

ciated the comfort and relief which skilled nursing brought to her that her thoughts turned to those amongst her poor neighbours who, suffering from serious illnesses, were unable to obtain the skilled aid, and consequent alleviations which were bestowed upon herself. She begged, therefore, that some steps might be taken to provide nurses for the sick poor, and after her death Mr. Rathbone set himself to carry out her dying wish. As an experiment, he engaged the nurse who had attended Mrs. Rathbone, to nurse poor patients, in their own homes, in a district in Liverpool, for three months; his idea being that she should help the poor both by her practical work, and by teaching them the elementary principles of nursing and sanitation. When one month had passed, the nurse returned to Mr. Rathbone and begged to be released from her engagement. Inured as she was to scenes of sickness and death, the misery which she encountered in the homes of the poor seemed more than she could endure. Mr. Rathbone, however, persuaded her to persevere, and pointed out that the good she was able to accomplish would be her certain reward, and at the end of three months the nurse was entirely of this opinion. Indeed, so interested had she become in her work that she begged to be allowed to give up private nursing, and to devote herself entirely to work amongst the poor. All honour is due to this pioneer district nurse, whose name we regret to find seems to have passed into oblivion. District nursing has now gained a place amongst nursing organisations from which it can never be dethroned, but the woman who first essayed so novel, and in many ways so repugnant, an experiment, must have been possessed of courage, unselfishness, and tenacity of purpose of no common order. The experiment was, it is unnecessary to say, a complete success, and it became advisable to organise, and extend the work which had been so happily initiated. A serious difficulty, however, immediately arose in connection with the proposed extension of the work. There was no lack of funds to carry out the scheme, but trained nurses were scarce, and these were fully occupied. The only organised training schools in existence were the Nightingale School, which was just being founded by Miss Nightingale at St. Thomas's Hospital, and St. John's House, which trained its nurses at King's College Hospital, and neither school could spare a nurse for the new venture. Miss Nightingale therefore suggested, as the only means of supplying the demand for trained nurses, that a school of nursing should be formed in Liverpool. Mr. Gibbon, the chairman of the Liverpool Infirmary, accordingly visited London, for the purpose of personally inquiring into the nursing

organisation of King's College, and St. Thomas's Hospitals, and so completely did he approve of the system which he investigated, that he said upon his return to Liverpool that, until he saw it at work in these two hospitals, he did not know what real Nursing was. He, therefore, supported an offer which was made to erect a building to be used as a training school in connection with the Liverpool Royal Infirmary. The Training School and Home for Nurses was thus established, its first superintendent being Miss Merryweather. The three main objects of the school were:—

- (1) To provide thoroughly-educated professional nurses for the Infirmary.
- (2) To provide district nurses for the poor.
- (3) To provide nurses for private families.

The training of suitable women being thus provided for, the division of the city into workable districts was next undertaken. In each district, a lady, or committee of ladies, promised to superintend the work. They undertook, that is to say, to find suitable lodgings for the nurse, in a central situation, to hold meetings of influential residents in the district, to visit the cases under treatment, and assure themselves that the nurse's work was satisfactorily performed, and to keep, supply, and distribute, medical comforts and appliances. These ladies, however, valuable as their services were, had no knowledge of nursing, and the want of trained supervision of the nurses was felt. A reform initiated by Mr. Charles Langton, then honorary secretary of the institution, had a notable effect in improving the quality of the district nursing. The nurses were placed under trained superintendents, in district homes, instead of living, as at first, alone in lodgings, the lady superintendents of the districts still continuing to supervise the non-professional branches of the work. The new departure was found to be wholly for good, and is the system still adopted almost universally in connection with district nursing organisations.

The growth of the system of district nursing, once inaugurated, was very rapid, and within four years of the first experiment the whole of Liverpool had been divided into eighteen districts, each district being superintended by a lady or a ladies' committee. The benefit of the system of district nursing in Liverpool was so apparent that other provincial towns began to follow its good example. In the year 1868, a District Nursing Society was first founded in London, chiefly through the instrumentality of the Hon. Mrs. Stuart Wortley, and Mr. Robert Wigram. It was called the East London Nursing Society, and its work is continued to the present day.

In 1874, the work of district nursing received a considerable impetus in the formation of the

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)