

## IDENTIFICATION AND ITS RÔLE IN SICK NURSING.

By MARY CHADWICK, S.R.N.

### SYNOPSIS.

Identification is seldom realised, nor the part it plays in the Nursing of the Sick understood.

Patient's reactions to the Health of the Nurse.

Envy and Imitation.

How the latter helps the Patient to get well.

This important psychological mechanism and its influence upon the restoration of the sick to health is realised too seldom.

By *Identification* is meant the unconscious process of imitation which continues without our being aware of it, on the part of the child towards the parents, and those who are deeply loved, or between any two persons, when one of them likes or admires the other. We are ready enough to admit the process in childhood, no doubt, although we may not at first realise that it is by this means the child is first and most wisely brought to surrender childish and ego-centric wishes, in order to conform more closely with those of the adults who are attending to its early training or education. It continues to exert the same far-reaching influence throughout our lives, especially at adolescence, and during illness.

### Why should this be ?

At adolescence, the tendencies of childhood recapitulate before taking on their adult form, and we see the old familiar behaviour of childhood being repeated in the young person, with a new setting and often new actors taking the place of the original parents who were the first love-objects of the child.

The youthful adoration of the adolescent may serve a useful purpose in many cases, when the one adored is really fitted to serve as this model, who will thus become part of the Ego through this process of Identification or Imitation. Contrarily, it may be equally dangerous for the young person, should the object of the devotion be in no way suited for this office.

### But what has this to do with Nursing ?

In illness, we return psychologically to various stages of adolescence, childhood or infancy, and in consequence of this regression, repeat the same psychological processes that played such an important part then. We were then enabled to give up our own wishes for those of mother or nurse because we loved her, because we wished to please her and incidentally to grow up as like her as possible. Here in our patients we find the same thing happening again. The patient who does not like the nurse is much more difficult to deal with than one who has transferred to her the affection of the child for his or her mother.

This putting the nurse in the place of the mother, the temporary restoration of that old feeling of trust and expectancy of help, will go a very long way on the weary road towards getting well.

Identification also plays another part, and for this reason one would like to see nurses chosen for their obvious good health, sunny nature and joy in life; so that their patients may imitate their model and thus get well in the process. A few might envy them and

unconsciously refuse to respond, but the constant model before them would be a bridge to many from sickness to health, through this often unconscious process of identification and the love we all feel for a healthy, joyous person when we meet him or her.

I knew one Nursing Sister during the War, whom her soldier patients used to call the *Ray of Sunshine* or the *Bottle of Medicine*. They sound contradictory, but were not so actually, when one took the men's explanation of the second into consideration. "She does us as much good as a bottle of medicine—when she comes up the ward with her smile and light step."

One has hinted that the Identification may form a bridge between sickness and health, and only too frequently our patients are very reluctant to set their feet upon this bridge. Psychological investigation shows in many cases that prolonged convalescence, or even illness itself, is a flight from some condition of life that is too hard or unpleasant for that person to face alone—for the state of invalidism is one that acts as a protection which no other offers. The transference influence of the Nurse and the help given by that of the Identification often makes the fresh start possible. The Nurse finds in Life something worth while and nothing to be afraid of—finds happiness in her health and does not have to fall back upon the subject of her own ill-health to give her an interest, and consequently the patient picks up courage once again, and sets out across that bridge, to find health, and interest, joy and something to live for once again—away from the fear and illness left behind.

## FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE THANKSGIVING DAY.

Florence Nightingale Thanksgiving Day, May 12th, is close at hand, when we are assured of help in support of the Florence Nightingale Scholarship, awarded by our National Council of Nurses. Several kind friends have already sent liberal donations, which we acknowledge with gratitude :—

	£	s.	d.
In hand from last year ... ..	39	14	0
The Scottish Matrons' Association	10	0	0
The County and County Borough Hospital Matrons' Association ...	5	0	0
The United Nursing Services Club	2	5	0
The Hospital Matrons' Association	2	2	0
	£59	1	0

## THE NATIONAL COUNCIL SCHOLARSHIP, 1936-37.

The colleagues of Miss Mary Phyllis Welch will wish to offer her warm congratulations on having been selected for the Florence Nightingale International Foundation Scholarship awarded by the National Council of Nurses of Great Britain, for 1936-1937.

Miss Welch was trained at the London Hospital, E., where she holds the position of Junior Night Sister. She is in her twenty-sixth year, and thus brings youth and energy to the Course of Study at Bedford College.

This is the Seventh Scholarship offered to the Foundation by the National Council of Nurses, to all of which the League of London Hospital Nurses have most generously contributed.

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