

THE INDIAN NURSE IN TRAINING.

IT occurred to us that it might be profitable to say something about a side of our work which is of the greatest importance but is perhaps least recognized by those not intimately acquainted with the workings of a hospital, viz., the nurses' department.

We have no great difficulty in getting girls, the majority of them come to us from orphanages of various societies; they have often no special taste, or desire, or gift for nursing, and their standard of education is not very high.

The more one sees of medical work in India and has to do with Hindustani nurses, the more one feels the need—the urgent need—of better educated girls to undertake this responsible and difficult work. In no way are doctors so heavily handicapped as by having stupid and irresponsible nurses; on the other hand they can have no greater help than a bright clever nurse who is able to take an intelligent interest in the treatment, and the why and wherefore of this and that, and who realises the large part she can play in assisting to save life and relieve pain. The large majority of people outside the medical profession do not seem to realise this, for in many cases we are asked to take girls who are not only uneducated but who, according to their Miss Sahibs are unfitted for teachers or Biblewomen and in fact are so stupid that probably they may make nurses. And missionaries are not always as careful as they might be, for we get girls sent to us whose moral not to say spiritual character is not at all what is essential for so important a work. But more of the spiritual side later on.

Training in the art of nursing, therefore, is apparently considered either to act miraculously and supply brains, and in fact everything that is lacking in these unfortunate individuals, or else nursing is thought to be such simple and easy work that neither education nor even ordinary intelligence is needed.

In response to a request for a bright intelligent girl a woman was sent to us on a nine days journey who, at the end of three months, could not make a bed and who stared blankly at the doctor when asked a question about a patient, and instead of answering a simple written question given as a test of knowledge, filled her paper by writing out the question over and over again. Some of our present nurses do their work in a mechanical way, and do not seem equal even to grasping the answer to such a simple question as "Why is it necessary to ventilate a room?" "Because we must have fresh air" they will tell us, or the nearest they can get to a reasonable answer is "Because we'll be ill if we don't." Although the hygienic reasons had been

thoroughly explained to them over and over again. In parrot fashion they can trace the circulation of blood through the body, always providing they are asked to start with the heart;—but should they be told to trace it from the fingers to the heart and back again they are absolutely at sea, and manage to thoroughly up-set the physiological mechanism, e. g., a nurse the other day excelled herself by sending the blood backwards from the veins to the arteries. The training has certainly in some cases had a wonderful effect in bringing out hidden qualities and in strengthening and ennobling character, but there must be a foundation on which to work. Bodily strength and an average amount of intelligence are absolute essentials for the making of a good nurse; but the educated girl, who has been taught to use her memory and her powers of reasoning and observation has a far better start than one whose education has been only the most elementary. A girl may be intelligent and in fact quite clever, but she is handicapped on every side if she cannot read and understand the directions on a bottle of medicine or do a simple sum of addition or subtraction to reckon out the quantities of a dose. Some of the girls we are now training find it most difficult even to feel the pulse let alone reckon up the beats per minute. It is a little trying after several lessons and many careful explanations to start a nurse off with a watch in one hand and the patient's wrist grasped in the other, and then be asked "Shall I count quickly or slowly"? A nurse will fail often, no matter how good her intentions, if she has never been taught to use her memory, and where forgetfulness in every-day life may only mean inconvenience or annoyance, in a nurse's career, it may mean the loss of a precious life and a never-ending regret. If she has never been taught to notice and observe, or to reason for herself, here again she will many times bring trouble on herself and on others. It is perhaps on these latter points—lack of observation and reasoning—that the nurses fail us most frequently, and where a nurse should have observed an important change in a patient, or in an emergency have used her common sense and acted for herself she has not done so and much valuable time has been lost, sometimes resulting in serious consequences to the patient. A senior nurse had been on night duty, and in the morning the doctor asked first thing how a certain patient was whose condition during the night had been some what critical. On being told "*achchhi*" "well" she trusted her nurse and went into prayers. Directly afterwards on going to the patient she found her nearly dead and with great difficulty her life was saved.

This want of observation is seen also in smaller things ; when owing to the pressure of work the preparations for an operation have to be left to the Indian nurse on duty an important instrument will perhaps have been forgotten—the fire will have been allowed to go out and in the middle of the operation the Doctor may have to wait perhaps twenty minutes for boiling water.

When one thinks of the education received by nurses at home where they go straight from a long school or college course to hospital and even then fail in the test of the abovementioned qualities and when one remembers the discouragement, the feeling of hopeless inability to cope with the endless duties, each one a trial of memory and skill—which comes over those who do manage to go through the training, one marvels that these girls can attempt and do so much.

They undertake the work in a careless, light hearted fashion not in the least realising its greatness or difficulty. It is a noticeable fact when putting a nurse in charge of a bad case that the more junior and ignorant the nurse the more cheerfully she accepts the responsibility. Of course it is quite impossible to compare Eastern methods of nursing with Western the two are so different ; but that is no reason why our nursing ideals should be lowered. There are wonderful possibilities in the Indian girl and she is worth training for she has many qualities essential to a good nurse, *e.g.*, love of children, cheerfulness, infinite patience, etc., but she can never be the power for good amongst her own people nor the help to European workers that she might be until she has received a better education and she ought to have it.

