

The Importance of Character.*

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Character is most essential to a nurse's success in life. It is the basis of her real and lasting happiness; and is the one thing in which she may rejoice in the absence of wealth, fame, talent, and social position in the usual acceptance of these terms. The word "character" comes from a Greek word meaning to cut down into, to engrave deeply. Thus, in relation to human beings, character means the permanent distinguishing marks which have been engraven into that being's soul by the deliberate choice of action under stress of circumstances and experiences.

Chalmers writes, "Acts of virtue ripen into habits, and the goodly and permanent result is the formation or establishment of a virtuous character." Every new achievement of principle smooths the way to future achievements of the same kind, so the struggle becomes less difficult and virtuous acts become the very habit of our own life.

"Character," says Emerson, "is nature in its highest form. It is no use to ape it or to contend with it. Somewhat is possible of resistance and of persistence and of creation which will foil all emulation. Men of character are the conscience of the Society to which they belong."

These are strong words. The attainment of character is a high ambition indeed, but we must remember also, that it is possible to all alike, whether or not gifted intellectually.

With the advent of a more intellectual element into a nurse's life, through scholastic training, the danger arises that the importance of character is apt to be overlooked. That "A little learning is a dangerous thing" is as true now as ever. Are nurses in these days inclined to push forward rather for the rewards given to intellectual attainments than remain content to be real nurses, in fact, good and useful women? The ideal nurse knows very well that mere knowledge is not to be valued for its own sake—or for the glorification of its possessor, but rather for its application to the wants of suffering humanity.

The types of moral excellence, or in other words of character, of course vary with the age, the country, the occupation, and the sex; for example, the stern virtue of the ancient Roman with his disdain for suffering, indiffer-

ence to death, and the small value he attached to the life of others as well as his own, was the kind of character necessary to the great military power destined for the conquest of the world, whereas the humanising effect of art, literature, and poetry are seen in the amiable virtues of the Greek. Then, later, the altruism of Christians displayed a happy union of the heroic and tender virtues.

A nurse above all things should possess the characteristic of a high standard of moral excellency. Of course, since a nurse does not enter upon her professional training until she has reached womanhood, the foundations for the superstructure of character have been already laid. Discipline begins at home, is carried further in school, thus preparing us for the real work of life. Those who are blessed with good homes and wise parents enter the field of nursing far better equipped for understanding what discipline means.

When undisciplined minds enter their course of training the usual result is that there is an under-current of discontent, due to a thorough want of appreciation of the necessity of order.

For instance, one of the most essential qualifications of a nurse is her power of ready obedience and a keen sense of loyalty, and these can only be displayed by those of high character. By the meaner soul the orders of the superior are subjected to criticism; the Sister or charge nurse is regarded as overbearing if she insists on the letter of the law being carried out, and the matter is referred to the Matron, from whom, of course, no redress can be expected.

When the spirit of discipline is lacking self-control, which is one of the highest expressions of character, will be absent, and the probationer or nurse begins to carp and cavil, to question authority, to nurse bitterness, while the nobler character waits patiently to understand in the fullness of time what she does not at the moment comprehend, and realises that her position and experience render her judgment quite inadequate to express an opinion on such matters in general.

It is certainly most important that nurses should early in their career understand the harm which is done to themselves and their fellow workers by allowing their characters to deteriorate through indulging in what we may call institution pests. I mean gossip, scandal, suspicion, ill-will, and envy, etc.

If nurses are inclined to handle lightly the character of those around them, to pass harsh judgment unnecessarily, to take pleasure in exposing the failures of others, they are sadly wanting in self-control, without which no

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[previous page](#)

[next page](#)