

The Elements of Success.

A LECTURE DELIVERED TO SECOND-YEAR NURSES AT MONSALL HOSPITAL.

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Before we begin to study in detail the various diseases which we have to treat in this hospital, I think it is as well that I should say a few words about the duties of a nurse in general, and especially about those qualities that make for success in the branch of our common profession which you have chosen to adopt.

I must, of necessity, speak from the medical point of view, but I do not want you to think for a minute that any medical man undervalues such qualities as patience and gentleness, without which, even if your intellectual attainments are abnormally great, anything like good nursing is impossible. I will now, however, take them for granted and will dwell only on certain ideals, if I may call them so, which you will find it well to set before yourselves in the wards.

Inasmuch as you have all "signed on" for a period of at least two years it is not necessary for me to emphasise the fact that it is impossible for anyone to be a good nurse if she does not intend to make it her life's work. Nothing approaching to the "musical amateur" type is possible in a hospital where serious work is required. Indeed, I doubt very much if any of you would have been able to stand the drudgery of the "menial work" with which you were so soon confronted were you not constantly thinking of the time when you would have "real nursing" to do. A man in running a race does not look at his toes. I mention this point, however, lest any of you should regret that you had not selected some other hospital where the work is not so hard. I say at once, there are many such, where the wardmaids do the "cleaning," and the probationers have little else to do but exist beautifully, but I would not give much for your knowledge of disease—and this is the dragon we have all to fight—when you had served your time in one of them.

The first point which I want to impress upon you is somewhat difficult to define, but I think I shall be able to show you what I mean. It is that you must none of you be contented

with merely "carrying out the doctor's orders." If there is one conception of our common work which makes me indignant it is that a doctor exists merely to give orders, and a nurse merely to carry them out. Perhaps some of you have the idea (you get it at all events fairly frequently in the nursing stories in some of the monthly illustrated magazines) of the doctor, who is sometimes, by the bye, a consulting physician who for some unexplained reason carries the instruments for the performance of most major operations in his coat-tail pocket, coming to the bed side, evolving some marvellous diagnosis from his inner consciousness after a five minutes' interview with the patient, and then giving his orders to the nurse. The patient, also for some entirely unaccountable reason, promptly gets well, and then marries either the nurse or the doctor!

It is all very well to make fun of this attitude, but it exists pretty largely for all that. The doctor, however, has to depend, and willingly depends, for the very materials to enable him to detect the disease at all, or to treat it successfully, on the observations of the nurse when he is not there. If you must divide the functions, it is for the nurse to observe and the doctor to reason from her observations. These are supplemented, it is true, by his own examination of the patient, but this cannot take the place of the constant previous watching by the bedside, which falls to the lot of the nurse.

And so I think there is a danger of a young nurse, at all events falling into the idea that she is not there to observe, but merely to obey: she may even think that she will possibly be snubbed if she does observe. This is not by any means the case: she may, and probably will, expose herself to a little gentle sarcasm if she proceeds to reason from her observations unasked, because she will probably jump to conclusions, but she will receive nothing but credit for observation pure and simple. Let me give you one or two instances:

You are in a diphtheria ward, and the Sister has gone to tea, leaving you temporarily responsible. A child who has had a bad attack of diphtheria and is apparently convalescent looks a little pale. If you are not observant that is all you will notice—you have, moreover, no special orders written down for you about that boy, so you think nothing, and go on doing something else which you have been definitely told to do. Perhaps an hour later that boy, whilst walking about, suddenly faints, and before the doctor can arrive he is dead. Well, you have done nothing that is in any way contrary to any rule, so you are, I sup-

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