

"Women And Hospital Work"

by Elizabeth Robins.

[Signed letter to the *Daily Chronicle*, October 6, 1916.]

[This letter is not listed among the Printed Letters section of Sue Thomas' bibliography, now online and available at this site's External Links as it was first published in 1994. Together, Beatrice Harraden and Elizabeth Robins had organized the reading library for recuperating soldiers at the Endell Street Military Hospital. Remarks about their joint volunteer work populate several journals of the time. Wendy Moore's 2020 study, *No Man's Land: The Trailblazing Women Who Ran Britain's Most Extraordinary Military Hospital During World War I*, documents the Hospital's exceptional achievements. As with other advocacy, Robins here looks past one small advance for women in the medical professions in order to lobby for much greater equality. See comments at end.]

WOMEN AND HOSPITAL WORK

From Miss Elizabeth Robins, the Well-known Novelist.

To the Editor *Daily Chronicle*.

Sir,-- On the opening of the extension of the London School of Medicine for Women by her Majesty the Queen, many will remember with gratification that public appeal for the necessary funds (signed by the Prime Minister and others), the success of which the ceremony on Monday was eloquent proof.

Perhaps some thought of this (or being newly come from an object lesson in the skill of medical women) prepared a disappointment to one reader at least of a letter published by you over a fortnight ago, under the heading, "More Women for Hospital Work."

The first innocent thought was that encouragement was being offered to increase that great national asset--the body of women doctors. On the contrary, the spokesmen for the British Red Cross and the St. John Ambulance were urging that after the hundreds and thousands already supplied, more women should qualify for nursing. Neither from the authorities quoted, nor any other, comes the imagined word of encouragement for women to undertake the responsibilities and rewards of the practice of healing--no sign of realisation that "hospital work" may mean for women what it means for men.

Not a woman in the land would, I think, say or write a word to discourage others from answering the appeal to offer her youth, her strength, her priceless training time to the country's present needs; and so even this reminder of the wider service so many might render has been delayed two weeks. We are glad and proud that the response in the past two years from women called on to nurse, to scrub, and stand by with bandages has been so generous.

Post Graduate Research.

Women are too generous to wish to monopolise generosity. They would be glad to see on the part of the monopolists in the medical world some realisation of the fact that it is too late to expect all women to interpret "hospital work for women" as nursing. The enlarged School of Medicine for Women will do much. But neither it nor any school can give those opportunities for "hospital work" so eagerly sought and jealously monopolised by men. Where women in the immediate future will go for post graduate research and experience I do not know. In the past, women who craved these opportunities (and could afford them) went to--

Germany. In spite of the Teutonic prejudice against equality in educational advantage, the British woman has to admit the humiliating fact that she has been obliged to leave her own country and go to Vienna, Berlin, Freiburg, Prague, or Paris for post graduate work which the men of her own nation refused her.

We are told that but for the financial support of women many a hospital would close its doors. We cannot suppose, in view of the number and urgency of the appeals, that these public-spirited chairmen realise the feelings roused in women whose money is begged for, while the boycott of women themselves holds unbroken.

The headmistress of a famous girls' school is said to have responded lately to such an appeal for funds by asking what opportunities were given to medical women in that hospital. The answer was that women were not allowed on the staff. The lady wrote again, urging that women should be admitted, and instancing Endell Street, if the hospital, authorities needed further proof of fitness. The chairman seemed not before to have heard of Endell Street. He said he would "look into it." He did so. He reported himself most favourably impressed. That was some time ago. What difference has it made that this great hospital magnate was favourably impressed? Absolutely none in the policy of his hospital.

I venture to think the time is not far off when those who have knowledge of what women doctors have already done and some conception of what, unhampered, they will do, may decline to aid in the maintenance of a stultifying tradition. A very natural reply to appeals from hospitals which do not "at present" even admit women students, would be that "at present" contributions are addressed to "Charing

Cross," or to the one or two other hospitals which supply a little of that widely needed opportunity for women to become as expert as their brothers. Lest we should seem to overlook any sign of grace, we welcome the report that the War Office has lately appointed 60 medical women to posts in Army hospitals.

It would be interesting to know how many of those 60 women owe to some "enemy" school their power to be of military service to their own nation.

ELIZABETH ROBINS.

October 4, 1916.

[Published in the October 6 issue, *Daily Chronicle*.

The printed letter is located in the *British Newspaper Archive*, and their database permits transcriptions made of works by authors who died 70 years ago or more. Original spelling and punctuation retained. Proofread against the imaged text and formatted by Joanne E. Gates, 2025, for the Elizabeth Robins Web at JSU.

An imaged copy also exists in the *Endell Street Military Hospital Scrapbook* in the Women's Library, now online at the London School of Economics. Stamped page number 45. In that scrapbook, other printed references to Robins are included, primarily in reference to the volunteer work for the Hospital Library done by Robins and fellow Woman Writer's Suffrage advocate, Beatrice Harraden.

The document is one long, single column, with just a single centered subheading.

Consult my biography for details on how ER's volunteer service led to her feminist articles advocating women's participation in war relief.]