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EDITED BY MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK, REGISTERED NURSE.

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EDITORIAL.

THE ETHICS OF NURSING SIXTY YEARS AGO.

LETTER FROM MISS FLORENCE NIGHTINGALE
TO THE NURSES AND PROBATIONERS AT ST.
THOMAS'S HOSPITAL.

6th May, 1881.

MY VERY DEAR FRIENDS,

Now, once more, God speed to you all, my very best greetings and thanks to you all, all:—To our beginners good courage, to our dear old workers peace, fresh courage too, perseverance: for to persevere to the end is as difficult and needs a yet better energy than to begin new work.

To be a good nurse one must be a good woman; here we shall all agree. It is the old, old story. But some of us are new to the state. What is it to be like a woman? "Like a woman"—"a very woman" is sometimes said as a word of contempt, sometimes as a word of tender admiration.

What makes a good woman is the better or higher or holier nature—quietness, gentleness—patience, endurance, forbearance, forbearance with her patients, her fellow-workers, her superiors—her equals. We need, above all, to remember that we come to learn, to be taught. Hence we come to obey. No one ever was able to govern who was not able to obey. No one ever was able to teach who was not able to learn. The best scholars make the best teachers—those who obey best, the best rulers. We all have to obey as well as to command, all our lives.

Who does it best?

As a mark of contempt for a woman is it not said: She can't obey? She will have her own way? as a mark of respect, she always knows how to obey? How to give up her own way? you are here to be trained for *nurses—attendants* on the wants of the sick—*helpers* in carrying out doctors' orders (not medical students). Though Theory is very useful when carried out by practice, Theory without practice is ruinous to Nurses.

Then a good woman should, be *thorough*—thoroughness in a nurse is a matter of life and death to the Patient, or, rather, without it, she is no nurse—especially thoroughness in the *unseen* work. Do that well and the other will be done well, too. Be as careful in the cleansing of the used poultice basin as in your attendance at an antiseptic dressing; don't care most about what meets the eye and gains attention.

"How do you know you have grace?" said a minister to a housemaid.

"Because I clean under the mats," was the excellent reply.

If a housemaid said that, how much more should a nurse, all of whose vessels mean patients!

Now, what does "like a woman" mean when it is said in contempt? Does it not mean: what is petty, little selfishnesses, small meannesses, envy, jealousy, foolish talking, unkind gossip, love of praise?

Now, while we try to be "like women" in the noble sense of the word, let us fight as bravely against all such womanly weaknesses. Let us be anxious to do well, not for selfish praise, but to honour and advance the cause, the work we have taken up. Let us value our training, not as it makes us cleverer or superior to others, but inasmuch as it enables us to be more useful and helpful to our fellow-creatures, the sick who most want our help.

Let it be our ambition to be thorough good women—good nurses. And never let us be ashamed of the name of "Nurse." This to our beginners, I had almost said. But those who have finished their year's training will be the first to tell us they are only beginners—they have just learnt how to learn and how to teach. When they are put into the responsibility of nurse or sister, then they know how to learn and how to teach something every day and year which *without* their thorough training they would not know. This is what they tell me.

Then their battlecry is: "Be not weary in well doing." We will not forget that once we were ignorant, tiresome probationers. We will not laugh at the mistakes of beginners, but it shall be our pride to help all who come under our influence to be better women, more thorough nurses. What is influence? the most mighty; the most unseen engine we know. The influence of one a year or two in the work over one a month or two in the work is more mighty, although narrow, than the influence of Statesmen or Sovereigns. The influence of a good woman and thorough nurse with all the raw probationers who come under her care is untold. This it is—the using such influence for good or for bad, which either raises or lowers the tone of a hospital. We all see how much easier it is to sink to the level of the low than to rise to the level of the high. But, dear friends all, we know how soldiers were taught to fight in the old times against desperate odds, standing shoulder to shoulder and back to back. Let us each and all, realising the importance of our influence on others, stand shoulder to shoulder and not alone in the good cause.

But let us be quiet.

What is it that is said about the leaven? Women's influence ever has been and ever should be quiet and gentle in its working, like the leaven. Never noisy or self-asserting. Let us seek, all of us, rather to be good than clever nurses.

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