

Nursing offers a wide channel for splendid service. Why can't we as Indian members and guides be imaginative and courageous in directing our young to take this bold way of nation building ?



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