CONCERNING OUR ETHICS.

By

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IN this paper I do not presume to offer a new code of professional ethics—a task as far above my finite powers as writing a Bible. I am not attempting to show you any easy path to right living ; to present any new truths or to disguise old ones in epigrammatic dress. What I have to do is merely to emphasize a few facts that we know very well—that ethics is not a question of law but of living ; of practice, not of precept; that the value of any ethical system is dependent not on moral rules but on moral qualities. Sets of rules never have made, never will make people ethical or law-abiding. Every school, every city, every State has its laws that are recognized dead letters and which, however desirable their enactment *might* be, would better, because of their neglect, be done away with altogether. What we need, individually and collectively, is not a revised code or a new code, but some thoughtful consideration of our own ethical resources. I speak to all, the graduate from the small hospital and from the large one, the institutional worker and the nurse on private duty. For, is there any one of us who in this regard would say with the Pharisee, "Lord, I thank Thee, that I am not as other men are." Surely not! Whatever of honest effort, of conquered selfishness, of accomplished good, any of us may be able to claim, at best, ours must be the publican's prayer, "God be merciful to *me,* a sinner." And as we know that in our ethical life we are faulty and inadequate, so also we know that the remedy for our defects lies not in the establishment of code but in the proper development of character.

Most of us have arrived at a time when we regret alike the few years of opportunity before us, and the years behind us, that have in them so much less than they ought of beauty and usefulness. None of us, doubtless, have been leading butterfly existences, and there have been long, long weary days of work and care. But with all this how petty and selfish our motives oftentimes; how fault-finding and irritable ; how little done of the vast opportunities that came to our hand ; how much neglected that meant irretrievable loss to the school, the work, the individual, and to the shaping of our own characters. Lessons we had from the best of teachers, but we forgot them in our new responsibilities, or resented them with our new cares and annoyances. But because we know now that one way or another, we have lost tremendously, we ought to be doubly zealous that the pupils of the present generation are safeguarded against these same distortions of character; that they are given in the lives of each of us the wholesome examples that shall

inspire in them a high regard of their duties to themselves and to others. And to help to a little profitable introspection out of which shall come more thoughtfulness in our lives—for our own sakes, for the sakes of the younger people who are daily getting their life lessons from us—to make us think if only for a little on these things that are of so much virtue, this would indeed be the worthiest purpose I could covet for this paper.

In this brief survey, I shall speak of three lessons that it seems to me need emphasizing with us. They set forth no new principles but they represent principles essential to a correct recognition of our duties, as a neglect of any or all of them means selfishness, injustice, wrong-doing, and all the deviations, great and small, that go with self-seeking, wilfulness and conceit. Out of a knowledge of some of our most conspicuous faults and necessities, I have chosen these three lessons as being essential to the correction of the defects themselves, important to our development, and, therefore, the things we would better talk about.

The first lesson I shall call the Lesson of Correct Discrimination—of correct valuation of things, the lesson that recognizes first, last, and all the time, that more important than order, or cleanliness, or technical skill, or our large ideas of how things ought to be, is the good of humanity. I am aware that the best of our teachers have always emphasized the importance of genuine sympathy in the equipment of the nurse. But equally true is it that one of the unfortunate first lessons that the new pupil learns is when she is permitted to straighten the ward at the cost of even one patient's comfort. The head nurse, ninety-nine times out of one hundred, would disclaim any but the most kindly motives and intentions, but equally ninety-nine times out of one hundred, her criticisms are directed towards the degree of order maintained, and not to the humane aspects of the case. And, considering how impressionable we are in the first days of our training, need we be surprised to find that these first lessons are the ones that "stick," and that tremendously affect our attitude and action for many a long day? We do not need to enter into the trite argument as to whether good nursing technic is compatible with the broadest sympathies. That it is, we are agreed to a man.

