

A GUIDE TO
MEDICAL AND SURGICAL NURSING.

BY RACHEL NORRIS.

CHAPTER II.

I DO not intend to argue the point—a much vexed one—as to the exact proportion which theoretical should bear to practical instruction. For all purposes of higher technical information, there are books from which a Nurse may herself obtain the exact amount of mental nourishment her powers of intelligence will enable her to digest, added to which there are, as I have before said, in most Hospitals, lectures given by members of the Medical Staff, which she has the advantage of attending.

When a woman comes into a Hospital, whether she be highly educated or not, she will hear things talked of which she has never heard before, and within half an hour perhaps of her first appearance in a Ward, she will be asked to furnish some article of which she knows neither the name nor the use. A surprisingly short time makes most acquainted with the technical expressions that they thought so difficult of comprehension, and on looking back they can hardly believe there ever was a period when they did not know the things they now consider so simple.

After attending a course of lectures given by a distinguished Surgeon to the Nurses of the Hospital where he visited, the very valuable substance of which he had carefully translated into what most of us thought the language of everyday life, I was amused by the varied criticisms of his audience. "He can't think we pick up much information here—he talks as if we were children," said one. "It would have been beautiful, if I could but have followed him," admitted another, with candour. It is to the latter class of listeners that these remarks are offered, and if in my paper are found words which they cannot understand, I heartily beg their pardon. Whilst to those in a position to smile at the simplicity of my little book I offer no apology, for they have but to close it, and seek another better adapted to their capacity. With a vivid remembrance of my own feelings on a similar occasion, I always feel great compassion for Probationers newly arrived at the Hospital to undergo their years' training.

Very few of them seem to know at all what they are about to undertake: some greatly exaggerate the difficulties they fancy they shall encounter; others are apt to laugh at the very idea of anything being required of them which they shall not be able to accomplish by the light of nature. Most experience a considerable amount of shyness, which is very natural, at finding them-

selves amongst a number of women with whom they are wholly unacquainted. This, however, soon wears off, and probably before they have been introduced to the Ward where they are to begin their new work, they have laid the foundations of pleasant friendships, which may last, if neither friend be too exacting, during their whole year of probation.

And now one word on the subject of dress.

I have often wondered what the enormous box, which is the almost invariable accompaniment of a Probationer, contained. Immediately on her arrival she is furnished by the Hospital with a sufficient supply of caps and aprons, and in about a month afterwards she receives her uniform dresses, which she is expected to wear whilst within the precincts of the institution where she is serving. Why then should she encumber herself with useless paraphernalia? For useless it nearly always is, it being quite the exception, when a Probationer, during her first month of trial, is provided with a gown at all suitable to her occupation. Three good prints neatly and plainly made—for surely good taste alone would suggest how unbecoming fashionable gowns are to a person engaged in the homeliest offices—and one good one in which she can visit her friends, walk out, &c., are all that is really needful for the equipment of a Probationer. To these must be added a good stock of underclothing, which should, if possible, be new, as the Probationer will find during her year of training that she will have little or no time to spare for the use of the needle. Not but what I may remark in passing, that really good needlework is an accomplishment well worth possessing. The great surgeon, Sir Benjamin Brodie, wished that all his sons should learn to work with the needle; nothing, he said, being better for giving delicacy of touch to the fingers.

Let me offer a little advice here: be very careful in the selection of the boots and shoes intended for wearing in the Wards, for much personal comfort, and I may add that of the patients, depends on this. The way in which boots and shoes wear out in Ward work is perfectly marvellous, and must be experienced to be believed in. The ankles of some Nurses are apt to swell, and the feet to become painfully tender, if very thin shoes are used during constant exercise. On the other hand, a noisy creaking footstep increases the sufferings of many patients greatly. It may be gathered from this that a wise discretion will avoid either extreme. I don't think that there is a word to be said in justification of tight boots or high heels—were it not that I have seen them worn in a Hospital, I should not have imagined that any one taking upon herself the calling of a Nurse could have thought them possible under the circumstances.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)