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Editorial.

ARE NURSES TOO INDEPENDENT?

We sometimes hear the criticism expressed that nurses are too independent nowadays, and the question always presents itself—*independent of what? of whom?*

A counter-charge is sometimes made, "Nurses have no initiative," so that it would seem that a critical public is occasionally hard to please; for if independent thought is discouraged then a nurse, unless she has an unusually strong character, becomes almost inevitably a machine, skilful in routine work, but apt to fail if anything outside routine is required of her. Her brain power being for the most part unexercised does not respond readily to an unusual call.

In regard to her relation to her medical chief it is almost unheard of for the accusation of over much independence to be brought against a well-trained nurse. She knows well that she is working with him for the welfare of the patient, that it is his part to order treatment, hers to carry it out. Yet even in this connection independence of thought on the part of the nurse may prove not only valuable, but much appreciated by the medical man under whom she is working. A case in point is that of a Staff Nurse in a ward where a busy house-surgeon ordered a patient, whose urine had not been tested, to be got ready for operation shortly. The nurse herself made the examination and then drew the attention of the doctor to the result. "There will be no operation this morning, I am much obliged to you nurse," he said. The patient was a diabetic,

whose life would have been endangered by the operation. The nurse in that instance surely proved herself a better helper to the doctor than if she had not exercised her own independence of thought, but had merely slavishly carried out orders.

Again, in the wards should the object of training be to encourage independence of thought on the part of a nurse or to eliminate it? The end of all training is to turn out a capable nurse, one who is equal to any emergency. To this end pupils should surely be encouraged to use their brains, and any signs of initiative should be sought for and cherished. It is not a common, but a very precious gift, and, within limits, should be carefully cultivated.

When a nurse enters a private family what does she frequently find? A patient critically ill, and distraught relations in a condition approaching either mental or physical collapse—perhaps both. What is needed then is not a well-trained automaton but a woman of independent thought and character who for the time being takes the helm, who can make up her mind as to a definite course of action, and carry it through with decision, being dependent on no one. On such an one a disorganised household will rely and a sense of well being—of relief at having someone to "turn to"—will take possession of it. But, if a nurse is to be a success in difficult circumstances, she must be accustomed to think for herself on ordinary occasions, and she can scarcely be too independent provided always that her independence finds its outlet along the right channels.

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