

Matrons are but human! Now I am not going to say that a preliminary examination tests the suitability of the candidate satisfactorily, but it affords time for a more lengthened study of the candidate, it tests her perseverance and earnestness by calling on her for some study not likely to be exceedingly congenial, and it affords some opportunity for testing the intelligence and general education. The Medical Instructor says in answer to this question: "I regard it as a useful means of excluding the least valuable candidates, but do not consider it essential." Most of the Matrons consider it desirable. In answer to questions 2, 3 and 4, Miss Nightingale says:—

"The 'preliminary course' seems like putting the cart before the horse. Nevertheless some preliminary trial may be necessary by way of test, supposing the circumstances are such that the Probationer does not at once come under close observation, *e.g.*, that the Hospital ward construction does not admit of the probationers in the ward being all constantly under the Ward Sister's eye, who, if she is the real Head Nurse of the Ward, should be able to detect incapacity and want of intelligence after a short experience of the Probationer.

Unless the preliminary course includes ward training, does it not seem to give a wrong turn to the Probationer's thoughts, and invite superficiality?

Can a preliminary examination tell you anything of the subjects of main importance—what the woman herself is like, what her character and spirit of conduct, which is nine-tenths of the battle? You may have tests of that which cannot be tested, and certificates of that which cannot be certified. Nevertheless, some test may be desirable, in order to avoid as far as possible failures and consequent loss of time and labour. What is wanted is, in addition to evidence of good character and conduct—not any knowledge derived from books of technical nursing, but evidence of the possession of common sense and intelligence—a fairly good education, previous experience showing a practical bringing up and usefully occupied life, good health and cheerful temper.

It is not easy to see how a special preliminary course of education can be usefully or conveniently made a condition of admission to the Hospital. How is the supervision of the Probationers during such a course to be provided for? How is the expense to be met? No doubt testimonials are often misleading, but not more so than examinations which can only afford but very partial evidence of qualifications, and none on most important characteristics."

She is right in doubting the absolute perfection of the examination test, but surely it tells something; it cannot in any way certify to the efficiency of the woman, but it can, and does, indicate her amount of intelligence and education. One lady states, no doubt from personal experience, "that only about two-thirds of those who enter as Probationers stay out the full time of training." In the report of one Hospital which I saw last year, quite one-half of the Probationers left at the end of the month of trial. This, I contend, is to a great extent avoided by a preliminary examination, particularly when a physical examination is associated with the mental test. Miss Nightingale lays great stress on the fact that an examination cannot test the woman herself, or the spirit in which she enters her work, and that what is wanted is evidence of good character and conduct, of the possession of common sense, and previous experience, showing a practical bringing up, good health and good temper.

No one is so poor or so bad that she cannot find two people who will say she is good; references are necessary, but are absolutely unreliable. Where can you get the evidence that Miss Nightingale considers essential? A preliminary education under the authority of a trained superintendent will give us some knowledge of the candidate's disposition, her health, her industry, her education, and her intelligence, more than can ever be learnt from one personal interview and a little correspondence. My experience of a preliminary examination, now about eighteen months old, is at one with Mrs. Strong's, although I have no preliminary education conducted under my supervision as she has, and, therefore, I have not the same opportunity for exclusion. If my memory serves me right, Mrs. Strong told me that during the first year that this system was working only one candidate failed for any cause during her first year's work in the ward. Surely this is a great recommendation to this system. You will agree with me that it is of the utmost importance that as few new people be brought into the Hospital as possible, and this for many reasons—they are a source of danger, anxiety and expense. It is hard on patients to have relays of incompetent, inexperienced people in the ward—it is hard for the Sister, and a very great disappointment to the candidate. It is better that thirty candidates should enter in one year, rather than sixty, of which thirty will leave within a month.

(To be continued.)

Nursing Echoes.



THE meeting of the Matrons' Council which was held last week, and a full report of which we will give as our space permits, was largely attended by well known Hospital Matrons from many parts of the country. Miss Stewart's paper was received with the greatest interest, and the subsequent discussion was prolonged until a late hour in the evening,

being followed with keen interest. After a cordial vote of thanks had been accorded to Miss Florence Nightingale for her kindness in answering the questions propounded by the Council, the following Resolution was passed unanimously: "That in the opinion of this meeting the time has now arrived for the institution of a definite and uniform system of education for Probationer Nurses."

DURING a visit to Nottingham last week, to attend the Conference of Women Workers, we were invited to inspect the General Hospital. The general progress, and high state of nursing efficiency to which this Institution has attained during the last decade is most encouraging. The perfect order, cleanliness, comfort, and beauty of the wards could not be excelled, and

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)