The work of a mission hospital is very far-reaching with endless opportunities not only of healing bodies but of reaching souls and we want to be prepared to meet these opportunities. Therefore, our equipment ought to be as efficient as possible. This brings us to another side of the training, the nurse's relation to the patient, from a missionary point of view the nurse's opportunity is the greatest, greater than the missionary's because she is an Indian and because she lives her life before the patients, greater than the Biblewoman's inasmuch as actions speak louder than words. The spirit in which a nurse does her work—the very way in which she handles her patients—administers their medicines—lays herself open to do any little service for them which does not come exactly amongst her duties her behaviour on the busy rushing days that sometimes come when there is no off duty time—the relation of the nurses to one another—all these things tell tremendously with the patients whose chief interest perhaps most of the day is in watching the nurse go about her work.

The truly Christian nurse too has many opportunities of speaking to the patients of Christ and His love. A patient said of one nurse "If being a Christian makes you like so and so then I want to be a Christian." There was one striking case in Hospital four years ago when a very bigoted old Mohammedan woman who simply refused to listen to the evangelist, was won for Christ by the patience and gentleness of the nurses. She did everything in her power to annoy them and her language was anything but desirable—but they never failed in showing her every consideration and kindness and at last her hard heart was conquered, a marvellous change came over and she was baptized shortly before her death. The great part the nurses play in our work was brought home to us some little time ago by the following incident; several of them were not showing the right spirit, there was quarrelling amongst them and what was worst—quarrelling in the wards before the patients. We shall not easily forget the sense of powerlessness that came over us and our work at that time. We felt we must take strong measures—one day we all assembled for prayers as usual but instead of having them, we said we could not while there was this spirit of enmity. All the nurses were sent to their rooms and we did their work; they were told to remain there until all were sorry and determined to be different. Since that time there has been a very different atmosphere and we date it from the prayer meeting we all had together before they went on duty again. Now we feel that our nurses are one with us—they are good girls—obedient and trustworthy as far as their knowledge goes and with a true desire to be witness-bearers for Christ. They have a weekly prayer meeting conducted entirely by themselves—and only a short time ago one nurse, after asking for special prayers for the lepers in Almora suggested that they might make some free will offerings or do crotchet in their leisure time and sell it in order to send a contribution to the work amongst lepers. Since hearing of a lady who told of the work done by her school girls in teaching the children of the compound our nurses have taken up the idea and hold a Weekly Sunday School for the children of our compound.

In conclusion we would solicit the help of other and especially educational missionaries and ask them to wherever possible make a point of bringing before their girls nursing as a profession thus breaking down prejudices and creating a public opinion as to the high calling of a nurse. At present sad to say it is regarded almost universally by Indians as *be izzati kam** and while this is so we are bound to have difficulty in getting well-educated girls. A little time ago a very nice

* Dishonourable low, work.

girl came to us—just the sort of girl we want except that she was not very strong physically. She stayed about a month and then left rather suddenly and from two sources we learnt that she had been prejudiced against the work before coming and this very expression *be izzati kam* was used. But there is surely that in nursing work, which, if presented aright will appeal to the heroic and best side of school girls who are becoming every year more free to carry out a purpose. The training for a nurse will always stand them in good stead and make them as truly fitted to serve the cause of Christ and of Indian womanhood as the training afforded by the teaching profession. There are matters such as the scale of pay, the intermingling of girls of more and of less education, etc., which require consideration and perhaps re-adjustment before we can realise our desire, and it is with a view to obtaining help on these matters that we have ventured to bring this subject to your notice. In order to procure these higher class and better-educated girls will it be necessary to make a clean sweep of these we have or is there not some way in which we may gradually effect the wished for change? and surely this change is essential if we are to advance with the times. Ought we for instance to be content with the present elementary standard of our examinations, difficult though it is and in some cases impossible for these uneducated girls to make a sufficient number of marks to pass. Surely not! When the standard of education is advancing in every direction why should not the standard of nursing be raised too? as far as our experience goes the wish for better educated nurses in India is widespread, but our object cannot be obtained without the co-operation of those workers who have opportunities of influencing the sort of girls we want to see working in all our mission Hospitals.

M. L. W. & B. M. W.

Do what thy manhood bids thee do, from none but self expect
applause.

He noblest lives and noblest dies who makes and keeps his self-
made laws.

All other life is living death, a world where none but phantoms
dwell ;

A breath, a wind, a sound, a voice, a tinkling of the camel-bell.

Cameons.

It is the part of the grovellers and cowards to follow the safe track ;
courage loves a lofty path.—*Seneca.*

It is by patience and self-control that the truly heroic character is
perfected.—*S. Smiles.*