

PRIZE ESSAY COMPETITION.—XXII.

Give your idea of what Obedience should consist of in the offices of a Probationer, a fully-Trained Nurse, a Sister, and a Matron respectively.

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IN all life and in every work obedience is a necessity, but it lies with the individual to make it a beautiful ornament, or wear it as a very bitter chain. The true spirit of obedience to God or man can be made to run like a golden vein through every detail of work, if it be the glad willing obedience of love, and not the forced necessity of fear. In the present day it is not a fashionable virtue. We hear a great deal of "independent action," of "original thought," of "personal conviction," but seldom of the beauty of obedience, and never of the strength of obedience. Indeed, it is looked on as a very feeble thing for man or woman to put themselves "under obedience," except in the most outward form. Freedom of judgment—aye, freedom to judge things both of heaven and earth—is loudly claimed by this nineteenth century of ours. We seem to have forgotten that it was ever said, "Vir obediens loquetur victoriani,"* and we do not always, I fear, remember even, "Children, obey your parents."

However the temper of the day may fight against it, there is no escape from the law of obedience, which, whether acknowledged or no, pervades every work in life; but the necessity for it, and also its beauty, is best seen in all kinds of community life, where order and discipline *must* be maintained; and my present object is to point out its relation to the life of workers in a Hospital—essentially a community life, with its grades and orders of responsibility.

Had Mr. Editor given the subject now before us as a post-card query instead of an essay subject, I would have answered on its limited space that there are four points in obedience which should be progressive steps as the office becomes more responsible and important:—

- (1) Submission of judgment.
- (2) Promptness of will.
- (3) Punctuality in execution.
- (4) Cheerfulness in performance.

When a Probationer enters a Hospital frequently the first thing she has to be taught is obedience in action; but it may be long before she learns obedience in its other aspects; and not until obedience is acquired in word and thought

can it be a beauty and gladness in her life. A Probationer, as the name testifies, is one who is on trial and under instruction for a higher office. Her attitude of mind, therefore, must only be receptive. In her position the critical faculty should be entirely kept in the background. It is impossible for one who stands at the foot of the ladder to have any grasp of the situation. She must work only under the direction of those over her, and her first measure of obedience needs to be complete submission of judgment. The Probationer who is always ready to justify her mistakes with "I *thought* it would be all right," how well we know her! She gives the typhoid patient extra pillows, loosens the bandages she *thinks* too tight, gives the diabetic patient sugar in his tea; "she *thinks* Nurse forgot it," utterly oblivious to the fact that a hundred considerations, of which she is quite ignorant, influence every order, and that her duty begins and ends in doing exactly and neither more nor less than she is bid, remembering that her judgment is of no value. At the same time, in learning submission of judgment, she takes the first step to qualify herself for responsibility when the disciplined judgment is to be of real value to her.

While submission of judgment is the first point in the obedience of the ignorant Probationer, we may consider promptness of will as the first point in the obedience of a Trained Nurse. As soon as a Nurse is placed in a position of responsibility her own judgment is more often called to her aid; but, whatever her judgment, her will must be prompt to obey the Sister to whom she is responsible, or the doctor under whom she is at work. If, as Probationer, she has learned to submit her judgment, it will have become second nature to her to act without hesitation when required to do so, according to what she knows to be the wishes of her superiors, though she may have formed a private opinion that some other plan would be more convenient or desirable. There will be no hesitation in keeping her critical faculty entirely in the background, and in preventing it influencing or delaying her action. Nothing is worse than service done grudgingly. Though no word be spoken the patient feels it, the fellow-Nurse suffers under it, and the wheels of daily work go heavily. Promptness of will means willing, and therefore cheerful, service.

When we pass from the office of Nurse to that of "Sister," the virtue of obedience assumes a somewhat different dress, though in root and principle it is the very same, and the woman who had an insubordinate spirit as a Probationer and Nurse will never be able to rule her wards wisely as a "Sister." She must combine in her-

* "The obedient man may speak of victory."

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