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Editorial.

NURSES ON BOARD SHIP.

A nurse who has graduated from a general hospital after a three years' course is apt to regard herself as fully qualified. But is this the case? If she has availed herself of the opportunities she has had, and presumably the authorities have satisfied themselves of this before granting her a certificate, then it may be assumed that she is well grounded in medical and surgical nursing. But directly she gets away from her training-school she realises that there are many ailments to which flesh is heir which come under neither of these headings, and concerning the nursing of which she can lay claim to no skilled knowledge. It is unlikely that she has ever nursed any of the infectious fevers (with the exception of enteric) or a case of diphtheria; her knowledge of gynaecological nursing is, as a rule, extremely limited, and of obstetric work she, generally, has had none. Yet all these cases she will be called upon to nurse in the ordinary course of private nursing, and the question, as a conscientious woman realises her limitations, is how she can acquire the necessary knowledge. To many who become private nurses it will appear desirable after gaining a three years' certificate to qualify thoroughly in one specialty, and to keep mainly to work of that kind, and there is much to be said for this view.

The acquisition of fresh knowledge is a fascinating pursuit, and the ideal plan would perhaps be to add a fresh qualification, to those already attained, each year.

But, on the other hand, it is indubitable that in the constant practice of one particular branch of work the perfection of skill is best attainable, and, once having a basis of general knowledge, it is probable that, life being only of limited extent, nurses will increasingly devote themselves to some specialty. Further, the motives which induce most women to

take up nursing are not exclusively altruistic; like the other sex, they work with the very laudable object of self-support, nor need the quality of work be less high on this account. Nevertheless, their working years being limited, they cannot afford to spend more than a certain proportion purely on education. But however desirable it may be for nurses who stay in England to specialise, those who go further afield can scarcely be too highly qualified all round. They cannot, as a rule, pick and choose their work, but will have to nurse whatever cases require their assistance, as frequently no other nursing care will be available. Thus Miss Penn, who is at present interesting herself in the provision of trained nurses on board passenger ships, writes to us to say that she has received letters from nurses showing that they are cordially in sympathy with the movement, but none have so far mentioned amongst their qualifications a knowledge of maternity work, and this is, of course, essential for any nurses who contemplate offering their services in the event of the establishment of a nursing service in connection with passenger ships.

This point, which we are asked by Miss Penn to mention to save many nurses writing for further information, once more emphasises the fact of the general neglect of this branch of work in the scheme of nursing education. It is constantly asserted that maternity nursing is a special branch—an incontestable fact—but there is no reason why it, any more than any other branch of nursing, should be left to women with a few months' special training, as has been largely the case in the past. As we rise to a more complete conception of our professional obligations we shall realise that duty demands of us to provide for the skilled care of maternity cases. This fact will probably be pressed home as, responding to the ever-widening calls made upon us, our work takes us further afield.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)