

Practical Nursing Notes.

BEFORE commencing these notes on practical Nursing, I feel bound to explain what, in my opinion, should be their aim and their scope, and what is their precise value; for that no practical Nursing can possibly be taught but by practice and experience, and that theoretical learning should not, can not, and must not, ever be allowed to take the place of actual personal work, is one of the first rules of Nursing, which is itself a branch of so essentially a practical calling.

No surgical text-book alone, however clear and concise, will ever make a man a good surgeon—a thorough knowledge of anatomy only forms a useful foundation; all his theoretical learning will avail him nothing if he does not bring manual skill, nerve, natural aptitude, and trained experience to his task. Even then, no good surgeon would be satisfied to remain for ever on the same spot on which his fathers in the profession had planted him. He moves forward, he introduces improvements in the details of an operation; he discovers new methods of treatment, new dressings, or it may be, he becomes the pioneer of a radical alteration in the performance of some operation, or ventures first on some totally new feat of daring and skill, and proves possible what seemed impossible until he attempted it.

In medicine, also, the physician would be helpless indeed who relied solely on his book knowledge. He can hardly treat a case but he meets with some deviation from the classical form of a disease; some complication or personal idiosyncrasy of the patient calls for an alteration in the generally accepted routine of treatment; and, in so far as he is a bold man, quick to adapt and apply to his patients not only his book knowledge but that wider knowledge which is gained only by sympathy through experience, he will achieve success in his profession.

For of all sciences, with apologies to the doctors be it written, the dictates of medical practice are the most variable. Every year sees fresh alterations being made, old methods discontinued, new ones tried, found wanting, and tossed aside, or approved and retained; appliances that were thought invaluable are superseded by others that answer better; a drug becomes the fashion for a time and then sinks again to its proper level, often a very humble one. We are still very far from having discovered the elixir vitæ. Meantime, an incessant and ever-increasing stream of medical literature is poured forth by the press. Standard works are scored by their owners with alterations and amendments, little points noted, great questions doubted, until a new edition has to be brought out "up to date," often with radical alterations from the one that went before it. And it is through this ceaseless record of individual experiences and opinions that medicine and surgery grow and improve, and it is undoubtedly largely because it has been possible during the present century to diffuse and exchange views and opinions and the results of investigations far more easily and readily than before, that they have made such enormous strides. Now Nursing, if the humblest, is also the most ancient branch of healing, for people certainly tended their sick before they treated them; and it is subject to the same laws as the other more dominant branches.

And as the great truths of anatomy and physiology, which are the framework of all medical science, remain unaltered, so the sympathy, loyalty and unselfishness which are the framework of good Nursing must not change; yet in so far as Nursing proper is the tending of the sick in obedience to the principles of treatment prescribed by medicine, surgery and hygiene, its details are liable to vary and alter with the fashions of the flying day.

I expect we could all score our Nursing text books with improvements and alterations, variations we had observed in the methods of carrying out treatment; differences even in such a simple matter as the making of beds—for the opinions of good authorities differ considerably often in trifling, as in more important, matters—and though we all agree that a Nurse should be loyal to her doctor, considerate to her patient, more thoughtful for him than herself, yet we mostly have our own pet theories, gathered by experience and observation, as to how best to do things.

Therefore I believe that though Nursing literature can never take the place of ward work, of the handling, the lifting, the managing of patients under competent teachers in the sick wards themselves, yet we may gain immense advantage through free exchange of our opinions and views and the comparison of our varied experiences.

My practical Nursing notes can only be the result of my own experience and observation—of the interchange of ideas with others based on a certain amount of theoretical knowledge—they can only state different and approved methods, they do not arrogate to themselves finality, they are open to criticism, they do not pretend to have said the last word on any subject upon which they will touch, which they will discuss; they will be suggestive rather than dogmatic. I frankly own that I have neglected many opportunities—life is short—I have missed much that others have been fortunate enough to see and note. Therefore I shall at all times be glad and grateful to receive (through the Editor) from my fellow Nurses, any suggestions, any hints, any new methods that may seem to them of interest to us.

To take a humble illustration—no good artistic work will always slavishly follow the recipes even of the excellent Mrs. Beeton. She adds to her valuable dictates little alterations and discoveries of her own, the result of her mature experience—but to those amongst us who are not artistic, experienced workers, her recipes form an invaluable guide, that, with the aid of a little common sense, will enable us to concoct an eatable meal.

Below all Nursing must lie a grand substratum of common sense. Text books and notes can, and will, give us much information regarding the minor surgery, and the carrying out of those medical details, that fall to a Nurse's lot; but they will supply us neither with the brains, the deftness, the manual skill and natural aptitude, without which, as Nurses, we are as naught.

M. MOLLETT.

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