

## The Nurse in Private Practice.\*

### THE QUALITIES OF THE NURSE.

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Let me first of all tender my most hearty thanks to Mrs. Fenwick and to all the organisers of this Congress for having invited the President of the Rue Amyot School to raise her voice among so many others who are authorised to deal competently with these nursing questions in which the whole world is so deeply interested now-a-days.

It is the glory of England that she was first not merely to interest herself in the improvement of sick nursing, but also to call general attention to that matter which is both philanthropic and social, and which until then had remained so deplorably unheeded by all.

I wish I could feel myself worthy of the honour which has been paid me, but I am so little used to speaking in public that I feel somewhat embarrassed, and fear to deal clumsily with the delicate subject which Mrs. Fenwick has set before me.

It is, indeed, a complex subject, and we should find it hard to state in precise terms the qualities which a nurse should possess, so true is it that her qualities must differ according to the special environment in which she is called upon to fulfil her mission as a nurse.

Thanks to her long training in hospitals, under the eyes of eminent doctors, she has gained full knowledge of the details of technical and practical nursing. All that concerns the manner in which doctors' orders are to be executed is familiar, or should be familiar to her. As the doctor's helper and his "employee" she manages—whatever may be the school where she first studied—to gather immediately, according to her special aptitude and degree of intelligence, what special care and attentions must be given to the patient entrusted to her. But that is only part of the mission she has to fulfil. The strict exactitude in fulfilling the doctor's directions, the scientific probity which can inspire the patient with a sensible idea of resignation and discipline, the scrupulous cleanliness in every detail of nursing, the feminine skill in applying dressings and bandages, the vigilance in warning the doctor of any changes which may occur in the patient's condition between his visits—all those qualities which are rare and make her peerless among women, do not suffice to turn her into a private nurse such as the patient will long to have near him—the one who will become a

blessing and comfort in the long and dreary hours of suffering.

No, the qualities the poor patient insists on, are not among those which may be learnt in schools. It is by a personal action of her own will, by the development of her intuition in reading the character of the various patients to whom she is called, that the nurse is able to mould her conduct in dealing with this one or with that other. Had she nothing but mere technical knowledge, she would run the risk of becoming not a beneficent helper, but a source of annoyance in the family into which she finds herself so suddenly transported and with whom she must mix so intimately. She has need now of true psychologic science. Think of the great diversity of positions in which she may be placed. According to the age, the position, the character of the patients she will need to modify her methods, as also according to the gravity and length of the illness—some need to be amused and others to be kept quiet—sometimes she must assert her authority, while at others she must use the utmost gentleness in order to obtain necessary submission to medical prescriptions. By a sort of guess-work she must rapidly enter into communion with the ambient atmosphere in which she finds herself—not merely the patient's mental atmosphere, but that of all who surround him. How easily these become jealous when they see a stranger usurping their place at the bedside of a loved one; how hardly do they submit to acknowledge that her attentions are more enlightened, more refined than theirs; they have painful susceptibilities, and the nurse must be able to understand their feelings, to spare them and even to pity them.

Moreover, the nurse who is free from the feverish anxiety of near relatives is often more able to calm the sick one than they are, and those who love him soon notice it, they become sad and even show irritation. Such a state of mind is extremely human, and the nurse must realise this fact. When after a few days passed in the house she has won the appreciation and gratitude of all around her, she will be fully compensated for the trying hours through which she has just come. The value of her efforts will be soon appreciated, the comfort she brings will be cherished. She will be sought out when they need a word of encouragement or of hope, and she will soon become the friend with whom they share the joy of the dear one's recovery, for has she not greatly contributed to obtain this happy result? And she will weep with the sorrowing friends when she has been unable to save the beloved being entrusted to her care, for the patient she nurses becomes dear to her, and it seems to her that

\*Read at the International Congress of Nurses, London, July, 1909.

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