

## A Plea for Uniformity of Education in Nursing.\*

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HAVING been requested to put before you the method of training women for the Profession of Nursing in the Glasgow Royal Infirmary, I consented to do so, but with reluctance, hesitating to express an opinion upon a system so recently inaugurated.

Any scheme must be largely tentative until tested by practical experience.

We have made a departure from the old paths, whether better remains to be proved. We do not depreciate the work of the past; it served its time; and without the labours of our predecessors we should not stand where we are to-day. Life should be growth or progress. Let us endeavour to add something to the stores of the past that may help forward the work of the future.

To make our position clear we must take a cursory glance over the field of Nursing—past and present.

A great impetus was given to Nursing by Miss Nightingale's memorable action in connection with the Crimean war, and her subsequent establishment of a school in conjunction with Mrs. Wardroper, whom Miss Nightingale found quietly working in St. Thomas's Hospital, seeking to rescue Nursing from its degraded position. All honour to these noble women; so far from forgetting what they have done, we can pay them no better tribute than seeking to expand and help on, in however small a degree, the work inaugurated by them. Had St. Thomas's Hospital remained the only "School for Nurses" in the United Kingdom there would have been uniformity of education, and possibly, as higher demands arose for the fuller instruction of Nurses, the authorities of that Hospital might have met those demands, and thus have lessened the need for legislation. As it is, almost every Hospital in the kingdom followed the laudable example set by the "Nightingale Committee," and instituted "Training Schools," each being a law unto itself. Hence the great variety in the forms of "education" introduced, which has called forth the desire for uniformity, both in instruction and in the test to be applied before "Diplomas in Nursing" are granted.

As Nursing stands now, it has no definite position. There is no uniformity of education, no general test or examination to prove whether a woman is qualified to take the charge of the sick or not.

A Nursing Certificate is therefore, comparatively speaking, worthless, unless one had an intimate knowledge of the working of each Hospital, and knew exactly what the "certificate" represented. There is a growing feeling amongst the public against employing Nurses who have not had a three years' residence in Hospital, and this is usually looked upon as a sufficient guarantee of efficiency. Personally I have not found this suffice.

Some still retain the idea that twelve months spent in the wards of a Hospital, without any theoretical instruction, will enable a woman to pick up sufficient knowledge to admit of her undertaking the duties of a Nurse.

This implies that a Nurse's work is purely mechanical, requiring little mental capacity. In days gone by, when the whole treatment of the sick was of a different nature—a Nurse's work consisting largely of giving medicines at certain intervals, gratifying the patient's wishes as much as possible, no scientific report being required of the patient's varying changes and symptoms—the so-called "training" was sufficient. I trust the custom is now obsolete of "ladies" going into Hospital, paying a considerable sum, remaining only one year, then receiving or obtaining appointments of considerable importance, and assuming the title of "trained Nurse."

The empirical knowledge gained at the bedside through a long series of years by a fairly intelligent woman produced, at times, a most valuable Nurse; but side by side with this must be taken into consideration the number of failures, partly owing to the want of a natural ability for observation, and partly owing to the want of direct instruction.

With the advance of medicine arose the want of a systematically-instructed Nurse—one whose knowledge should be of a definite nature. Given a "trained Nurse," there should be some standard or test, so that anyone employing her may have some idea of what to expect from her. Degrees of knowledge will ever be regulated by the power of the individual to assimilate the instruction given. Still there should be a fixed quantity.

Recognising the necessity of technical instruction, some Hospital authorities have instituted a series of "lectures" for their Probationers, which have to be attended simultaneously with the acquiring of the practical part of their work.

This was the custom in the Glasgow Royal Infirmary, but we found that this seriously interfered with the discipline of the house and the working of the wards—having to take the Probationers away at irregular hours for the attending of these lectures. We were also unable to provide them with time for study, which rendered the lectures practically useless for the majority, as it was only the few whose strength permitted of their depriving themselves of rest or recreation to obtain time for study. This

\* Being a Paper read before the first Conference of the Matrons' Council, held in London on November 1st, 1894.

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