

PRIZE ESSAY.

As we announced in our August issue the essay which won the Prize presented by Miss Isabel Macdonald was that of Miss Joyce M. Watson, which we print below.

THE ETHICAL STANDARDS AND QUALIFICATIONS WHICH A PATIENT HAS A RIGHT TO EXPECT IN A PRIVATE NURSE.

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The discussion of "The Ethical Standards and Qualifications which a Patient has a right to expect in a Private Nurse," involves consideration of three questions:—Firstly, what ethical standards and qualifications are to be sought in any nurse; Secondly, what standards are especially desirable in a Private Nurse; and Thirdly, how far has the private patient the right to expect his Nurse to attain to these standards?

The ideals set for herself by the Nurse must be of the very highest, and as there is perhaps no vocation in which a woman is called upon to be more versatile, so there are no womanly virtues which she can be excused for not striving to possess.

In the annals of its history, we read that the Nursing Profession has never been separated from its original inspiration: partly religious and partly humanitarian; partly from the new Christ spirit which led men to say, "See how these Christians love one another," and partly from the desire to render service to the Almighty by undertaking the arduous and often loathsome duties it then entailed. The need for this severe self-abnegation now seldom arises (though it has died hard) with modern conveniences, aseptic methods, and the dawning realisation that undue fatigue and complete giving up of private interests are undesirable. But the modern Nurse with proper ethical standards is as willing as her predecessor to face hardship should the need arise.

This early inspiration, then, still exists, fired still by the love of humanity and guided and amplified by increasing scientific knowledge.

Some instruction upon ethics is usually given in a Nurse's early training, and may well be supplemented by reading the subject. But in every case the Nurse must set up her ideals for herself, and should set them ever above what she finds herself able to attain. The ethics of nursing are always difficult to define, and to separate from their near relations—for instance, psychology. Nor is this strict definition necessary, since it must be her first principle to include *any* observance which will make Nursing more useful. Perhaps a good definition would be "To possess and practise a strong sense of duty, inspired by a great love of service."

This sense of duty must be focused upon the patient. It will cause her to study his case, and his individuality. It will be extended to his anxious friends. It will compel the Nurse to render obedience, loyalty, and truthfulness wherever it is due, especially to her employers and the medical attendant. Obedience, of course, involves the continual endeavour to increase her knowledge and skill, that orders may be carried out satisfactorily. Truthfulness involves cultivation of powers of observation, and sufficient mastery of technical language to make her report accurate and intelligible.

The Nurse's duty to herself must be placed next, because it is inseparable from that to her patient and her employers. There must be the adoption of a rule of life which will permit in her busy day proper attention to her bodily and mental hygiene, the extension of her field of interest, and the preservation of her freshness and sense of humour.

Her duty extends beyond this range, to include the profession at large, especially young and aged members, the general public, and even posterity.

And all this without Charity is nothing worth. Hers can never be that automatic performance of duty which may well call forth the cry: "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid Him."

What of the Special Qualities desirable in the Private Nurse?

On entering the house, she meets first the patient's family. The patient has a right to expect her to have sympathy with them, and to feel that while to her this is a daily occurrence, to them it is a crisis. It may be necessary to make considerable alteration in the household and sick room arrangements: this must be done with tact, and only if essential. The Nurse must take possession of the situation firmly: it is her function to appear calm and capable, but this does not mean unconcerned. The sick-room itself is her sphere to rule, but without tyranny. He is entitled to expect her to obey all reasonable regulations of the household, of which she is a temporary member, and to observe strictest confidence with regard to its arrangements.

The patient will probably be awaiting his Nurse with some anxiety. She should try to create a favourable impression by making a careful entry to the sickroom. Being as yet unaware of her patient's personal likes and prejudices, sharpened by illness, she should adopt a quietly pleasant demeanour.

A Nurse is not called upon to practise a higher ethical system towards her private patients than towards others, because *no* patient should receive less than the highest. Nevertheless, the private patient is in the relation of employer to the Nurse. She is bound to offer him the highest nursing skill at her command. He has a right to expect her to be capable of undertaking his case, or if she finds it beyond her, to state that she cannot do so.

He has a right to expect her to come to him fit in body and mind, to perform all the duties proper to her position punctually, and efficiently, to put a full admixture of loving kindness into their performance, to make all possible allowance for his likes and dislikes, to be prepared to modify her arrangements as occasion demands, in severe sickness, to be quietly sympathetic. She must show that she knows he is suffering and seriously ill (it does not help him to make light of a danger of which he is himself aware) and that she has complete control of the situation. She must be able to entertain him when well enough. She is never to jeopardise his dignity or her own. There is an impersonal attitude, difficult of definition, but possible of attainment, which will safeguard both, whilst she performs the intimate duties of the sickroom, and becomes the cheerful companion of convalescence, and encouraging prophet of recovery. Her personal integrity must be above suspicion.

To the medical attendant she must always offer help and loyalty. Should she find it impossible to work loyally with him, she should signify the fact, and leave the case when the patient can replace her. But whilst still there she continues to owe this loyalty, which is due to the profession he represents.

Her duty to herself continues throughout the case. It is a part of her duty to her next patient. She must receive proper accommodation and comfort. These matters must be settled outside the sickroom, and in no way enter it.

How far has the Private Patient the right to expect her to attain to the Ethical Standards set forth?

He has no right to expect her to perform superhuman feats of endurance and patience, or to carry out any duties, or to accept any position in the household improper to her professional status, or to behave disloyally to the medical

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