

HONOUR.

By MISS MOLLETT
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IT is impossible to over-estimate the influence of the quality which we call Honour, not only on the character of any individual, but also upon the quality of his or her life work. The first—perhaps the most striking—characteristic of honourable people is their truthfulness, a natural instinctive rectitude of mind that makes any equivocation repulsive and unnatural to them. With them, black is black and white is white, while neutral tints in truth are not taken into consideration. They are rigidly exact in the performance of their duty. No matter how hardly it may clash with their own personal comfort or feelings, their duty comes first always; the work that they are in honour bound to perform takes the first place in their lives. Life itself must be sacrificed where the performance of duty demands it. The best of their abilities, their time, their thought, all are unreservedly given up to any duty they have undertaken, which honour therefore demands shall have the first and best of their powers. There is no work, however humble, but the workman should be actuated by such a sense of honour; but there are some callings in which it is the *essential* factor, in which the work is impossible unless the workman can be relied upon. To undertake such without bringing to it that scrupulous sense of honour, which is almost beyond definition, lowers the workman's moral character; for honour being one of the first principles, if it be absent he has to insert some sham in its stead, which makes his whole career a half truth instead of a whole truth, and so he walks through life in the shadow of a lie.

Such a profession is that of Medicine, whose very foundation-stone is Honour. No unskilled layman can ever tell whether the man to whom he has entrusted the lives of his wife and children is fully worthy of such trust; whether he conscientiously does his utmost, bringing to his work the full energy of his faculties—no half-effort. He must trust to the doctor's honour. If he has that quality, and has fully realised the moral responsibility of his position, then no case that is brought to his notice will be lightly or carelessly dealt with. He will do his best in all and every case, so that he can answer for it to his own conscience; and whether success or non-success attend his treatment, feels assured that he has thoroughly done his duty.

Nursing is the woman's share of medical work, and it is a profession that no one who has not the keenest sense of honour should ever undertake. A nurse's honour consists essentially in always acting with entire truthfulness and rectitude, at all times to do the best work of which she is capable, to bring to bear upon that work in all its details all her best energies, her highest faculties and fullest powers;

so alone will she be worthy of the responsibility that rests in her hands. No one but the nurse herself can ever know whether she has really done her best in her work—the best of which she personally is capable. Not scamping the minor points, or the apparently less important details, but leavening all she does with that little lump of honour, which will impart a satisfaction to her whole life's work such as the most ardent ambition, desire for praise, or kindly sympathy can never do. If she be in a trusted position, the lack of it may never be noticed—it may not be suspected that she is *not* doing her best. She alone will know that she falls far below that standard to which we all can attain, the practical ideal of humanity—the highest effort of which we are capable.

The aneurism case allowed to make just the little extra but forbidden exertion, perhaps in things so slight that the doctor at the very bedside would hardly notice them; the medicine that was not of much importance, forgotten; the ward that was left alone without permission for a few minutes—nothing happened, it is true, but it was a breach of trust, and blunted the nurse's conscience for a future occasion; the poultices changed without *all* the precautions that should have been taken; the mistake that was made and never owned to—it was never found out; the care due to every case, no matter how uninteresting, that was not always given; the attention that should be bestowed on all ward work, however menial, that was so often wanting; the want of subordination to the Home rules and the discipline to which obedience has been promised. All these points appear very trivial, but it is the woman who unconsciously never ceases to act honourably, even in trifles, who is the honourable nurse. The strictest supervision on the part of authorities can never replace a nurse's lack of honour. The honourable nurse, after receiving her instructions, knows but one way of carrying them out—the very best of which she is capable. Her sense of natural rectitude leaves her no second course. Such nurses are seldom aware that they possess any exceptional quality, and cannot understand its non-existence in others; they grieve over another nurse's "carelessness" and "forgetfulness," never grasping the fact that there is a "forgetfulness" born of laziness and dishonour, that is not wholly unpremeditated. They are not always clever or quick. They may be women who take long to grasp an idea, but when they have once translated the idea into a fact, they cling to it with tenacious honesty. They never say, "I know," when they mean "I think I know"; nor "I understand," when they mean "I believe I understand." They never give highly-coloured reports, but the fact that they are always truthful gives them an immense value. I have often heard a sister say: "Oh, Nurse So-and-so is not clever, but you can *rely* upon her, upon what she says and what she does."

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