

knowledge of the reason of so many of the acts they are taught to perform is constantly found to be lacking.

To many such pupils books of a serious nature are somewhat of a novelty, and a study of them is consequently often attended by comparatively small benefit. To pick out the essentials, and what you might call to tear the heart out of a book requires both skill and practice. The pupil should learn to compare the statements found in books with what she sees in her daily rounds, and should not at once blindly accept them because they are in print until they are found to correspond with her experience. A fairly wide experience of both the written and verbal answers of pupil maternity nurses furnish endless examples of the way books are misused. Ordinary every day methods of treatment which she has seen practiced a score of times are passed by and the candidate describes in considerable detail some obsolete though perhaps rather striking method which she has read of in a book, all the time being apparently perfectly aware that the method she is describing is obsolete because she ends up her description generally by saying, "this however is a bad method."

After a good many years' experience as an examiner, I have acquired a small stock of two or three questions of extraordinary simplicity, the nature of which it is not my intention to divulge, which prove stumbling blocks to all but the most intelligent candidates. The candidates have been losing themselves in the intricate by-paths of obstetric medicine and have overlooked some of the most striking and obvious facts that must have come under their notice during every day of their pupilage.

The object of the course of training which the maternity nurse goes through is to lay a foundation both of theoretical and practical knowledge. After a brief training no nurse can expect to reach finality. What is known as experience comes slowly and never comes at all to those who have not made their foundations sure, or to those who in early youth have made up their minds that they have reached such a stage of excellence that they have nothing further to learn.

Without knowledge and without humility experience can never benefit anyone. In the erroneous but popular acceptance of the term, Mrs. Gamp would stand high as an example of an experienced midwife, but to people of that type increasing years only bring increasing ignorance.

With all due deference to those present this evening a really good maternity nurse is not a very common thing to find, and the quality of

all others which many of them lack is discipline. A three years' training in a general hospital, if it teaches nothing else, teaches discipline, but those who go out into the world after a few brief months spent at a lying-in hospital often most sadly lack this most essential quality.

During her short period of training the pupil has probably been engaged in the study not only of nursing but of the duties of the midwife, and when subsequently she takes on the function of the maternity nurse she not infrequently confuses herself with the doctor. No greater mistake can be made than for two people to try and treat the same patient simultaneously. This lack of discipline is generally due to ignorance, and to the fact that she has not been properly taught what are her duties towards her patient and towards the medical attendant. The position of the maternity nurse in a household is an extremely difficult one, and full of pitfalls, and only those who are born wise are ever likely to attain supreme excellence.

An appreciation of these difficulties, and the practice of discretion and self control will, however, enable those who are less gifted by nature to pass through life with satisfaction to their patients and to themselves. It is only by the realisation of our mistakes that we are ever likely to improve. In this age of ours everyone describes his occupation as a profession, whether he be a plumber or whether he be a poet. It is the custom to speak of the work of the doctor and the work of the nurse alike as a profession, but we must ever remember that both alike are also handicrafts and that to learn a handicraft takes much time and demands much serious effort and thought. Many nurses immerse themselves far too exclusively in theoretical knowledge and miss the opportunity of learning not merely how to do things, but how to do things well. The maternity nurse is not expected to have an encyclopædic knowledge of the diseases of women and children as the result of a five months' training and it is well to avoid the pose of being omniscient.

The proper appreciation of importance of the mechanical side of our work cannot be too strongly kept in mind, for otherwise whilst we are talking of our profession we go through life as bunglers.

THE NURSING OF MATERNITY CASES.

MISS AMY HUGHES.

Miss Amy Hughes said that the question of to-day was, What is training? She held that it meant fitting nurses to meet any demand upon their services. She thought she might

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)