

THE INDIAN NURSE CANDIDATE

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HOW to get the right type of girls as candidates for nurses' training has been our problem since the opening of the Medical Work here in Jiaganj in 1898.

It used to be that guardians of troublesome girls wrote us pathetic letters asking if we could give so and so her last chance. So and so was a great problem and having failed in several other attempts to earn a livelihood, it was thought that nothing else remained for her but to try and nurse the sick. True, everyone thought it very derogatory but what else could she do? She herself realised it and in one instance plainly stated that she knew she had been sent as a punishment! At any rate as much as the sweepers could be got to do for bed-ridden patients, or as much as friends and relatives could do, or even as much as sometimes very ill and suffering women could do for themselves, they might do. One "nurse" even complained when on duty at night that patients gave her no chance to sleep. It used to be thus, but since about 1920 some little inkling of the dignity and greatness of service, and especially of nursing and so serving often the very helpless began to be realised. It may have been partly as a result of the publicity and praise *ad nauseum* given to nursing during the Great War that from about its close onwards we began to receive more suitable applications for training, in fact we even heard from some who wrote saying "so and so is just a splendid worker, it will be hard to spare her, but she wants to learn nursing and so on. Some of those who had proved their worth in other spheres, and some who had done well at school, who had not been problems, but rather "very helpful", "very bright", "would do well anywhere" began to arrive. It was such a treat to try to train those who *wanted* to learn and to teach those who could read and write well, and who began to work intelligently, wanting to know and understand many a why and wherefore. Yet they were not the best educated; those entered the teaching profession. The nursing profession seemed to be considered the second best (little realising how much teaching should be imparted by nurses in this land of ignorance regarding health and sickness). But gradually, if one were to believe one's ears, nursing was being realised to be a great and noble calling. There was only praise for those who could follow it, admiration instead of scorn, if one were to believe the passing remarks expressed. Where public

opinion was not in favour it was the public who were ignorant and ill advised. Yet it was talk not leading to action, praise of others while still holding back from following them. But yet we knew the failure to "go and do likewise" was very largely to be attributed to the fact that the young women sitting for their final examinations, contemplating future careers, knew little of any possibilities except the Teaching Profession which they had had always before them, exemplified in their teachers, during their school and college days.

It was then suggested by a wise School Principal that the opportunity should be given to some of her pupils to get a wider outlook. It was arranged that a party of six, after sitting for their matriculation, should take the chance which our quieter country compound as contrasted to the school's city life, afforded of a quiet retreat and rest for tired examinees, while at the same time these young women now leaving school and college days behind, should see hospital life from the inside, should stay a few days with the nurses in their hostel, should be shown something of the daily routine in the wards and out-patients' department, where suffering should make its own appeal to enthusiastic youth, poverty and ignorance remind the comparatively rich, taught and privileged the responsibilities of their advantages.

There were no spare beds in the Nurses' Hostel, but one room was vacated and beds were made up on thick straw mattresses (it was cold weather) on the floor, and our visitors arrived. They were a keen bright set of young girls, with enquiring minds and eager to help. Moreover, they had been commissioned to return and report to their school of all they saw and heard in what seemed to them almost another world, in order that the outlook of the whole school should be broadened.

Later on a similar party came, stayed a few days, and returned to report to the school. Two from among these parties have since started studying medicine, hoping in the future to become doctors. We are able to follow their careers with special interest and they, we believe, look back to their visit here sometimes and gain inspiration. Meanwhile we hope that either some who came and saw or others who remained at school but afterwards heard from those who saw, something of the need of the patients and the opportunities of the nurses, may one day be found bringing education and talent to the task of skilful *nursing* the sick.