

NURSING AS A PROFESSION.



IT is astonishing with what prejudice professional nurses are regarded by the majority of sick people and their friends. If any doubt this statement let them notice the ways of their own acquaintance. When any one is taken suddenly ill, the friends of the sufferer are most unwilling to seek

for and profit by the services of a trained nurse. Wives and mothers, sisters and daughters, strain every nerve and perform prodigies of endurance rather than give over the care of the loved one to a stranger. "As long as ever I can keep up I will wait on him myself," is their brave but short-sighted determination. And if notwithstanding all their efforts the assistance of the professional helper must be engaged, her new employers are sure for awhile to regard her with dislike and suspicion, and look upon her as one who is to be watched and distrusted in every way.

An instance of this kind came under my notice the other day. A professional nurse was engaged to assist in nursing a gentleman who was seriously ill. His wife was most unhappy about this, and most unwilling to share her care with a stranger. For the first night or two she was quite miserable at leaving the sick man, listened anxiously for every sound, and as soon as ever she had an opportunity of speaking with her husband questioned him eagerly, "Is she kind to you? Is she *always* kind and attentive?" But the answer was invariably in the affirmative. The nurse was as unlike Mrs. Gamp as possible. She was gentle and kindly, and yet so reliable and trustworthy, so exact in measuring out the medicine, so accurate in her reports of the sufferer's condition, so patient with his feverish irritability, possessed of so much forethought and presence of mind, that in awhile suspicion and distrust disappeared entirely; they were changed into real regard and esteem. When the patient recovered the lady was quite unwilling to part with her new friend. She would gladly have kept her for awhile, to give her rest and change; but no, the engagement had terminated. Another sufferer required attendance, and the nurse went away to begin again her trying duty.

Fortunately for suffering humanity, the nursing profession is not what it once was. There was a time when the only women engaged in the work were ignorant persons, who were supposed to be specially adapted for it because they were poor and miserable and "had seen a deal of sickness," and were "experienced," or were possessed by all the superstitious notions which had collected round the sick bed and made even disease and death more horrible than they would otherwise have been. Now the professional nurse is thoroughly trained for the work she

undertakes—trained in the only place where sickness in all its varieties is continually present—in the hospital.

This training in the hospital for nursing the sick is by no means to be lightly undertaken.

Not every woman is suited for nursing the sick. A woman is no more born a nurse than she is born a cook, or a seamstress, or a musician, or an artist. She may possess qualifications which when developed will make her an excellent nurse, but even then the special training can on no account be dispensed with, because the education given to a woman is not generally of a character that will do this.

A good nurse should possess the power of thinking accurately, or of concentrating her attention on one subject. She should be thorough and reliable, with an unlimited stock of patience, cheerfulness, and good temper. She should have unflinching energy and perseverance, be quick to perceive, intelligent to observe, and skilful to act; she should be able to exercise forethought, which is the faculty of being prepared, and presence of mind, which is calmness and collectedness in the presence of emergencies, and she should have steady nerves to enable her to do what is best. Above all she should be gentle, sympathetic, and unselfish. A very clever and experienced writer in addressing nurses said she could give no better rule than that the nurse should put herself in the place of her patient. Gentleness of heart will teach gentleness of the hand and manners, and those who are gentle in mind will soon learn to be gentle in action.

Miss Nightingale once said that in her opinion the very elements of good nursing are all but unknown. This is sad enough, for the knowledge spoken of is of a kind which every one ought to possess. Each one of us may at any moment be suddenly placed in a position where ignorance on our part would mean loss of life to those whom we hold most dear. How many people there are in the world who have suffered terrible fright and exceeding anxiety, and reproached themselves for being incompetent and useless, because they did not know what ought to be done in an emergency! Take a case of hæmorrhage for instance. It is most alarming to witness a flow of blood and not know how to stop it. Of course any one can rush wildly for the doctor, but till the doctor comes? The quiet, collected individual who with ready hand and steady nerve comes upon the scene, sees what is wanted and does just what is needful, is looked upon as a ministering angel. "What admirable presence of mind!" every one is ready to say. Yes, but there is more than presence of mind. There is knowledge of the right kind, the result of experience. It seems sometimes as if the world were rather hard upon those who in times of difficulty are not equal to the occasion. Sensible, strong-minded people are quite out of patience with the weak and excited individual who makes fresh

work instead of doing what is to be done, and falls into a swoon or goes into hysterics instead of helping the sufferer. And to a certain extent they are right. The weak women who scream when there is an accident, or faint at the sight of blood, may very frequently be put down as selfish as well as silly. Too often they are useless and in the way because they cannot forget themselves. They are so occupied with their own sensations and astonishment and horror that they can do nothing. If they had learnt that most difficult lesson, abnegation of self, they would be collected enough. But it is not always so. Want of presence of mind is also due to this miserable consciousness—"I ought to do something instantly, and I do not know what." Many a valuable life might be saved that now is allowed to slip away, if only this essential knowledge could be more generally diffused amongst all classes of society.

