

An Address to Nurses.

By MISS MARION E. SMITH.

WE have received from a lady of note in the Nursing World in this country, a copy of a most interesting address delivered by Miss Marion E. Smith, Chief Nurse, Philadelphia Hospital to the graduating class of the Wilkes-Barre City Hospital Training School for Nurses, at the Annual Commencement. Our correspondent writes: "Why in England can we not show these same amenities between those in the same profession, and recognize a little one another's work? Our nursing schools are so isolated, never caring, apparently, to join hands with others working for the same object. We look so suspiciously on our fellow women." It is unfortunately true that this spirit prevails largely in this country, and is the great stumbling-block in the way of professional progress. The secret of the success of American Matrons is that putting 'narrow jealousies' on one side they join hands for the common welfare. When shall we see in this country the Matron of one hospital delivering the annual address to the nurses of another?"

From Miss Marion Smith's most interesting lecture we cull the following:

"The Nurse, newly graduated from a hospital (and especially on the day of her graduation) stands at the threshold of a new life, untried and unknown; and because we know this better than she, and know, too, something of what she is likely to meet, the parting words we give are usually heavily laden with advice to arm her for the future."

In addressing a graduating class of physicians in Philadelphia last spring, one of the faculty says:

"The laws of supply and demand regulate the circulation of all commodities not excepting that of advice. It was a wise man who said to one who asked him for counsel in some emergency, 'tell me what kind of advice you want and I will give it to you.'"

I do not promise you that, but at this time of year you are, like all of us, probably satiated with classes and lectures, and so, while I cannot refrain from giving you a certain amount of that commodity—advice—so cheap, so boundless, and so seldom followed, until our own experience has proved its value, I shall touch upon other things than actual nursing this evening. As work comes before pleasure, we will take up that first and say something of nursing ethics.

I shall take it for granted that most of you expect to become private nurses, and so shall say nothing of hospital life.

The ethics of nursing is a subject so broad and so difficult to treat in a short lecture, that it is

with hesitancy I undertake it, knowing full well that but scant justice will be done it at my hands.

The laws which govern the "science which treats of human actions, regarded as right or wrong," are, most of them, so subtle it is obviously almost impossible to analyse or discuss them. . . . But we must take up the subject from a very practical standpoint, particularly as nursing ethics differ from other forms, just as hospital etiquette differs from social etiquette.

Let us try to discover where the fault lies, that there are so many complaints and so much dissatisfaction when you enter a patient's home to take care of the sick.

There are three classes who complain: physicians, nurses and patients. I hear the voices of all three, and am therefore, to a certain extent, able to form an opinion especially as, though a nurse myself, I am practically an on-looker, and so "see most of the game."

If the mistress of the house or the one in charge would be explicit it would help much, and such matters as sleep and meals could be arranged at once. . . . Those who watch, too, by the sick bed, may and do claim that the nurse is not the only one who is worn out, and this is true enough, but even though the anxiety of love is on their side added to the strain, they must remember the responsibility on yours is very great; for instance, in a case of typhoid fever or pneumonia, even in your sleep you will dream of hæmorrhage or heart failure and wake again and again with a start, fearing it is reality.

If the laity could stand as I have done, by the sick bed of a nurse and hear in her delirium anxiety for her patients and fear lest they be neglected or forgotten, they would realize better that it becomes part of her very life.

Training teaches such abnegation of self that the individual needs are rarely obtruded, but the physical call for rest must be obeyed.

In an address (delivered some years ago before this training school) Dr. J. William White made the following remarks: "I need scarcely mention self-sacrifice, and willingness to undergo deprivation of personal comforts, bodily fatigue, mental strain, and even physical danger, as being amongst the attributes of the nurse I am describing. To the honour of all nurses, be it said, that these qualities are almost never absent, even in those who in other ways are far from satisfactory. I have had too many patients saved for me (after hovering on the verge of the grave) and brought back to life and health by the untiring and unremitting devotion of nurses not to pay them, as a class, this sincere and well deserved tribute."

You will need plenty of that very scarce virtue—moral courage—in your lives as nurses, and you must learn (if you have not already done so)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)