

## Matrons in Council.

### WHAT IS A TRAINED NURSE?



MADAM,—I think we Nurses are to be congratulated upon the opportunity afforded to us, of meeting in council in your professional columns, and there, being afforded the privilege of expressing our views. There is [no question which requires more careful consideration and interchange of opinion than the subject now under discussion—the definition of a “Trained Nurse.” What a wide area the title compasses as at present understood. From the “monthly,” with her month’s residence in a lying-in hospital, to the registered Nurse of three years’ experience, after examination and certification, and all the intervening gradations, including mission women and cottage helps, all claim the title of “Trained Nurse.” What is a trained Nurse? Echo answers what? The explanation has been given—“Oh! a woman who wears a widow’s bonnet with a flowing veil, a very large collar, and an apron out of doors.” This is a little severe, and does not, somehow, convey to one’s mind’s eye the unobtrusive cleanly little person one would desire to honour with the title. But, if vague, it is true. It remains for the next decade to define a “Trained Nurse.” I am not quite sure that she exists at present. I have been interested in reading the letters in your last issue. Both Miss de Pledge and Miss Ridley evidently fear that should Nurses, like pupils in other work and trades, be required to pay a certain sum (it need not necessarily be exorbitant), we should lose much good material; this may be so, and yet my experience of life teaches me that we value most that for which we pay, and, judging after seventeen years of hospital experience, I am strongly of opinion that the present want of system prevailing in our nursing schools, with regard to fees, is the very *gravest blot* on our Nursing system. As a beginner in 1876, there were no hospitals which admitted gentlewomen, excepting by payment. Why? For the simple reason that gentlewomen desired to enter hospitals to nurse the sick and not to “char,” and it was a recognised fact; in those far off days, that a race-horse was not much use at the plough. Modifications in the work were instituted in consequence; we paid our guinea a week, went on duty an hour later, had single bedrooms, and somewhat more appetising food, and were exempt from scrubbing, and spent our time largely in helping the Sister of the ward and nursing the patients. So far, so good. Our guinea went some way to covering our expenses, and we were ever on the alert asking questions, observing much, feeling injured in spirit if, after a day on duty, we had not acquired fresh knowledge. “What have you learnt to-day?” was the first question with which I was greeted at supper, and meek in spirit one felt indeed, if one could not give a fresh and definite answer to the question. Unfortunately, in the early eighties, Nursing became fashionable; great numbers of penniless young women, who formerly gained a living as teachers, etc., pressed into our hospitals as Probationers—they could not afford to pay, they were consequently admitted as regulars, and then the tug of war began. The laborious duties of the “char,” the very

indifferent food and domestic accommodation, and lack of fresh air, and long weary hours on duty! First came sullen murmurs, then requests “for more” light—food—rest; inch by inch the Governors gave way, fighting valiantly, in hopes of harbouring the public funds. Later, the heartless halfpenny paper needed copy. “Nurse Sweating” supplied it—the Governors trembled in their shoes—“White Slavery—terrible!” (these Governors were in reality the most philanthropic and kindly of men). The fiat went forth, and the present enormous expenditure necessitated in the maintenance of a thoroughly efficient nurse training school was conceded. With what result? In many instances a beggared exchequer. Palatial Nursing Homes (I think I am right in stating that in many, Axminster is the covering of the floor), two dinners daily, unlimited *bottled* beer and milk, two to three hours off duty daily, whole days off, and monthly Saturday to Monday. Scientific lectures and skilled instruction, all free gratis and for nothing. Now I have watched the development of the nurse training school, and to me it appears only just that this liberal education should be paid for by the pupil, part in labour and part in cash. If Nursing is ever to take the honoured professional standard for which the Royal British Nurses’ Association is working so valiantly, then self-respect and independence must be early inculcated into the pupils who are to advance to be the professional Nurses of the future; and they must be taught that they must pay for the great advantages which well organized nurse training schools offer, just as the student, male and female, do in any other walk of life.—Yours faithfully, AN OLD LADY PUPIL.

MADAM,—With regard to the question, “Should Nurses pay for their training?” I do not feel qualified to speak dogmatically. As far as my experience goes, I have not found that the best Nurses are always drawn from the class who can afford to pay, and I think if it were to become a rule that Nurses *must* pay for their training, many needy, earnest, capable good women, well qualified in every way for the work, would be excluded from earning a living.

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It seems advisable, in order to obtain a wide consensus of opinion on the best systems of Nurse Training, to divide the important subject into sections, and invite all interested in the subject to express an opinion on each separately.

It has been suggested that the following leading questions would elicit useful information:—

1. Should Probationers pay for training? If so, how much?
2. Is a preliminary examination advisable? If so, in what subjects?
3. What should constitute an efficient preliminary education, and how should it be obtained?
4. For what length of time should a Probationer be trained in the wards of a hospital, and how should that training be organized to fit her to hold every position in the profession?
5. How should a Nurse’s knowledge be tested? If by examination, by whom?
6. What form of certificate should a Nurse receive

It is to be hoped that question No. 1 will be widely discussed next week.

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