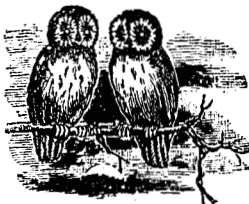


**Matrons in Council.****The Training of Male Nurses.\***

BY MAUD GREENHOUGH-SMITH.



THE choice of the title "Male Nurses," as a subject for a paper, among others, to be discussed at this Conference, recalls to mind the Irishman who was asked to write an essay on "Snakes in Ireland." His essay was soon finished, and was found to have completely exhausted the subject. It consisted of the words: "There are no snakes in Ireland." And we might sum up as briefly, "There are no male nurses in England."

The first question that naturally suggests itself is: "What advantages would be gained by training male nurses?" And falling back upon the general principle that the demand creates the supply, we may imagine that there being apparently no demand at present for male nurses in England, it would be useless to try and create a supply; and that even supposing that male nurses were properly trained, they would find no opening waiting for them, and that their training would lead to no permanent employment.

But general principles are sometimes too comprehensive, and do not fit into every particular question. It is quite easy for the public to be conscious of a want, and yet for them to accept as inevitable the blank they would wish to see occupied.

How often a new commodity in the market is said to "supply a long felt want." The want has long been there, although nothing has been forthcoming to meet it, but when once met, we wonder how we ever did without it, and then the supply is continued with the confidence that there is a certain demand for that particular supply. The question of male nurses must surely be a matter of history repeating itself, for in the early and middle ages, when one portion of the monasteries, and religious houses was always set apart to receive and tend the infirm and sick—who were the nurses but the devoted lay-brothers, who waited on their suffering brethren with what to our modern ideas would doubtless appear limited, and in many cases futile remedies, but in all cases, we cannot doubt, with unlimited gentleness and care?

In these days, so entirely has the idea of the male nurse been lost, that the word "nurse" implies, invariably, a female nurse. Whereas an attendant for the insane is designated always as a male or female attendant.

\* Being a Paper read before the Annual Conference of the Matrons' Council of Great Britain and Ireland, London, June, 1898.

We will at once anticipate the objection which may be raised by those who, looking at the present standard of nursing, and feeling with pride that British nurses have reached a high water mark of excellence, will anxiously question what would be gained by introducing a male nurse in place of a female nurse, who, if she has profited by all the advantages of modern training, and if she works in an intelligent and conscientious way, is now felt to be an invaluable and indispensable aid in the sick room.

It is not for a moment intended to suggest that the present nurse is to be supplanted. It is felt that her work might in some cases be well *supplemented* by the male nurse. He is not to be regarded as a trespasser on ground already occupied, but as a co-worker in taking his share of those cases which are, from their nature, more suited to be entrusted to his care.

For example, how often it happens that when a patient becomes delirious and unmanageable, that an attendant has to be sent for, to keep the patient in bed, and the help forthcoming is probably that of a porter, or some helper belonging to the institution, who has but the crudest ideas of handling and lifting the patient.

In these days when speciality is so fully recognized, it will hardly be denied that special cases require special nurses.

We will now see what is the position of male nurses at home and abroad. In the military hospitals the nursing is carried on by orderlies, working under the supervision of a Sister. She is naturally a fully-trained nurse, but from the number of cases in her wards, it is impossible for her to give much attention to each individual case or much instruction to the orderly, and the training, therefore, given in this department cannot be considered satisfactory, or in any way to come up to the standard now recognised in the leading hospitals to-day.

Upon consulting a paper on military nursing by Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, I find she makes the following remarks with regard to the training of orderlies in military hospitals:—"The orderlies for the most part are men who have enlisted in the Medical Staff Corps for three, seven, or twenty-one years. It is a remarkable fact, however, that this does not mean that these men are devoted to nursing, or to ambulance work alone. They are required to do all the work in connection with the hospital at which they are stationed. They may be, and they are, called upon to act as cooks, gardeners, clerks, window-cleaners, floor-scrubbers, store-keepers, servants to the medical officers, mess-waiters, anything and everything, in short, and finally, occasionally as nurses. It is impossible to approve of a system which withdraws a man from cooking, or gardening, and places him in responsible charge of a sick or wounded comrade

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)