

## WHAT CONSTITUTES AN EFFICIENT NURSE.

By Miss M. C. LOCH.

TO have written an essay formerly on the above subject, before Miss Florence Nightingale had made her influence felt in the nursing world, would have been comparatively an easy task to perform; and in like manner to have been a nurse in those days, and to have aimed at what would then have been deemed "efficiency," would also have been to undertake an easy and pleasant work. But now that the profession of nursing has undergone such a marvellous change, so that its whole character and status has been altered; now that it no longer consists merely in smoothing the pillow and in giving cooling drinks to the sick; now that a complete revolution in fact has been effected in it; it becomes a difficulty to know how to define the limits of efficiency, how to decide what is the highest standard to which all nurses worthy of the name and of their high calling should aspire.

But it is a question of the utmost importance, and one that must be faced as soon as possible by every one of us, if we do not wish to be left behind in the struggle, if we are to shew to the world at large, not only that the profession of nursing has undergone great changes, but that it has by those very changes made vast strides onwards, and with distinct gain to all with whom it has to do.

What then does constitute efficiency in a nurse—that is, in a nurse who, having gone through the necessary training in all its branches, is now ready to begin her profession, to make her start in life, guaranteed by a certificate (legally registered, we will hope, before long) as an efficiently trained nurse, ready for any branch of that profession, and for any appointment in it that may fall to her lot? That she should be able to perform all her duties well, with credit to herself, her sex, her hospital and its method of training, and to the whole of the nursing sisterhood whom she represents, is of the utmost importance at this time when many critical eyes are upon her, only too ready to condemn her as the representative of the new order of things in the nursing world. In order that she should be equal to the occasion, that she should be able to fulfil all these demands upon her, and to stand all the criticism that she is sure to get, it is absolutely necessary that her training beforehand should have been most complete and of the very best, and that her environment from the first should have been stimulating and helpful.

To begin, then, with what may seem a minor qualification, but which nevertheless is very important—her physical condition. It will be an advantage to her if, as well as being of a sound and healthy constitution, she is also well knit together with an active, lithsome frame. To be tall is not

always an advantage, although to be very short is without doubt to labour under a disadvantage, especially in private nursing.

A woman should scarcely ever begin to take up nursing as a profession—that is to begin her hospital training—before she is twenty-three years of age. Some will think this is putting it unnecessarily late; but when the importance of the work is thought of, when the requirements of it are considered, it will, I think, seem too early rather than too late. No one can ever hope to attain to the highest state of true efficiency who cannot bring into her profession a cultured mind, well stored with knowledge; a love of music, poetry, and of art; a large-hearted sympathy, a cool head, and a deft hand; for she must remember she will have little time for culture when her training has once begun. She can be preparing herself for her future work in a hundred different ways before she begins her actual practical training. For instance, she will find it an enormous advantage if she has made some progress in the study of elementary anatomy; if she has gained some knowledge of botany; if she has learnt to be very skilful with her needle, and to cut out easily and readily; for all this will be wanted later on in the practice of her calling. Consequently no time need be really lost by deferring the training beyond twenty-three, and the gain will be great if by so waiting she is learning to despise and look down upon the frivolities, vanities, and flirtations of that crude age, and is ready to bring to the hospital something more tangible and satisfactory. Then, again, it is all-important that a woman should have had some experience of life, and of the poor and their surroundings in their own homes, before she can deal with them effectually in their hospital life; and this, again, she cannot well gain before that age. And lastly, she should be quite certain that she has a decided love of nursing, of dealing with sickness, and of helping in suffering; for if not, she can never reach the highest state of efficiency, however good her actual training may be.

There is a greater danger now than formerly that this may not always be the case. The dignity of labour has at last been acknowledged, for women as well as for men; consequently there are many more women now in all classes of society who wish to work for its own sake, as well as many who must work for the sake of a livelihood; and there are some who, having no aptitude for teaching, try nursing, and adopt it with the one and only idea of getting money. Others, alas! become nurses with less worthy motives still. But none of these can ever hope to reach the highest state of efficiency. So there should certainly be a real and growing love for nursing before it is taken up as a life work.

But supposing that we have the strong, well-knit young woman, between three and four and twenty, well educated, with a cultured, refined mind, active,

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