

**Are Nurses worth their money value to the Public? \***

By Miss M. Burr.

At first sight, one naturally exclaims "Certainly! a nurse is worth her money value. See what a run there is upon all Nursing Institutions and Homes during an epidemic." But when one thinks the matter over more calmly, and hears the many accounts given by patients of their nurses, one cannot but think that, perhaps, after all, they are not so valuable as at first sight appears.

Nursing is a contract, made between a nurse, or the Home or Institution to which she belongs, and the public. This latter may mean patients in hospital (in which case the Hospital Authorities are the other contracting party) or private families.

I think I am right in assuming that when we speak of a nurse's monetary value to the public, we really mean to those private families who employ nurses, and to whom the nurses look for their reward in the shape of high fees, for their years of work in hospital.

We will look at this contract, first from the point of view of the family, and secondly from that of the nurse:—First, a person sending for a nurse, tacitly agrees to pay her fees, travelling expenses, washing bills, to board and lodge her, and in return wishes primarily for technical skill in the work undertaken. The patient is expected to be her chief care, and upon him she must concentrate all her skill and energy. Then the family comes next; the various members of which naturally expect sympathy and courtesy, and finally the servants; for whom are expected kindness and consideration.

This is briefly what is expected of a nurse by those who send for her. Now what does the nurse expect to give in return for her fees, etc.? Her skilled care, the result of her hospital training, which may mean life instead of death to her patient; anything more than this does not, I think, enter into the mind of the average nurse going to a case.

Now we will take the actual, and contrast it with the ideal, comparing what is, with what should be, and in so doing try to work out a nurse's value, according to the various types of the modern nurse.

How many nurses there are who enter the profession merely to learn the method of work, which will later on bring them in a living; unless in the meantime they get married. These nurses become technically and very often theoretically very skilful, they are looked upon as *smart* nurses, very up-to-date, etc., they go to cases and do their

work well, yet, their patients will say of them, "Yes, so and so was such a clever nurse, and the doctor thought most highly of her, and I don't want to seem ungrateful, but I often wished she had been—well, you know, a little more human and sympathetic."

In fact, nurse so-and-so was merely a nursing machine. Was this nurse worth her money value to her patient? Yes! but her value was no greater than the money paid her, for she did that which she was paid for, neither more nor less; her patient, as a human being, with a human being's feelings and sympathy, was nothing to her, she was a case and as such she was treated.

Not only do patients suffer from the want of sympathy, but this machine so often develops into the "Smart-for-the-Doctor nurse." To clearly explain what I mean, I will repeat an account of the treatment of a patient in a smart Nursing Home, which I heard a few months ago. The patient was to be operated upon for glaucoma, and went into this Home for the purpose, as it had been most highly recommended by the surgeon. The operation was performed, and after he recovered from it, he was left from the doctor's visit until the next meal time, and from meal time to meal time alone, sitting in his chair totally blind, in a strange room without a bell and unable to help himself in the very least. When the doctor paid his visit, everything was as it should be, and he thought most highly of this particular nurse, until one day he dropped in unexpectedly and was horrified to find his patient so neglected by his "smart" nurse.

What is the value of this type of nurse?

Much less than the money paid her, undoubtedly. Then we can place in this same category the badly-trained, the semi-trained, the ignorant, and the vulgar, and many too who, although they hold good certificates and call themselves ladies, yet have none of the refinement or the good manners which go to the making of a true gentlewoman.

I would like to remark here that I do not consider the mere fact of spending so many years in hospital, either constitutes "training," or makes a nurse who is worth her money value. For there are many who would in these days be thought to have had but a very meagre training, yet who have had much experience and have as much technical skill as the best trained nurse. Such nurses may have no theory worth mentioning. They could not describe the mechanism of the ear or eye, or the composition of drugs, yet these so-called untrained nurses get heaps of work, their patients get devoted to them, because they are so kind and sympathetic, they say. Are they worth their money value to the public? Undoubtedly they are.

\* Read before the Meeting of a Nursing Society.

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