

DISTRICT NURSING.

MUCH has been spoken and written about "District Nursing" of late, but not many people really understand the full meaning of the term. Perhaps a few words in explanation may be found interesting.

District nursing differs from hospital nursing in many ways. In hospital nursing the patient is removed from home; in district nursing he is nursed at home.

In the hospital the nurse has at her command every appliance which modern, medical, and sanitary science can supply, and receives her instructions from the doctor himself. She has a clean and well ventilated ward in which to nurse her patients.

This is not so in district nursing. The nurse has to contend with many difficulties—dust, dirt, want of fresh air, perhaps extreme poverty. She has only such appliances as she can carry with her. She seldom meets the doctor, and has to receive his orders in writing. Therefore district nursing is in many respects harder than hospital nursing.

It is easy to understand that to carry on district nursing successfully the nurses must be very highly trained. They must be thoroughly instructed in the different wards of a good general hospital, as the cases they may be called upon to visit in the district are of various kinds. It has also been proved that they must be selected from a higher social position than the ordinary class of nurses. A lady possessed of refinement and tact can more readily introduce necessary sanitary reforms without hurting the feelings of the poor; and when necessity demands it, herself do menial work, sweep, dust and tidy a room, take away curtains and carpets in which infection and germs may lurk, and make it a place in which speedy recovery is possible.

Wherever district nursing is established, the poor on their part look upon the nurses as their friends. The nurse's visit is looked forward to from day to day; she invariably receives a warm welcome.

In one country district to which a nurse from the Bloomsbury Square District Training School was sent the universal opinion was, "It is the best thing that has ever come to the town."

In a London district the wife of a clergyman was visiting a poor sick woman. She found her beautifully clean, and far more comfortable, considering the painful complaint from which she was suffering, than she could have expected. It had all been brought about by the visit of the district nurse. "Oh, ma'am," she exclaimed, "it was like an angel coming to me!" The nurse had done exactly what a skilled person was able to do. She had made the bed without disturbing the patient, she had carefully washed the poor suffering limbs, she had combed and arranged the disordered

hair, she had sweetened the close atmosphere by letting in fresh air, she had got rid of all the dust and dirt and foul rubbish about the room, and made it as bright and wholesome as a hospital.

Another case was that of a young married woman, aged twenty-two, suffering from peritonitis. Here there was great poverty to contend with. The nurse found the patient in a miserable house; she was lying on a heap of straw in a corner of the room. A table was the only furniture. Large holes in the floor showed a costermonger's stable below. The room was in an extremely dirty condition. Of course the patient was in a neglected state, and had no bed-clothes or necessaries of any kind. The nurse washed her and made her as comfortable as possible, lending her sheets and bed-clothes. After a few days the doctor gave her leave to be lifted to a bedstead which was lent. For the first week there were many offers of help from the neighbours; but as it proved a long illness, these helpers found they had enough to employ them at home, so the nurse had to give as much time as she could spare from other cases to this patient. As their poverty arose to a great extent from their own fault, the efforts of the nurse were directed towards self-help and reform, and in some measure she was successful. She persuaded the husband to scrub the floor and clean the room, for the first time in his life, to the surprise of the neighbourhood. He continued doing this till his wife regained her health.

These are but one or two specimens of cases taken from the records of those who have actually seen the work of the district nurses. They are inserted here with the view of showing a few of the difficulties with which these nurses have to cope.

Much more might be written on this subject, but space forbids it. It is sufficient to add that relief is not allowed to be given by nurses of the Bloomsbury Association. Cases of distress are brought to the notice of existing charitable agencies, and thus the nursing is kept distinct from any pauperizing tendency.

The work of district nursing receives the warmest support of Miss Nightingale, who, with Mrs. Dacre Craven, was a chief promoter in the formation of an association for nursing the sick poor in their own homes, and to whose advice and sympathy the progress in district nursing is greatly due.

NOTES, SHORT COMMENTS, QUERIES, AND REPLIES.

We shall endeavour, as far as it is in our power, to make this column of use to those who from time to time may require various information. See notices on first page of matter.

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