

What Opportunities have Private Nurses for Self-Improvement?

Before discussing the opportunities which present themselves to private nurses, we must first of all have a clear idea of what is meant by "opportunities."

If it is to mean merely pursuing a definite course of study along some approved line, then I admit at once that the opportunities are limited.

But would they not be equally so in any other occupation?

If it is to mean the acquiring of general information, which goes so far towards making a nurse an interesting companion, then the private nurse has many and varied opportunities of self-improvement, unique opportunities which few others have.

But, like everything else, the occasions must be grasped immediately they present themselves or they vanish.

If the nurse has eyes which see not, ears that hear not, and a mind that cannot understand, these chances of self-improvement pass by unheeded, and the complaint is made that there is so little leisure in private work that a nurse has no time for self-improvement.

With this I emphatically disagree. That some cases leave nurses little time to study I do not deny, but all cases are not equally heavy. Every case is not so all-engrossing that the nurse cannot appropriate something worth keeping from her contact with other minds.

In my estimation, the first great factor for self-improvement, is the close contact which a nurse has with human nature as it is, for sickness exposes each individual in his true light. No matter how courteous or polished, rough or ready a person may be in everyday life, sickness will show if the polish is the natural shining of a gentle mind, or the thin veneer which covers a low nature.

Sickness will show, too, whether the roughness is assumed to cover, as it so often does, a very tender, sympathetic heart, or an ignorant, harsh creature.

A nurse sees as only an unbiased outsider can see the causes which may have produced these effects of good or bad, and this surely is an opportunity for learning so to mould our own characters that the false is shed whilst retaining the true and good.

When we come into close and intimate contact with a true, pure soul, can this not be traced to its real source where all may find the same strength?

Where we see a person whose only thought is self, who is of the earth earthy, can we not here find a lesson and an opportunity of self-improvement, and say, by God's grace I will endeavour to live up to a higher ideal than that which has sufficed for this poor soul?

This we might call soul-culture; but there can be no effort made to live a higher spiritual life, but it leaves its mark upon the individual, and tends therefore to self-improvement of the highest order.

For improvement of the mind there is always the interesting study of the mental attitude of those with whom a nurse comes into such close contact. Meeting people ever so frequently socially does not give one the same opportunity of knowing them as watching with them for a week or so beside the bedside of a sick relative.

If taken advantage of, these opportunities give a nurse a very wide knowledge of the workings of the human mind, that she often instinctively knows the point of view taken by other people, and so she can either forestall, turn aside, or encourage the wishes of those she is with; then she is spoken of as being tactful and sympathetic.

Every fresh household a nurse goes to is an unknown country which may be productive of great mental wealth, or almost a barren land, but from nearly every one a nurse may learn something. One family may be literary, here is an opportunity for reading during the night watches some of the best books.

Another may go in for pictures, old china, or old furniture, and will usually be found willing to talk of their particular tastes, and where any interest is shown will explain and instruct.

Others may go in for botany, geology or some other science; here, too, a nurse can get much information which can all be used for self-improvement.

Those who are interested in social subjects will invariably be found ready to explain existing conditions and the suggested methods of remedying them. Books on the particular subjects which interest the chief members of the household and the patient will usually be found ready to hand, but it is for the nurse to show the receptive mind and willingness to be interested and instructed. It is not to be supposed that people will lay themselves out to teach a stranger, but when they broach their own particular interest to one ready to listen and learn there will usually be no lack of information.

But should they be met with:—"No, I don't believe in this or that; I don't care about so and so; I'm not interested in social problems, I have no time for such things." The mine is sealed and will offer nothing better than current magazines or light trashy novels.

You may say: "But when can a nurse get all this information? The conversation at a meal followed by reading the usually-proffered book, will often open up a wide vista of knowledge only half suspected before."

The intimation that one is interested in French, botany, or literature on account of the self-improvement scheme of one's League, will often bring

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