

gowns of soft shades of blue, warm greys, or green should be worn, as they prove both restful and cheering to the eye of a patient. I speak from personal experience both as a nurse and as a patient. I wonder why private nurses adhere to the wearing of stiff linen collars and cuffs? The latter are impracticable for actual duty, besides the touch of them being uncomfortable to the patient. Consequently they are more often to be seen reposing on a dressing-table than in wear. To my mind, the dainty hem-stitched turnover collar and cuffs of linen or cambric, so reminiscent of our grandmothers, are far more practical and quite as effective; and "what is fit is fine."

Very early in my private nursing experience I discovered the value of colour to the sick, mainly by reason of the appreciation bestowed on my dressing-gown, which was of a pastel shade of blue, relieved with guipure lace; also through the positive admiration expressed for a certain large Indian shawl which accompanies me wherever I go. It is of the deep rich scarlet peculiar to its kind, with a striped border of all the primary colours, black and white, blended with the harmony which only Eastern peoples can form with such mixtures. For many years this shawl has cheered me in moments of depression and in surroundings of unavoidable greyness, and I have grown to regard it as a sort of portable poppy-bed, secured to me for all seasons and all places. I soon realised that it was a valuable asset in my nursing, and it has played its cheerful part in many a sick-room. Fortunately, let me add, it is washable.

There seems to be a generally-accepted belief that illness is morally salutary, but altogether disagreeable. Now, I have never been able to accept that belief either for my patients or for myself. There are many cases of illness which, skilfully managed by the nurse, may prove not only salutary but times of considerable pleasure, notwithstanding physical weakness, and which may bring happy experiences unattainable through any other means. But these can only be secured by thought and devotion on the part of the nurse. After the period of danger is passed, there is no reason why illness should continue to be the intense discomfort it too often is, either for the patient or his friends. In my own experience I have had patients who, though dangerously ill at the outset, told me at the conclusion of the case that they felt they had had "a good time"!

There are many women patients who not only suffer no harm, but who derive immense benefit from a period of being well cared for and made much of; women who spend the greater part of their days of health in caring for and toiling for others. I am aware there are some cases, which one can only describe as impossible, where one meets hopeless discontent and selfishness, instead of a sane desire

to make the best of circumstances; but these are in the minority.

There are many methods by which colour and brightness may be introduced into a sick-room. A small table placed within the patient's line of vision with a high-centred arrangement of ferns and flowers makes a pleasant resting-place for the eye. But the plants and their arrangement should be altered constantly in order to prevent the possibility of the patient feeling tired of it. Some patients enjoy having a tray full of bright blossoms brought to them, and another holding pansy-glasses or little fish bowls with water, and themselves arranging the flowers for the rest of the house, as well as for their own room. I taboo specimen glasses and tall vases, likely to be upset, for such occasions, as causing nervous strain. To bring in from other rooms pictures which in health the patient may have had little leisure to study, and leave them within comfortable range of sight, just long enough to let them sink into the mind, and no longer, gives distinct pleasure to many patients. To patients well enough to use a needle, a valuable means of supplying colour is to encourage them to do embroidery. A bunch of coloured embroidery threads or silks is a very pretty thing to look at, and it has a value unsuspected by many. Of course, nothing fine, or likely to take much time, should be attempted. I remember one patient of my own deriving much interest and pleasure from the working, with Harris's coloured threads, of conventional sprays on some linen covers for her little bed table. She knew very little of needlework, but learnt quickly, as most women do, and we spent many pleasant hours in using up every possible variety of Mountmellick stitch so as to avoid monotony. Where sunshine is unobtainable, muslin window curtains of a yellow-ochre shade will supply a suggestion of this. Moreover, a scientific authority has declared that light passed through this colour is beneficial. I also attach much value to the artistic use as well as the indispensable practical use of pretty screens. I learnt this through the satisfaction I derived during an illness in letting my gaze rest on a Japanese screen of buff colour thickly embroidered in gold. It was so simple—just birds and reeds, and the suggestion of water; but it was full of suggestiveness, and, glittering cheerfully in the firelight, it filled up with brightness many moments which might have been grey in its absence.

In some houses one finds the inexplicable idea that anything is good enough for use in the sick-room; I, on the contrary, consider that the sick-room demands the best there is that will not suffer by use, the prettiest china and glass and furniture, and that the patient, for the time being, is the most important person in the house. And, certainly, I have generally found my public very

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)