

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD
EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

No. 855.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 20, 1904.

Vol. XXXIII.

Editorial.

THE SCOPE OF A DISTRICT NURSE'S WORK.

It is sometimes asserted that the thoroughly-trained hospital nurse does not make the best district nurse in a country parish, as she does not find scope enough for her special capacities, while work that needs doing remains undone. That this, although it may be true in isolated instances, is the case to any great extent we do not believe—the whole body of Queen's nurses, well-trained women, welcomed in the homes of the poor through the length and breadth of the land, give proof to the contrary. If, then, it occasionally happens that a nurse fresh from a good training-school does not make a successful district nurse, the reason is probably some defect in her training, or in her conception of her obligations.

One reason for the successful work of the nurses of the Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute is that in addition to their hospital training they all receive instruction in district work under experienced teachers before being sent to isolated posts. Like every other branch of nursing work, that of a district or parish nurse has its own special features, and the new worker escapes many pitfalls if she has the opportunity of working under those who have a practical knowledge of the best methods before taking up an appointment in which many of the problems with which she is confronted are new to her.

In the training-school something can no doubt be done to help the future district worker to a comprehension of the work before her. The attention of pupils who intend to nurse in the homes of the poor should be directed to the importance of a knowledge of sanitary and hygienic matters as they affect the homes of artisans, of the proper methods of feeding infants, of the hundred and one things which it is essential that the mother of a family should know, which a nurse, trusted and respected, has special opportunities of teaching her, and in relation to which, through no fault of her own,

the average working-class woman is, as a rule, entirely ignorant.

Again, the success of a nurse in district work depends largely upon her conception of what is included in her duties. If, fresh from hospital, she imagines that they are fulfilled when the acutely ill have been attended, then she may find time hang heavy on her hands, while her employers feel that something is wanting. But if such a nurse once realises that her work must be largely preventive, that it includes not only the care of the sick, but is concerned in raising and maintaining the general standard of physical health, then her opportunities will be endless.

Thus it is well if, with all devotion, she nurses back to health the child suffering from blood-poisoning, due to a neglected poisoned finger. She has saved, maybe, a right hand, and preserved to the patient the ability to support himself in days to come. But it is better if by a timely visit to the schools the finger is seen at the beginning of the mischief, brought under medical treatment, and taken in time, so that the serious illness never occurs. The result of the nurse's work may not be so evident to the ordinary observer as when the patient is pulled through a critical illness, but the work is much sounder, for it attacks the root of the mischief instead of dealing with the results arising from it.

In the same way, the usual mothers' meeting affords an opportunity for simple instruction in the feeding of young children, in the laws of health, and in the importance and preparation of wholesome food; instruction which, if imparted in an interesting and popular form, may result in the upbringing of healthy families, to be useful members of society, instead of the anæmic children, lacking in stamina, too often to be found in the healthiest localities. A nurse who works on the lines above indicated will never find time hanging heavily on her hands, but fresh fields of usefulness will constantly open before her. It is, indeed, no small part of the charm of district work that the worker

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)