

is given upon the results of acquired knowledge and an intimate acquaintance with the habits and character of the person who receives it. It is evidence, therefore, of the existence of qualities of which the recipient herself is perhaps only dimly conscious—qualities which have been tried and assessed by those who have obtained the knowledge, after long experience in hundreds or thousands of cases, of the peculiar faculties which are required in a first-rate nurse. The medical man, not knowing this, and being ignorant of the thoroughness with which a nurse is trained, is apt to assume a position of marked superiority when he is working with her. He treats her as an inferior, when in reality he ought to look upon himself as the managing director in a firm where the other partners have equal rights, but different spheres of action. The nurse, on the other hand, is not always free from blame when any friction arises. Knowing herself to be well trained and accustomed to a given routine, she is sometimes apt to resent orders because their import is not clear to her at the moment. She forgets that the same end may often be attained in different ways, and that the methods to which she is accustomed may still be capable of variation and improvement.

4.—THE PRIVATE NURSE IN RELATION TO HERSELF.

Lastly, we have to discuss the nurse in relation to herself. The first thing which should be in a nurse's mind is that she is a member of a profession, and is not a mere individual. What she does and the way she does it, therefore, will bring credit or discredit upon the whole body of nurses, and not upon herself alone. At times she may think that it cannot matter very much what she does in the seclusion of a sick room in a small middle-class family. But she ought always to remember that her actions and her attitude towards every patient and his friends is keenly criticised, and that her influence for good or evil goes to make up the body of general opinion which gives nursing a good or a bad name. Our ideal of nursing in England is very high, and it is worthily maintained. Founded primarily by ladies, the good influence has worked downwards through the profession. The old and bad class of nurse was swept away entirely, and has been replaced by yourselves. We wish these ideals to extend throughout the world, and, where it is possible, to have them improved upon. For this reason I should like to see the private nurses recruited from the best educated candidates, and from those of the higher rather than the lower social grades. But whether this is possible or not, everyone who is engaged in private nursing should strive

to keep herself abreast of the current topics of the day. There is a little danger of becoming so absorbed in your work that you take no interest outside it, and you may then easily become mere drudges, quite unfit for private nursing. A man who is convalescent, or a lady who is recovering from an illness, does not want as her attendant a person who can talk of nothing but nursing. They need someone who, without being a blue-stocking, can discuss ordinary social topics from a reasonable standpoint, and who has ideas about what is going on in the world around her. If you are in a large town, there is no reason why you should not attend good concerts if you are musical, picture galleries if you have inclinations towards art, or the theatres occasionally when work is slack and there is something worth seeing. Even in a small town, or in the depths of the country, your minds need not lie fallow. There is plenty of literature to be had for the asking, only be sure that it is literature; the halfpenny paper and the modern novel do not come under the definition. Biography, history, and the standard novels are much better for you to browse upon. But beware of reading whilst you are on duty in the sick room. A patient will often hesitate to interrupt a nurse until she has got to the end of the chapter, whereas a mere man will not scruple to ask for all he wants, and at the instant, if he thinks that his nurse is only sewing or doing a bit of fancy work.

Throughout her attendance upon a sick person a nurse is bound to remember that she is a member of a profession, and that she is there solely in her corporate capacity. She must, therefore, sink her individuality, and whilst she attends assiduously to her patient, and sympathises with him in his illness, she should be on her guard that no other sentiment is allowed to spring up. We ought to feel the same for a nurse who marries her patient as we do for a doctor or a solicitor who receives a substantial bequest from a patient or client. It may be capable of a satisfactory explanation, but, on the other hand, it should be viewed with suspicion as a step which greatly detracts from the purely professional aspect of nursing.

These, ladies, are some of the topics I would have you think over in connection with private nursing, and if they afford material for discussion, the object of my paper this afternoon is attained.

Professor Bevan-Lewis presided on Monday at a dinner at the Gaiety Restaurant of the Medico-Psychological Association of Great Britain and Ireland, to commemorate the passing of the Asylum Officers' Superannuation Act.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)