Nursing Progress in the Nineteenth Century.

The Rise of Nurse Training Schools.

At the beginning of the present century nursing was at a very low ebb. As a scientific calling it was, of course, non-existent, but in addition to this, it had fallen out of the kindly, and often skilful, if untrained hands, of the religious orders, and was considered a suitable employment for women of the very lowest class. The needless sufferings the sick must have endured, and the cruelties to which they were subjected, are inconceivable. When at length efforts were made to secure the services of women as nurses who were at least respectable, and to raise the standard of nursing, it is noteworthy that the effort was made both in this country and also in Germany, not by the medical men who were responsible for the care of the sick, but by lay women actuated by a great love of humanity and by sympathy with suffering.

As so often happens in great reforms, the idea was working almost simultaneously in the minds of two great philanthropists, Frederica Fliedner, in Germany, and our own Elizabeth Fry in this country. In 1836 Frederica Fliedner opened a house as a hospital at Kaiserswerth, on the Rhine—needless to say, in opposition to the wishes of the Mayor and the inhabitants. When were reforms, even the most urgent and humane, ever popular? In 1840 Mrs. Elizabeth Fry founded in this country a private nursing institution in Devonshire Square, which is still existent, and in 1848 St. John's House was opened, and, after a brief hospital training, sent out nurses to care for the sick in private families and as district nurses. From the nursing staff of this house Miss Nightingale and Miss Stanley selected some of the little band of devoted women who went with them to the Crimea.

It was not, however, until 1860 that the Nightingale School in connection with St. Thomas' Hospital was established, and the training of nurses placed upon a scientific basis, and in 1873 the first nurse-training school in the United States was inaugurated at Bellevue Hospital, New York. Of European countries, Germany, Holland, and Denmark have some well organized training schools; in Sweden the nursing of the sick is chiefly in the hands of the Red Cross Sisters, who work under the direct patronage of the Queen; while the introduction of trained nursing into Greece took place as recently as 1897, when the Crown Princess, who had observed the work of English nurses during the Græco-Turkish war, placed the nursing of the great military hospital at Athens, and of a Children's Hospital, established by herself, in their hands.

Further Organization.

With the advent of the trained nurse, and with the opening up to her of many avenues of employment, the further subdivision of her work became inevitable. So we find her, after her training, taking up various special branches, and the organization of these specialities undertaken by those whose interests lay in that direction. Thus the boon that district nurses would be to the poor was realized by the late Mrs. William Rathbone, of Liverpool, who herself had the comfort and care of a nurse upon her death-bed, and by her earnest desire a nurse was found to begin pioneer work amongst the poor of Liverpool. From this small beginning sprang the great work of district nursing, which received such an impetus in 1887, when Her Majesty the Queen devoted part of the Women's Jubilee offering to founding a Society of District Nurses, which should bear her name.

Then it became apparent that the sick in workhouse infirmaries were entitled to proper nursing, and the work of Agnes Jones in the organization of nursing at the Liverpool Workhouse Infirmary —a work to which her life was sacrificed— directed attention to this need. Many of our workhouse infirmaries are now excellent training schools, but, notably in the smaller infirmaries which are as a rule attached to the workhouses, much remains to be done. In none of them is the Matron, or the Superintendent Nurse, as yet officially recognized as head of the Nurse Training School, and until this important reform is made, the nursing of our Poor Law Infirmaries must rest on an insecure and unsatisfactory foundation.

Still later, the idea became patent that our sick soldiers and sailors were entitled to at least as much skilled care as our sick paupers, and so the Nursing Services, first the Army, then the Navy, then the Indian Army, and latest of all the Army Nursing Reserve, were formed. While the work of the Nursing Sisters has been proved to be of the greatest benefit, their number is at present far too small. Indeed, all these Services need to be re-organized on a modern basis, and placed under the superintendence of trained and experienced nursing officers as heads of the nursing departments in each Service. Promotion by seniority should also be abolished, and due weight should be given to the suitability of a Sister for a given post, and to her powers of initiative and organization, in making appointments. A recently developed branch of nursing, the inevitable outcome of our Imperialism, is the Colonial Nursing Society, the aim of which is to supply the Colonies with efficient nurses. Other branches of nursing are coming into line less slowly. For instance,

previous page next page