

Nursing at Ellis Island. A Memoir.

By
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Ellis Island as everybody knows is the great landing depot for immigrants, the revolving door through which millions from other lands have entered the United States. Here until recent years all immigrants were taken for final examination, which meant that they were either admitted or rejected. Ellis Island is therefore a place of hopes and fears, of jubilations and disappointments. In such atmosphere and surroundings I have served as nurse for more than thirty years.

It may be of interest to mention how I came to Ellis Island. I did so at the suggestion of a friend, now long since passed away, who felt convinced that nursing the sick immigrant was a most commendable and charitable undertaking. My long experience in that capacity has more than justified his judgment and advice. In my opinion scarcely any other field offered such an opportunity for serving God and country. With the exception of seven months spent at the U.S. Marine Hospital, Stapleton, Staten Island, Ellis Island has been continuously the scene of my labors.

In the spring of 1902 I sought the appointment and after the necessary forms were filled and filed, I was accepted, the salary being the munificent sum of \$40.00 per month. I reported March 1, to Dr. George W. Stoner, who was then medical officer in charge at the Station. I found Dr. Stoner a very likable man, a strict disciplinarian but eminently just and kind hearted. The hours were practically all day and often late into the night.

The work at the hospital was quite arduous. Nurses were on duty from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., and later if landings were still being made. Such a thing as being relieved for an hour during the day was not even thought of. We were given a half day each week provided we could be spared. Going to the city in the evening was quite an adventure, as the boat did not run after 7 p.m. and few were willing to take the chance of spending the night in town. If one did remain in town it was necessary to get out of bed about 5:30 a.m. to get the morning boat, as there was no suitable hotel or boarding house in the vicinity of the Battery. Such an experience was not particularly appealing on a cold winter's morning.