

The NEGRO WOMAN in the NURSING PROFESSION

By ELIZABETH JONES



Miss Jones

Recalling the words of the great pioneer of the nursing profession and the world's greatest nurse, Florence Nightingale, when speaking of the profession as "God's Work, A True Vocation" one cannot forget the sacrifice, struggle and hardships which she endured for the sake of others, for the sake of God's Work, for the sake of her life's vocation. Nor did she lack those qualities which tend to develop the true nurse. Overcoming difficulties and hardships, she did not struggle in vain, but left an indelible impress upon the memories of all nationalities, races and creeds.

Many have grasped the opportunity to answer to the call. Among those we have our first Negro nurse in Miss Mary E. L. Mahoney, a graduate of the New England Hospital for Women and Children, Roxbury, Mass. She, like the other great pioneers, had her difficulties, which were even greater than those of her white sisters. But like a true soldier, she fought her battles bravely, and today is able to see the great reward that comes through perseverance. We may safely say that to this great Negro pioneer, the Negro Nursing profession owes its thanks. For today the race is the proud possessor of at least twelve large training schools for Negro women, as well as a number of small ones throughout the south. This number is being increased as the white training schools are opening their doors to the aspirant Negro woman.

Here we find her received kindly and yet with a doubt of her ability. Nothing is left undone to test the endurance of a young nurse. Ofttimes these tests have to be handled with tact so as not to become an imposition. Once the Negro nurse has shown her ability, her aptness to grasp situations, she is no longer looked upon as an intruder in the profession, but she is received kindly and given the respect due her by both the patients, their families and the physicians.

Nor has the advancement ceased at bedside nursing (private duty) but has extended to public health nursing and social service work. In the public health service we find the Negro nurse in dental and tuberculosis clinics. We find her in public schools and preventorium, giving instructions to those suffering from and in contact with infectious diseases, such as scarlet fever, diphtheria, and the venereal diseases. In social service we find her visiting homes and giving relief, where needed, to the poor, by referring their cases to a charity organization.

Daily the Negro woman has avenues opened up to her. She is no longer looked upon only as a servant. She is no longer held down as greatly as in the past by prejudice. She has been given the opportunity and has grasped it; not only aiding herself but her race by proving her efficiency in a field that was heretofore occupied exclusively by her white sister.

In 1908 New York City's Department of Health opened up its doors to the Negro nurse, and Miss Harris, a Lincoln Hospital graduate, was first to brave the civil service examination and the adversities which followed. Yet she attempted and succeeded. Today, following along in her footsteps smoothly, are many other determined young women of different countries

and hospitals. Another, Miss Mae Clendenin (whom Lincoln Hospital also claims), was the first Negro nurse in Henry Street Settlement's Visiting Nurse Staff, and today she, like the others, is followed by many more.

Nor have these opportunities been only in New York City, but cities throughout the United States have accepted the Negro nurse. Not only has the advancement been in just the medical field but also in the social and educational as well.

Miss M. Franklin, a graduate of the Women's Hospital, Philadelphia, Pa., was the first to become active in bringing about the National Association of Colored Nurses. She realized fully the advantages of unity and today she is the leading spirit in one of the finest organizations in the United States, one that is recognized and respected by the entire medical profession.

Prior to the founding of the National Association of Colored Nurses no effort was made to influence the nurse to join the white organization. But with the founding of the Negro organization a decided effort to obtain the colored nurse has been made by the white association.

Then there is the educational unrest. The Negro nurse is restless. She is seeking, always seeking those things which tend to increase her efficiency. The well equipped nurse of today should be trained to some extent in business. She should have some knowledge of secretarial work, etc. This knowledge she will find useful in all parts of her profession: scientific knowledge of dietetics, pathology, bacteriology, a broader knowledge of psychology and some knowledge of more than one of the many languages spoken in a large American city.

The colleges have opened their doors and today she is struggling, not in vain, to accomplish those things which lead to a higher plane of life. The New Negro Woman of today, regardless of the profession she is in, is more or less a teacher. This especially applies to those of the nursing profession, and it is realized more and more by those who enter upon that field. Not only is she a teacher, but she is looked upon by most of those with whom she comes in contact, as an example of the higher life.

This especially applies to the young children. The fact was brought clearly to me one day when I entered a room full of small children. I noticed that there was a general effort on the part of each little individual to tidy up his person. He had one thing in mind and that was cleanliness and neatness; sanitation regardless of the method of obtaining it. Handkerchiefs served both as shoe polishers and face towels. The whole picture was amusing as well as impressive. It brought to my mind the influence the very presence of a nurse had on those small minds. Strange to say, to those young folk, a nurse is something almost superhuman.

