

"There was something about it that made me want to tell her to clear out of my sight for good." Instances such as these could be recounted *ad infinitum*, and always the same reply comes to the obvious question in each case: "Why did you put up with it?" "Oh, we did not wish to make unpleasantness nor to do the girl harm."

It may appear a somewhat uninspiring subject for an article this, but we make no apology for raising it at a time of the year when most of the usual activities of the Corporation fall out, more or less. Over and over again we hear references to the lack of what one might term professional behaviour on the part of the nurses; perhaps it disappeared in some degree when they forsook, for the "overall," the traditional uniform, with its immaculate apron and neat cap; there is such a thing as the influence of dress! Perhaps fine manners in the sickroom became out of fashion, like so many other nice things, "after the war." Perhaps conditions have altered because fewer women enter the profession with the idea that it is to be a sort of vocation as well, fewer come to regard it as an "art" in the old-fashioned way in which Maister Peter Lowe, and other pioneers of the medical profession, regarded that. Be the cause what it may we would have the nurses observe in all seriousness how slovenly, irritating, familiar, impudent and ignorant, manners in the sickroom can become, and to do all that lies in their power to improve what is a real danger to the profession, a hindrance both to its prestige and its advancement. "Manners makyeth the man." More surely still manners make a profession or mar it.

It is true that we live in an age when manners have become much more free and easy than of old. But let us keep in mind that they should never, as a rule, become so in the sickroom remembering that conditions, which to a nurse are part of her daily life, arise from circumstances which, to the patient, are a great emergency; therefore familiarities and careless speech are of necessity peculiarly irritating to him. Kind, bright, dignified behaviour has a profound influence on the atmosphere of a sick room, and nurses who regard their profession with the reverence it deserves will not fail in this respect. But the point is that the position is so serious that it does not end there, for it behoves those who take this attitude to use every opportunity to combat a condition of affairs that is working like a sort of dry rot in the whole structure of the profession; for incidents, such as those we related, are just as undignified in the hospital ward as they are in a mansion in Kensington. It is up to each one to try to promote at all times a more professional attitude in nurses towards their patients and towards their work, that thereby they may mirror back from their profession the clear shining of "the spirit of nursing."

The psychology of behaviour, such as that we condemn, does not indicate any measure of strong character or good brain power on the part of the nurses who indulge in slovenly and degrading mannerisms. There are three great factors recognised in certain branches of psychology as of the utmost importance—thinking, feeling and willing; and the achievement of ethical behaviour lies, to a great extent, in the ability to keep these three balanced. But, in people who have not attained to the dignity of self control feeling is apt to run, unbridled, ahead of the other two; thus the need to "think before you speak" is discounted or forgotten, and the will power that engenders constraint lags still further in the rear of the other two.

The point of view from which we write should be that of the whole profession and we would urge every reader to join in and help in a campaign to bring back something of the quiet dignity that characterised nursing a quarter of a century ago. Slovenly manners and easy behaviour may represent humour to some, but we must set before us ideals

in this respect, which, if devoid of *humour* have a *beauty* of their own and which will enable our profession to travel with fine dignity down the years, alongside the other professions, to a worthy development that earns the world's respect as it passes. Legal status will not make a profession, it is but the pedestal, and the nurses themselves are the sculptors who can give to the visible counterpart of the spirit of nursing, dignity, delicacy, grace and perfection worthy of the dreams of those who, in one age and another, have helped to build up tradition.

AT HEADQUARTERS.

Owing to unseasonable weather we have been unable to carry out the usual programme of whole-day "Rambles" which we generally arrange as an important part of our social programme in summer-time. Lectures and social gatherings have to be mostly reserved for seasons other than those in which holidays are in progress, but the Council were "At Home" to members of the Association on July 18th. There was a smaller attendance than is usual at such gatherings, but those who were able to be present expressed themselves as very appreciative of their Council's hospitality. During the past month it gave us pleasure to entertain several international visitors. Miss Pickering, Assistant Professor of Nursing Education in the University of California, came to dinner, and we spent a most interesting evening with her; she is playing a great part in the promotion of educational standards of nursing on the other side of the Atlantic. Then, on another evening, Miss E. E. Thomson, the very charming President of the American Nurses' Association, dined at the club and brought a young friend, Miss Morris, who holds a Doctorate in Science, and is engaged in Public Health Organisation. Another interesting guest was M. Bernard Flurscheim, an eminent French surgeon, and Hon. Treasurer and Director of the International Union on Venereal Disease. He had many things to tell us of the new hospital he is founding in Paris, and we came to the conclusion that the office of matron there was to give a great field for self expression. Whoever is appointed is to have opportunity given her for studying nursing administration in England, America and other countries and, when she enters upon her duties, she "is to be given enough rope to hang herself or to make a great success." Evidently M. Flurscheim does not believe in limitations and red tape, which too often induce mediocrity. We were delighted also to have Mrs. Strong at the club for about a fortnight in July. We always greet these visits, of the doyen of the nursing profession in Scotland, with great pleasure, and her company appears to be particularly pleasing to the younger members, whom she treats to a good deal of quiet humour interspersed with good advice and administered in a manner which is evidently acceptable, for we heard one of them remark that she "hoped she would either die an early death or live to be like Mrs. Strong." Then we had a short visit from Mrs. Temple, the Fairy Godmother of the Club, interested in all that is happening and spreading her acts of kindness among us. Sometimes these are nearly attended by tragedy, as when she insisted upon providing the wine for dinner when Monsieur came, and he turned out to be "dry"! However, with French gallantry he threw his principles to the winds when he found that wine was not an everyday luxury at the club, and had been provided by one of the nurses in his honour. As we go to press we are looking forward to a visit from Miss de Buy Wenniger, Matron of the Municipal Hospital of Rotterdam, and one from Mrs. Raikes, an old friend of the R.B.N.A. in Canada and one of its keenest members.

ISABEL MACDONALD,
Secretary to the Corporation.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)