

Our American Letter.

(By our Special Correspondent.)

DURING the past winter, English nurses who read our professional Journals may have noticed on several occasions articles and letters written by members of the Nurses' Protective Association of the State of New York, and may, perhaps, have wondered at their tone, and conjectured somewhat as to the merits of the questions involved. The simple truth is that the Protective Association of New York State has been making much more of an appearance in print than its actual importance would warrant, and the true proportions of the rather one-sided controversy it is carrying on are less than one would be led to suppose. The Association was formed chiefly through the efforts of a few people especially interested in massage, one or two of whom had schools where massage was taught. Their primary object was to gain some restrictive legislation, which should confine the practice of massage to doctors and trained nurses. They allowed it to be understood that there was sufficient influence available to secure the passage of their bill through the State Legislature, but in order to interest a sufficient number of nurses to form an association of respectable size to support it, they held it advisable to add further material to it in the form of certain regulations for graduate nurses, which were described as "protective" regulations, and were relied on to gain popularity. It was a little hard at first to find out just what shape their proposed legislation was to take, but, as finally adopted and reported in the daily press, their bill, besides various provisions relating to the practice of massage, required registration before the County Clerk, for all nurses graduating from schools giving a two years' course. No distinction was drawn between good schools and poor ones, between large and small hospitals, and no attention was paid to the character of the teaching, or to the thoroughness of the training given.

A bill of this kind, it will readily be seen, would leave everything in the nursing profession precisely where it is now, and would have no force at all in raising and maintaining standards or in "protecting" the thoroughly-trained from the half-trained nurse, as the mere act of registering is worthless, unless it is the stamp of some definite and uniform attainment. It was, therefore, opposed by the soundest elements of the profession in New York, and the superintendents of all the prominent schools entered a formal protest on the ground that it was hasty, insufficient, and worse than no legislation at all.

The Bill did not succeed in reaching the legislature, and hence the Protective Association has not yet forgiven its opponents.

As yet the nursing profession in America has not attempted any legislation, and it is needless to say how important it is that if any such steps are ever taken, it should be with the greatest care and thought. We are already, as a nation, supposed to suffer from too many laws, and would suffer more did not many of them stand as dead letters for want of any public opinion to enforce them. In considering laws for regulating the practice of nursing, it is well to know what can *not* be done by force of law. First, we can *not* have any general laws passed by our National Government at Washington on such subjects. We can seek laws from the legislatures of

the different states, each one acting for itself and independently of all the rest. Second, we can *not* have laws passed, directly forbidding untrained or half-trained women, or women dismissed from training schools and holding no diplomas, to practise nursing at any price they may choose to ask. Third, we can *not* get laws forbidding the establishment of training schools by all sorts of small and incompetent hospitals. We can only indirectly reach these difficulties by requiring registration for graduates and by adopting a system of state examinations, for the purpose of ensuring the general competency of graduates, and their fitness to register. Registration affords a means whereby the standing of a nurse may be proved to the public, yet it must be remembered that it will not and cannot prevent undiplomaed women from practising if they choose to do so, and if the doctors and the public choose to employ them. No agency is provided whose business it is to expose them, and this work, if done, must be undertaken by individuals or societies, and is a most thankless and ungracious task. State examinations, however, if supported by public opinion, are quite definitely and actively beneficial in creating a uniform standard, to which schools must conform, if their graduates are to pass; and this is the only way in which influence can be brought to bear on schools of low grade, to persuade or compel them to improve their methods. The Medical profession after long and arduous struggles found these the only practical solutions of the difficulties arising from hordes of half-taught men being graduated from half-quack schools and turned loose on the public, and our problems are precisely the same. It is not likely that at present we can do anything better than follow their example.

As to massage, it is not interesting to many nurses, and few care to take it up as a speciality. The principles of massage are taught in most schools, and pupils are instructed that it is properly a speciality, and should not be combined with the work of general nursing. It is too exhausting for the nurse to attempt to practise it except in rest-cure cases, where it forms practically the main part of the treatment; and even here it is often necessary for the masseuse to be called in, if the nurse loses her sleep or is much confined. On the other hand, there are women and men of intelligence whose physique and temperament fit them to do well with massage, who yet would never be attracted by or fitted for the work of nurses; therefore, while undoubtedly the practice of massage has room for many reforms, it is doubtful whether it would be the part of wisdom to limit it entirely to doctors and nurses. It is generally considered that Dr. Weir Mitchell's Hospital, in Philadelphia, is the only place in the States where scientific massage is thoroughly taught. Graduates of reputable training schools may receive a six months' course of instruction there, being required to pay a fee.

The first annual meeting of the Associated Alumnae of the United States and Canada will be held in the last week of April, in New York, and is looked forward to with much interest. The officers for the year ending with this session, are: Mrs. Hunter Robb, Cleveland, Ohio, President (Mrs. Robb was Miss Hampton, whose career in nursing is well known); Miss Walden of the New York Hospital, first Vice-President; Miss Ambrose, of the Presbyterian Hospital, second Vice-President; Miss Barnard, of the Johns Hopkins, Secretary; and Miss Healy of the Brooklyn City Hospital, Treasurer.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)