

NURSING JOURNAL EXCHANGES

The Passing Show

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I DO not exactly enjoy poor health but it seems to have been thrust upon me along with brown eyes and wavy hair. At least I have had it ever since I can remember, which is quite awhile back. But many of my recollections of sustaining life, on the business end of a thermometer and a light diet, are very happy ones. Some are not so happy. The difference is all in what nurse I happened to draw from the registry.

There was a Miss Graham, the names are all products of my imagination, who brought the spirit of youth into my sick room. She had a smile that was good to look at. "Good morning" reminded me of spring and robins hopping on the lawn. But she would scatter powder over my dresser top—and forget to take it off. She would use some sheik lure of a perfume that made me feel as if I were living in a harem. A very stuffy harem. She would forget to wash the line of the water mark off the basin when she finished with my bath. It always came up for the next bath with part of the trail of the previous one upon it. A little thing to be fussy about—but the sick are fussy. When she washed my face it was with a dabby motion, not firm and even and soothing. There was invariably one corner of the cloth that eluded her and trickled down my neck or in my ear. She was always sorry when this happened. So was I. But it happened just the same.

One of the bright spots in the passing years was Miss Simon. I had her seven months and at the end of the time we still looked forward to meeting again. A pretty good recommendation for both of us. But she was, without doubt, as near perfection as a nurse could be. I liked to lie and look at her. She was so radiantly clean, like a freshly bathed baby. She was so wholesomely healthy. Her hours off were spent in walking, skating, or going to a swimming pool.

"Aren't you, ever tired?" I asked her one day. "You never look or act tired. How do you manage it?"

She smiled one of her show, sweet smiles. "Yes, I get pretty tired sometimes but I just stop to think how much more tired my patient must be. Then, too, if I feel too tired I use my off hours to go to bed and take a warm bath. I never try to shop or do any social stunts if I'm on a hard case."

How many nurses put their health and their profession first?

And my trays! By some miracle of management the hot things were always hot, the cold things always cold. Even in the hospital when the diet kitchen was three floors below. I never did know who she bribed or how she did it. One thing I do know—I was always propped up on my pillows, my medicine given, the bed table in place before she went for the tray. I never had to sit and wait while I was prepared to eat my meal.

The bedpan was warmed. Not sometimes, but every time. And only those who have been at the mercy of a stiffly starched nurse and an icy bedpan can appreciate this and truly estimate my gratitude.

On the other hand the minute I saw Miss Tobin I knew what I was in for. She was one of these efficiency experts in nursing uniform. Nothing was left undone that should have been done. The covers were tucked in with an iron hand that made me feel like the inmate of a straight jacket. My temperature

was taken with a grim expression of DUTY that would not have changed by one line if I had registered a hundred and six.

Now I have a habit—a very bad one, I admit—of reading a bit of a magazine article and then laying it open face down while I pick up another one. I like to read that way. A taste here and a taste there and then back to the first one later on. But an open magazine laid corner-wise on bed or table was a horrible sight to Miss Tobin. She never said anything. But the magazines were always closed firmly as soon as they left my hands and laid in a neat pile.

The corner of my pillow, which I am fond of wadding into a ball under my left ear, was invariably pulled out straight and the wrinkles, as far as possible, eradicated. I could see that I was going to be taken care of properly if it killed me.

Perhaps this was why I hailed the plump slovenliness of Miss Marshall with delight. She was a darling. A born mother and nurse of the small town variety. Not for her the rules of the profession. She cuddled and bossed her patients back to health as though they were children. Her uniform never had its full quota of buttons, her rubber heels were always going to be put on, her cap would slip sideways, but the way she'd say, "My but you look bright and fresh this morning!" would put the heart into a jelly fish. And after one of her baths and a dusting of powder one would curl up and purr like a kitten.

Miss Barry was the prize entertainer. She could read palms and tell fortunes with cards. And the fortunes were such fascinating ones. Never any ill luck or lost loves or early deaths. They were nicely tuned to the sick room. But fun just the same. She was an expert manicurist too and amused me by shining up my nails and telling me funny stories of the time she spent as manicure girl in a far west hotel. I was well convinced, after I had her, that every nurse should have experience as a manicurist. It made her so human and companionable. Of course then I was convalescing. I never saw such joy and energy. Miss Barry could dance all night and nurse all day or, reverse the process, and dance all day and nurse all night. She was an exceptionally good nurse too. I can never fancy her as getting old and disillusioned in the profession. She would go on and on taking pleasure as she found it even between the dismal walls of a hospital.

In contrast to her was my most recent acquisition, Miss Perkins. She would have found her greatest usefulness and happiness in keeping death statistics for a life insurance company. It seems to me that she took it as a personal affront to her judgment if a patient recovered. At least she never expected any of them to, that was sure. I can hear her yet, with that air of perfect and forced cheerfulness, saying, "of course you may recover from this perfectly. But in a serious condition one never knows." I really think I made an extra effort to get well just to have the satisfaction of proving her wrong. If you recovered you were the exception, if you didn't it was as she had thought.

"I have seen a great many patients pass on," she would sigh. "In spite of all that skill could do. But it was only God's will."

So, in spite of all that skill has done to me, I am still here and "enjoying poor health" to the end of the chapter. But blessed be nurses. Most of them have made life much easier.