What we need to recognize and to emphasize in all our teaching is that, in spite of this self-evident truth, we are continually getting away from it in the value we place on the development of technical skill and the little relatively we teach and demand of qualities of the heart. We ought to exact much more largely of these heart qualities from the day the young woman comes to us, and we ought to make failures of heart at least of equal demerit with failures of bed-making and class work. Late and early, we should teach the beauty of service; the development

of character when helping those who need help, becomes the first motive of our lives. Lessons these that, once a part of us, make response to patients' necessities and even to their whims more immediately important than needed "discipline" or tidy beds or out-grown traditions. Lessons that everywhere make us more immediately responsive and useful and that best of all enlarge our own natures, and increase immeasurably the possibilities of good within us. Neglect of the lesson of right discrimination, with the resulting callousness and selfishness is responsible for many of the lamentable but justifiable criticisms that are continually made against the nurse in hospital and private duty. How many of our shortcomings are based on our desire to have things our own way, rather than to be most genuinely helpful. How emphatic what we *will* do and what we *won't* do, regardless of where we are needed most. What is worthwhile receives short shrift as we magnify to abnormal dimensions our personal grievances against everything that comes within our professional horizon, from the directory that always sends us to the wrong kind of a case, to the nurse who comes to assist us and whose inexperience and ignorance, even, we manage as with everything else to twist into a personal affront. How many truly excellent women by thus making much of the things that are not worthwhile, by the reiteration of annoyances that would much better be forgotten, are daily losing sight of the higher motives that alone should actuate them, as they are losing their equanimity and cheerfulness, and with these their mastery of circumstances. As the individual loses by the neglect of this desirable virtue the profession loses no less, and we continue weak and culpable where we ought to be strongest and most efficient.

The second lesson that we need to keep in mind is the lesson of magnanimity. Perhaps the words high-mindedness, generosity, forbearance, may help to convey my meaning. It is that principle of right action that makes our own and not another's acts the standard for our measurement; the recognition that in considering the ethical value of our own acts we have no need or occasion to take into account the ethical standards of others. But this is a hard lesson to learn and to heed. Continually the first impulse is to absolve ourselves of blame; continually our defence is sought by contumely of the other person. Have you known nurses who *never* acquired the true spirit of forbearance with the sick and aged? of sick people who were severely "disciplined," or even discharged from hospital care because they were insolent to nurse or physician? Did you ever know nurses who persisted in construing the incoherent utterances of the insane or delirious, or the irresponsible accusations of old persons as intended insults, to be dealt with accordingly, and who were still tolerated in their schools in spite of their resentful and vindictive manner? Where lay the blame?

Certainly not with the sick one, and infinitely less with the nurse than with her teachers who, at the critical period of her development, were overlooking her moral necessities. Absorbed in the praiseworthy task of holding her up to a high standard in practice and theory, they were failing to hold her to those severe exactions of herself, and to that degree of forbearance toward others, that discussed in the tranquil atmosphere of this meeting we all recognize as most essential to a suitable strengthening of one's ethical nature. From experience like this in the early days of training, is it anything but natural that later the nurse should seek for a solution of all her difficulties not in the just arraignment of herself, but in the satisfying condemnation of others. In my world the question that I must settle is, not how much Doctor A. or Mrs. B. or the newest probationer is to blame for this trouble, but how much am *I* at fault? Have I from the first to last been as tactful, as just, as generous as I ought to have been? It helps me not at all discovering and continually commenting on the fact that this person is unreasonable in his demands, that that one seeks to usurp my authority, that my pay is too small and my work too heavy, that the conditions of living to which my private duty experiences force me, are shockingly inadequate. The measure of *me* is dependent on myself—not on conditions or acts apart.

"*I* am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul,"

in the vicissitudes of nursing as much as in any conditions of life.

The first lesson, that of right discrimination, gets me into a correct attitude toward my work, toward those whom I serve. The second lesson, the lesson of magnanimity, puts me in a correct attitude toward myself, aids me in realizing my personal responsibility; the fact that in all this big world of being and action, there is just one thing that is tremendously important to me and that is what *I* am and what *I* do. And when I have learned the lesson that no one needs my blame and criticism half so much as I do myself; that vindication is not my special prerogative and that generosity is better than gratification of self, then another important part of my duties becomes plain and unmistakable. I have no need of referring to rules, for the compelling power to right action is within me, the guiding spirit of magnanimity.

