thoroughly capable nurse, may still be wanting in many qualities desirable in a sick room in a private house. Others who are able efficiently to nurse the sick in their own homes are quite incompetent to cope with the patients in a hospital ward, or to exercise the moral control necessary there. Moreover, a nurse may be thoroughly efficient for a medical case, and at the same time may be quite unsuitable for a critical surgical operation.

Another may be perfectly competent and in all ways fitted for nursing sick children, and yet may be wanting in much that is necessary for efficiently nursing adults.

When we are asked, therefore, what constitutes an efficient nurse in the abstract, it becomes necessary to idealize to a certain extent, if we are to combine in one person a nurse who is equally fitted for any sort of case, and for hospital or private work; trying at the same time to describe as clearly as possible a combination of qualities, rarely, if ever, met with amongst ourselves.

Still, even an ideal may help to form a reality, and possibly it would be well for all of us to aim at, and to keep before us, an excellency which seems well nigh unattainable, and to bear in mind always the elements really needed to make a nurse thoroughly efficient in tending the sick, whether singly or in numbers, and whatever may be the form their suffering may take, letting our standard of qualifications and efficiency be sufficiently pliable and elastic to adapt itself to circumstances, and at the same time doing our utmost to render the word "nurse" synonymous with all that is best and truest in our nature.

"We needs must love the highest when we see it."

Much has been said, and much has been written, both for and against hospital training for nurses, and, strange though it may seem, it is nevertheless a fact, that doctors still exist, even of a modern school of thought, who consider its value much overrated, and, indeed, who prefer intelligent obedience with less experience, to the risk of having, as their helpmate in the battle with disease, the hardened material and the routine work which it must be granted *is* occasionally, though we may hope not often, the outcome of life in a hospital. It is, no doubt, difficult for those who have not themselves worked in the wards as probationers to realise *how* indispensable it is, to have done so, for anyone who wishes to be in any degree an efficient nurse in the present day. A woman may possess all the necessary qualifications, moral and mental, and may, moreover, be skilled in her work to a certain extent, and yet, in an emergency especially, may be found wanting, just for lack of the clinical experience to be gained nowhere else.

The hourly education, often in a marked degree unconscious, which goes on all through a nurse's training; the learning "how to do, and how not to do," even little things; the necessary acquaintance with the uses of different appliances and instruments, with the knowledge how to prepare them for patient or doctor, and how to rightly clean them afterwards; the skill in touch, the deft handling, which practice alone can give; the proper understanding of ways and means, to be learnt by actual insight only; the absolute punctuality, and unquestioning obedience, which become habits; the precise realisation, in all its bearings, of the relative position of doctor and nurse—all these things, in themselves so many items, collectively go further afterwards in making a nurse efficient, than she is at all aware of at the time. Moreover, the sights and sounds of daily occurrence brace the nerves and teach self-reliance, and contact with every variety of character amongst the patients teaches the necessity of infinite patience and tact in dealing with the sick.

The experience of life gained in a hospital often, too, breaks down prejudices, and softens hard judgments, while the strict discipline and control of temper, absolutely indispensable in the wards, is good training indeed for a nurse's future, and will beneficially influence her work, whatever branch she takes up, and wherever it may lie.

Doubtless it is, however, that hospital life has its dangers and its deteriorating influences—on some characters especially—and apart from its effects on a nurse's individual life, it results sometimes in making her work a matter of mere routine to be got over as quickly as possible, and in causing her to regard her patients in the light of "cases" only, and not as fellow creatures also. But any woman whose character is easily influenced for evil, and who has not sufficient ballast to carry her safely through the difficulties and temptations around her, will never make a really efficient nurse, and is wanting not only in the real love of, and intelligent interest in, her work which is necessary, but also in the honesty of purpose, and the steady endeavour to act up to a high standard in all ways, and to do her best in great things or in small, which should be the keynotes of a nurse's life.

By entering into and sympathizing with the troubles of all classes, a nurse's own mind and sympathies become enlarged. She learns too that nursing in its highest sense means not only bodily tending, but heart soothing; and the wonderful connection between the workings of mind and body in the sick is realised in a way no physiology lessons could ever teach it.

There are many different opinions as to the length of hospital training required to make an efficient nurse, even amongst those most competent to judge. It would seem as if its necessary duration must to a great extent depend on individual character, and also on what branch of nursing a woman means to follow. Long hospital work tends,

previous page next page