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Editorial.

THE SCOPE OF A NURSE'S WORK.

It is sometimes alleged that a nurse takes no interest in cases which are not acute. If this be so, surely it is not only a reproach to nurses as individuals, but reflects also upon the schools where they received their professional training, and the lack of instruction imparted in the essential principles of a nurse's work, for nurses are quick to absorb and respond to ideas communicated to them while they are in training, and to put them into practice. What then are the main objects of a nurse's work?

To assist the work of physicians and surgeons.

1. For the complete recovery of the patient.
2. In the alleviation of suffering where a complete or partial cure cannot be anticipated.
3. In the prevention of disease.

Once a nurse has obtained her basis of general nursing education she will naturally devote her attention to whichever of these branches is most congenial to her, for though, to some extent they overlap, nursing work falls naturally into these three main divisions.

The work of a district nurse is concerned to a considerable extent with the prevention of disease, and it is only right that this ideal should be set before her in her period of training. No one will deny that an ideal condition would be attained if the community could be kept in perfect health, and a great interest in a district nurse's work is that she can assist materially in raising the standard of the national health. The number of acute cases she is called upon to attend may be limited, but she has other interests, and once she realises these she will not often complain of dullness. In the alleviation of the suffering of trying chronic cases, to whom her visits are their chief daily pleasure, and in the precept that prevention is better than cure, if it happens there are few acute cases demanding her skilled attention, she finds her work and her happiness.

She knows, for instance, that the constitution of the future adult depends to a great extent upon suitable feeding in infancy, and in season and out of season she endeavours to instil sound principles into mothers who have accepted the responsibilities of maternity with a profound ignorance of its most elementary duties.

She knows, again, the evils of overcrowding, and the value of fresh air, and advice as to open windows, and to the division of rooms by curtains, so that boys and girls may grow up in privacy and decency, is listened to with respect by those to whom she has in the past proved herself a friend, perhaps by nursing a member of the family back to life. Where sanitary arrangements are hopelessly defective, and landlords obdurate, she can suggest a timely visit from the sanitary inspector, and perchance prevent thereby an outbreak of disease. She can visit the elementary schools, attend to cuts and bruises, sore fingers, and incipient chilblains, and thus avert a large amount of preventable suffering. She can give simple instruction in the laws of health, and in wholesome and palatable cookery within the means of the working classes, thus combating the thriftlessness and discomfort, coupled with extravagance, which too often prevails. On all these points time and trouble are well and usefully spent, and no nurse, however highly trained, who has once grasped the social aspect of her work amongst the poor, or its value to the nation at large, will find either that work lacking in interest, or time hanging heavily upon her hands.

If, therefore, a district nurse complains of dullness, is it not rather that there is, as a rule, a want of adaptability in herself, rather than that there is a dearth of work ready to hand if only she has eyes to see?

Lastly, while discretion and tact are necessary to all nurses, they are a pre-eminent necessity to the district nurse if she is to be acceptable and successful.

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