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Editorial.

PROFESSIONAL CONFIDENCE.

The circumstances of the "American Poisoning Mystery" in connection with which a wife was arrested on a charge of attempting to poison the husband who had perfect confidence in her loyalty, concerns the nursing profession because there is imported into it a nurse-detective. It is inconceivable that the duties required of such a person should be undertaken by a trained nurse, whose office the police are bound to respect as they would those of the priest or the physician, whom they would never impersonate in the interests of justice.

The trust which the public place in the clergy and the medical profession rests on the fact that they have proved themselves worthy of it, that they hold sacred the confidences entrusted to them, and are consequently persons to whom the sick in mind and body can with safety "open their griefs." Would these relations ever have been possible if in the mind of the penitent or the patient there lurked the suspicion that the rôle of confidant was merely a pose, and that the trusted representative of medicine or the church was in reality an officer of the law obtaining his confidence to entrap him to his undoing? The inviolability of the trust placed in such persons must, to be above suspicion.

In the case of the younger profession of nursing the same obligation to secrecy exists, the danger to the public if that secrecy is violated is even greater than in the instances already mentioned; for the interview with the priest or physician is comparatively brief, often taking place in his own house. The nurse enters the house of the patient in the guise of a friend, and at once assumes the most confidential and intimate relations with both patient and

household, relations which are only possible because she is a member of an honourable profession, and can be trusted not to abuse the confidence placed in her loyalty and discretion. We do not believe the nurse is to be found who would so prostitute her calling as to play the part of confidential attendant and friend, while in reality making use of the exceptional facilities which she enjoys to act as a detective in the interests of a criminal department. If she did so act, she would certainly lay herself open to the epithet applied to the nurse-detective by the accused woman in the case under consideration, "Judas Iscariot."

On the other hand if the police, in their zeal to bring home a crime to the guilty party, employ one of their staff of detectives to personate a trained nurse they undertake a very serious responsibility, in supplying unskilled in place of skilled help to a sick person in his hour of need, help, moreover, for which the patient is presumably paying on the assumption that it is skilled.

We hope the police will realise that the employment of a nurse as a detective, and a detective as a nurse, are both ethically and professionally unjustifiable, and that they must find other means of bringing criminals to justice. Also that nurses will remember that, whether they formally take the Florence Nightingale Pledge or not, they are bound by its declaration "I will do all in my power to elevate the standard of my profession, and will hold in confidence all personal matters committed to my keeping, and all family affairs coming to my knowledge in the practice of my calling. With loyalty will I endeavour to aid the physician in his work, and devote myself to the welfare of those committed to my care." To act otherwise, is to miss the whole spirit of their profession, and to lower it in public estimation.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)