I recall an amusing incident while passing on the steps where some kiddies were at play. One said, "Get up, and let the lady pass." While making a passage, all eyes were turned upon me with great intent. Suddenly, as if having solved a problem, one little voice chimed in, and said with much glee, "Aw! she aint a lady, she's a nurse!"

Not only has Miss Mahoney's good work helped her sisters in the United States, but it has penetrated even the dark, wild jungles of Africa, and the islands far and near. Today we see the spirit of the New Negro woman shining out of the dark jungles. Women are eager and determined to be up and doing; to no longer stand the disgrace of being counted an inferior of her white sister.

God created all men equal, and why should she, because of her dark skin, be brow-beaten? Why should she stand by and see her race looked upon in an attitude little better than one would look upon a snake or an insect? She realizes that merit counts a great deal toward achievement and, why, because of lack of education, should her race suffer? She realizes fully that it is a long and hard fight, but she does not forget the influence she has over those poor unfortunate ones with whom she comes in contact. She sees the life of an individual as it really is, and not as it seems to be, for she often has other problems besides that of helping to heal the diseased body. She often has the economical, spiritual and moral problems of the patient to solve. She has for her studies the many problems that are found at all ages among the different races of people.

I feel confident that there is no nurse in the profession that does not stop and ask herself these questions. First, "How may I become a valuable factor in bringing about a better relation between the two races?" Second, "What are the future prospects of the race?" When recalling how I got my inspiration to become a nurse, I feel that there are more who have received and will receive their inspiration in the same way.

I, like many other country girls, was just passing the time away as best I could in a little town that was surrounded by mountains and filled with non-adventurous people. Oh! how the time dragged, and what was I going to do next? Some suggested going away to study music. Fine! Oh! yes, that was great! Yet, there was something lacking in the suggestion. Music was fine, just grand, yet to me it did not afford enough thrill. I wanted to be something else beside a musi-

cian. What it was I did not know. To make a long story short, our neighbor was taken ill with typhoid fever. She had to have a trained nurse. The nurse arrived, and I shall never forget that gentle, sweet smiling face. She worked day and night so untiringly, moving softly and swiftly about her duties, always ready with a smile, always so immaculate in her white uniform.

I watched her day by day, then ventured to make friends with her. We became good pals and as she told me of her work I realized fully that it was the nursing profession I wanted; to serve others and to be of some value to humanity.

It is not the duties we have to perform that count, it is the way in which we do them that leaves an impression. The respect that the Negro nurse can win for her race through close professional contact is indeed surprising. Here she meets the masses of people; all ages, all races and creeds. It is up to her to leave a good impression on the minds of those with whom she comes in contact. She has for her material hundreds and hundreds of young minds; minds that can be shaped and impressed. It is through these that she must bring about better race relations. What will be the future prospects of the race? Through close professional contact, and through open discussions on race problems with both the higher and lower minds she is able to see clearly into the future.

Through free discussion, she learns that the Negro is, in the white man's mind, much inferior. He doubts his abilities yet, when forced, reluctantly will acknowledge them. He will, although he dislikes the idea, recognize the Negro's aptness and talent. Eventually he will be compelled to take us on our merits rather than on our skins.

We have to educate him. We have to show him wherein he is wrong. To be what we are and what we want to be and not to submit to be what he would like us to be, will exact an immeasurable meed of respect. Thus when we unite and determine to take our place among people, then, and only then, will we be given a fair deal in all professions.

The NEGRO WOMAN in the PROFESSIONS

By ANNA JONES ROBINSON



M. ROBINSON

Twenty years ago the woman engaged in the practice of a profession was a rare creature. Seventy five per cent of the women graduating from professional schools never actually pursued the practice of their professions, either because discouraged too quickly by the opposition and difficulties of pioneer work or because the duties of marriage made impossible the career for which they had been trained.

The small number of women who persisted in spite of obstacles have had a great measure of success. This has come because of the very real interest in their work, and love for the profession which they have chosen. They have not tried to avoid the drudgery or uninteresting details upon which any real success must be founded. Indeed this attention to small details has helped many women to climb to very responsible positions such as executive in large business enterprises. Women with legal training and real

ability are eagerly sought to prepare briefs and to take charge of certain classes of cases in law firms because of their very careful work and attention to details which are often most lightly passed over by men.

Twenty years ago the professions entered by women were limited. With the exception of teaching, which up to the present has always been regarded as a field for which women were particularly fitted, there was very little representation. Medicine was regarded with most favor, with dentistry a close second. In all three of these professions the woman could still live a more or less secluded life and was not required to go forth into active competition with men engaged in the same work. The woman physician or dentist could count on a certain number of people who would seek her out because of real ability, and because they preferred a woman doctor or dentist.

To day, although teaching, medicine and dentistry still hold first places, we find women successfully engaged in professions which require active competition