

# THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED  
THE NURSING RECORD

EDITED BY MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK, REGISTERED NURSE.

No. 1,843.

SATURDAY, JULY 28, 1923.

Vol. LXXI

## EDITORIAL.

### THE NURSE'S VOICE AND MANNER OF SPEECH.

*There is no excellence without great labour.*

So writes Dr. E. F. Bartholomew, Ph.D., L.H.D., in the current issue of the *American Journal of Nursing*. "Few people realise," he thinks, "the importance of a good speaking voice in the equipment of a successful private nurse. Every other qualification is subjected to the strictest scrutiny, but, strangely enough, the voice is not thought to have any place in her training. The fact, however, is that a soft, gentle, sweet and melodious voice is a most valuable asset in the nurse's equipment for service in the sick chamber. We should not forget that the nurse has to do with persons whose nerves are morbidly sensitive as the result of disease, pain and suffering. Many a physician, who is an expert in his particular line, has failed to achieve the highest success in his calling simply because of his slovenly and unfortunate manner of speech. This is something in the physician or attendant that patients, as a rule, do not like to talk about, and yet they feel it keenly, and it plays an important rôle in the healing art." Dr. Bartholomew tells of a young nurse who entered upon her calling with every prospect of a brilliant career, but who was discharged from two cases successively. Upon inquiry as to the reason, the physicians in charge of the respective cases answered in almost identical words: "Why, that voice of hers is enough to drive any patient crazy."

So comforting a thing is a voice that is "ever soft, gentle and low," that it is worth while taking considerable pains to attain it. The speaking voice, of course, varies greatly in different individuals: to some Nature has been kind, and given a voice that is full of charm.

Who that heard the late Lady Henry Somerset hold an audience enthralled did not realise how much of her enchantment was due not only to her eloquence and the force of her arguments, but to the wonderful quality of her voice—tender, sympathetic, beautifully modulated, a fine instrument, entirely under her control, by means of which she held great audiences spellbound.

It is given to few to possess so fine and beautiful a voice, yet much can be done by training to improve a less perfect one, and it is well worth while to make the effort to do so. Dr. Bartholomew writes truly: "If anywhere there is a place where beauty, the melody, and soft, sweet tones of which our English language should be heard, surely that place is in the sick-room; and if anyone needs to be master of those tones, that person is the nurse who is called to minister at the altar of human welfare." Words should be "properly uttered, properly voiced, pronounced, intoned, accented, and enunciated," and the possessor of a voice which carries these charms will find the power of persuasiveness increased tenfold. We could mention several nurses on whom Nature has conferred the great gift of a speaking voice of such rare quality that it is an immense asset in their work.

We agree that nurses during their training would do well to secure lessons in voice-production and elocution, and the present shorter hours on duty permit nurses now in training to make their own arrangements for such lessons. They will find that in administrative posts, and, if they take the part they should in promoting their professional organisations, public speaking will inevitably be demanded of them; and, if they desire to speak well, let them remember that in this, as in all else, "there is no excellence without great labour."

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)