The third lesson is the lesson of unremitting helpfulness; not merely to do of two things that which counts most for humanity's sake, but actively to seek to be helpful; to hunt up ways of being serviceable. The first lesson has taught me wherein lie my greatest opportunities; the second lesson has taught my responsibility for myself and my actions. It is this third lesson that determines what I do and how I do; whether I shall merely acquit myself of those responsibilities incidental to my

position as private duty or institutional nurse and that are plainly mine to do, or whether I shall seek out *every* opportunity to do for another that which is kindly and helpful, however small the thing may be, however much considerations of myself seem to argue against it. Then the question with us busy people becomes not "Have I time for this or that?" but "Will it help anyone if I do it?" To be never too busy to write the friendly letter to the disheartened fellow-worker; out of our own troubles to give sympathy to those heavy hearts who need us; never too busy to listen to complaints and to demonstrate the importance of kindlier methods; never too busy to give to the stranger nurse within our gates the lesson of cheerful helpfulness that will in turn make her more responsive and more helpful. Never too busy—or too annoyed—to give the exact information concerning the good nurse who has left us for another school. Never too busy to do our part in whatever counts for the betterment of our profession, or for the good of humanity. Of course, there is apt to be much asked of us that seems when we do it to receive small thanks. But is the influence of any willing service ever lost? I believe the example of the busy person who always *has time* and who always graciously *takes time* to be kind and helpful to every one means an influence of incalculable value with the younger women. Do you say this is idle talk that, carried into practice with women already near the point of breaking, would mean overwork, nothing short of suicidal? In answer to this objection that constitutes another important problem I would ask: are we most the victims of work or of worry? Are we overworked most by reason of the immensity of our tasks or by lack of system and concentration? In any case is it compatible with the true spirit of helpfulness that we constantly mar our influence by selfish consideration? True service must put self in the background. Few of us will break in consequence. With the desired development of this helpful side of our natures the burdens in our Superintendents' Society, in our state and local associations, disappear, for each member appreciates her duty to give of herself, not merely to take. Whatever talent the Lord has given each seeks by an honest and earnest effort to increase it as much as may be against the day when she must account for her stewardship. How much the lack of this helpful spirit is responsible for the thousand and one things in which we are handicapped in our work and compromised as a profession. How much of foolish pride and petty jealousy and secretiveness that at every turn thwart us. Can we estimate the immense benefit it would mean to *all*, not only to our profession, but to the world, if we, a rapidly increasing body of earnest efficient workers, were always willing to be genuinely helpful? And invariably in helping others we should find the greatest gains were our own after all.

Have I exaggerated to you concerning some of our weaknesses or needs? Are we consistently manifesting every day these qualities of correct judgment, of forbearance, of helpfulness, or are these qualities of relatively minor importance? Are we to the full extent of our duty aiding toward the suitable development of these or other virtues in our pupils, that the ethics of the future shall take on a new strength and beauty because they are being *lived* every day and are but the natural expression of the well-rounded character of the good nurse and the good woman? In our consideration of the nurse's broader and more thorough training surely these questions of ethical development must be given a first and most important place. The text in this preachment comes last—the most sublimely beautiful expression of this theme and taken from the most perfect system of ethics the world has ever known; just a sentence, but it embodies the whole philosophy of right living: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself."

Mercy and Truth for August contains a very interesting speech delivered by Professor Carless, of King's College, as Chairman of the C. M. S. Medical Auxiliary Annual Meeting on May 6th. Professor Carless pointed out that the beds in the C. M. S. Hospitals numbered 3,075, while those of the four largest London hospitals—London, St. Thomas's, Guy's and St. Bartholomew's,—together with King's College, numbered 3,024. But those five London hospitals had a staff of 198 doctors, not including the residents, while there were only 84 for the fifty mission hospitals. The Committee would never be satisfied until they had at least two doctors for every hospital. As regards nursing, the London standard was one nurse to from five to ten beds. In the mission hospitals there was one nurse for 60 beds. Then the mission hospitals were maintained at a cost of £13 a bed, while in London the cost was £100. The Editor points out that this calculation does not take into account the sums contributed by friends and by patients. In many cases considerable sums are received as fees, some of the hospitals being almost self-supporting.

Medical Missions in India.

"There is a growing need in this world that we must meet not by a contribution of money, but of self."—*Boynton.*
