A Uniform Curriculum for Training Schools.*

AT the request of my colleagues I have consented, with much reluctance and many misgivings, to present for the consideration of this Association a paper on the subject of a Uniform Curriculum for Training Schools.

Notwithstanding the numerous difficulties which immediately present themselves when we enter upon the consideration of this important subject, there is encouragement in remembering that, if we are prepared to admit the imperfections of the present system of education in our Nursing Schools, and the need of greater uniformity of our methods of work, we will have taken the first step towards reformation—the system will gradually evolve and in time become complete.

We are all familiar with the proverb, "Rome was not built in a day." This means to us, Be of good cheer, the world has never yet witnessed any great revolution which was not brought about gradually—sometimes almost imperceptibly. In proof of this we have only to look backward over the history of our own profession.

Only thirty-five years ago how degraded it was! At that time we find Florence Nightingale, and some other good and noble women, pondering the question of reform, and seeking by earnest effort and self-sacrifice, amid untold difficulties, discouragement and opposition, to introduce a system of management into one of the large London Hospitals.

The position which the profession of Nursing occupies to-day, and the hundreds of Training Schools for Nurses throughout the length and breadth of our land, tell us how well they succeeded in their work.

We stand to-day upon the attainments of our predecessors, and our gathering here is proof that we realise how much yet remains to be accomplished. We are living not for the present only. Be it ours so to do our part, that those following us may occupy a much higher plane than we now occupy—ours to "open into the future a better and more perfect way."

With this thought in view, we will consider briefly the present position of the Training School system, the desirability of inaugurating uniformity of education in Nursing, and some of the possible methods by which uniformity could be introduced and made practicable.

Nursing as it existed a few years ago was simply mechanical, education of any kind not being deemed essential. Any kindly woman of ordinary ability or intelligence, who was capable of administering medicine and nourishment according to directions, willing to cater to the whims of her patient and make herself generally useful, was considered a most valuable Nurse. Later, when the practice of medicine became more scientific, came the demand for Nurses so trained in the various departments—medical, surgical, and gynæcological, as to be able to co-operate with the physician along scientific lines. It therefore became essential that a Nurse should receive instruction in many branches, once thought to be entirely out of her province and beyond her requirements, in order that the theoretical knowledge thus obtained might control and make of the highest importance the practical part of her work. Accordingly lectures and class-teaching were introduced into many of the larger schools. The advantage afforded by this course of study soon became apparent, and medical men were not slow to observe the effect produced in reducing the percentages of mortality in the various Hospitals in which this higher system of Nursing had been adopted.

Strange as it may appear, there are still to be found those who cry out in alarm against what they are pleased to call "an attempt to educate Nurses." They object to the idea of Nurses being taught the symptoms, treatment, &c., of the various diseases, and claim, on the principle that "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing," that Nurses should remain in ignorance, and still go on in the mechanical fashion of a few years ago.

But who will estimate the value of a Nurse in charge of a case of enteric fever, for instance, who understands the ulcerated condition of the intestines, and the importance of thorough cleanliness, ventilation and disinfection of excreta, the possible complications which may arise during the progress of the disease, such as hæmorrhage, delirium, &c., and how to combat these in the absence of medical advice, or the great care which must be exercised as to diet, &c., during the period of convalescence, as compared with the ignorant, though kindly, woman who understands none of these things, and is quite in accord with the patient when he clamours for a meal of beef-steak and potatoes, and hastens to satisfy the cravings of his appetite with what to him should be forbidden food, often proving all too clearly that it is the *want* of a little knowledge which is dangerous.

And if in the care of medical cases so much better results have been obtained, how much

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