But whoever else may have, or have not, the power of self-control, the professional nurse *must* possess it. She must be able to keep calm, though all around her may be flurried, she must be collected when others are distracted, or she will prove herself quite unfitted for her work. And it is not given to every one thus to command themselves. Those who have the intention to become nurses and are doubtful of their power in this respect would do well to pause before they undertake work, failure in the right performance of which would mean not only disappointment to themselves, but pain and injury and perhaps loss of life to others.

Incompetent, ignorant nurses have had a long reign, and they have been the cause of an abundance of suffering to poor humanity. But there are hopeful signs abroad. Amongst medical men it is a recognised fact that good nursing is a most important factor in the cure of disease; and to supply what is wanted numbers of ladies, as well as women of a lower class, are seeking the special training that is required. It would appear that in some quarters there is a prejudice against the admission of educated women to the profession. It is thought that they are conceited and not inclined to be teachable and obedient. This reproach is partly deserved, and every lady who enters upon the work should endeavour to remove the occasion for it. Probationers are re-

ceived at the different hospitals, and they usually pay for their training. When they have gone through the course they in some instances receive a certificate, or they may obtain an engagement at one of the Institutions for Trained Nurses, and so enter on their work.

Any one who desired to train for a nurse could not do better than seek an interview with, or write to, the matron of the particular hospital she would prefer to enter; and these ladies are always willing to give any information that is necessary. Hospitals are established in every large town. Amongst the principal of these institutions in London may be mentioned Guy's Hospital, Borough, S.E.; St. Thomas's Hospital, Westminster Bridge Road; Middlesex Hospital, Berners Street, Oxford Street; St. Bartholomew's Hospital, Smithfield; and St. George's Hospital, Knightsbridge. In each one of these, certain rules are laid down and followed, and the probationer must acquaint herself with them.

At Guy's Hospital the nurse probationers who enter are expected to remain as nurses. The management prefer to receive widows or unmarried women, from 23 to 35 years of age, who have been good domestic servants. This is simply because there is a certain portion of housework to be done which must be well done. These nurses can earn about £1 a week and full board wages. Ladies are received for a certain term at Guy's upon payment of 21s. a week. They are exempted from the rougher domestic work, but they are required to make their own beds and must pay for their own washing.

Nursing is grand work, and it calls for the exercise of great qualities. It is essentially a woman's work, for there are very few women who are not at one period of their lives or another called upon to engage in it. It is therefore most desirable that not only those who intend to enter upon it professionally, but that every woman should give thought to the subject and gain a knowledge of how it can best be done.

A very interesting and instructive little book has lately been written by Miss Wood, the Matron of the Hospital in Great Ormond Street, which gives excellent practical hints about nursing. This book is well worth perusal, and it would be most valuable for any one to refer to in an emergency.*

PHILLIS BROWNE.

THE GATHERER.

Beacon Lights at Sea.

The electric light has not only been successfully applied to the illumination of light-houses, but a Belgian inventor, M. de Sussex, has also applied it to light up floating buoys. The battery is attached to the buoy, and is kept in action by the sea-water acting as a solution. The electricity generated is passed through an induction coil, and the strong discharges from the latter traverse a vacuum tube and produce a bright glow. This contrivance is always in action, but the light only begins to be visible as night draws on. Gas

has also been successfully tried of late for lighting buoys by the Commissioner of Irish Lights, following a method devised by Mr. J. R. Wigham. Pipes convey the gas from the shore along the sea-bottom. It is arranged that by a high pressure of gas a small light only shall be kept burning during the day; but when darkness comes on the pressure is diminished, and the light springs up to its full size. The labour of the

* "A Handbook of Nursing for the Home and the Hospital," by C. J. Wood. (Cassell Petter & Galpin.)