

Uniforms.*

BY MARION E. SMITH.

THE subject of this paper, when first given to me, was "A National Uniform," and I replied, perhaps rather abruptly, to our secretary that I could write it in one sentence, and that would be, "It is an absurdity." It was then given to another member who, I believe, would have none of it, when it was again turned over to me with its present title. Feeling it had been treated very shabbily, I somewhat reluctantly consented to undertake what appeared to be a meagre subject, and find, after all, there is something to say, though I fear nothing new, and certainly nothing original.

Let us take up the question of the proposed national uniform first. The suggestion is that we strive to make our dress a national one, like that of the soldier or the policeman. Apart from all legal steps which might make this possible, we should have to begin by being very much more liberal-minded than we are now. We could not look askance at other schools outside of our own, for their rank would be equal in all eyes. More loyalty would be necessary, and, therefore, the petty spirit existing so largely among us to-day would to a great extent be abolished—so far, so good. An Act of Congress, doubtless difficult to obtain quickly, would be the only way to settle the question of right. If we take the ground that it is desirable, what shall we gain by this change? A better *esprit de corps* probably. An abolition of vulgarity of dress, let us hope, frills and tuckers and unsuitable colours being eliminated by the final vote. Easy recognition of a graduate-nurse by all, and there my list ends.

The disadvantages? Very many, I think. First of all, why in these days when individuality is cultivated and desired, and rightly so, should we endeavour to make ourselves as characterless as a row of paper dolls in appearance? Do we not all wish that only our own graduates shall wear the well-known dress of our school? About this there can be no question, surely. I, for one, resent any other superintendent adopting ours, as has been done on one or two occasions to my knowledge, by women who did not have the right to wear it themselves, but who, by some extraordinary system of reasoning, felt at liberty to give it to their graduates. Rooted deep in all of our hearts is or should be—and those without it deserve our pity—a pride and loyalty in and to our own school, which would, one would suppose, make a national costume an impossibility. We all have reasons for thinking our own the best;

it is a matter of education and training, and who is going to give up their dress? Shall we adopt the Bellevue dress or perhaps the choice will fall on ours, or will Johns Hopkins be the favoured one or shall we take the Nightingale cap of St. Thomas's? I repeat that a national uniform is an absurdity, and can never come to pass. Each school will have its own distinctive dress, honoured and loved by its wearers because it is theirs and means so much to them, and this is as it should be, for the "apparel doth oft proclaim the man," and the reputation jealously guarded and watched over would perhaps be less precious if we were no longer known by our dress, but shared it in common with the whole Nursing world. We shall never be a government body employed by the nation or the State, therefore why try to emulate a class controlled by entirely different circumstances. Rather let us seek to uphold the standard of our schools that the particular dress may be an honour which great striving and high character will alone make us worthy to wear.

The question of the protection of our uniform is much more important. How shall we prevent anyone and everyone from wearing our cap or distinctive dress? Not infrequently are private Nurses asked for a pattern of a cap for a waitress or a parlour-maid, while it is an all-too-common thing for a dismissed pupil, or one who for some reason did not finish her course, to pose as a graduate, and, assuming the cap of her late school, to be employed by physicians who do not know, because they do not ask, whether she is in good standing in her profession or not, and who do not suspect that she has not graduated. What is to be done? How can we prevent such occurrences? Individual effort can do much. Pursuit of the pirate and exposure of the fraudulent person would result happily in many instances. We are all far too lax in these matters, though we have but little opportunity of hearing of them, and they come to our ears, as a rule, only by chance. In England there has been a great deal of talk about the abuse of out-door uniforms, nurse-maids, thieves, and women of bad repute wearing it with impunity. The editor of a London paper says, in the October number: "We would therefore suggest that this question is now in a condition to be taken up by the Royal British Nurses' Association, which might thus give sureties to the profession and the public that it intends to represent the interests of Nurses whenever such representation will conduce to the welfare of the public and the Nursing body as a whole. If an association of Nurses is ever to be of practical utility, it must take charge of questions of this kind, and that is why we hope that the Royal British Nurses' Association will approach the hotel-keepers and secure that in future no

* Paper read at the Convention of American Superintendents of Training Schools, at Philadelphia, February, 1896.

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