

THE POSSIBILITIES OF ALUMNÆ ASSOCIATIONS.

By MRS. ISABEL HAMPTON ROBB.

THE present age is eminently one of organisation. The offensive and defensive alliances of great nations have a thousand smaller counterparts in the banding together of the members of different trades and professions for the protection of their rights, and for the furtherance of the principles of which they as a body and as individuals believe themselves to be the true representatives. From the capitalist who combines with others for the carrying out of gigantic enterprises, to the humblest artisan who believes that his sole hope for existence lies in his special union—all are thoroughly impressed with the idea that individual efforts are feeble in comparison with forces which are combined. It is not my intention, however, to enter into a discussion of the various broad problems of social economics, but rather to direct your attention to one small branch of the subject, which, trivial as it may appear to some, to us as nurses should be of all-absorbing interest.

Those who have watched the evolution of the training school for nurses have been gratified to see how the various problems which have arisen in this connection have been, and are still being, successfully solved. No one pretends that grave imperfections do not still exist, but success in the past gives confidence that we may hope to have in the future in all civilised countries a number of well-trained women who will be competent to nurse the sick according to the most enlightened methods, and yet with the same self-devotion which has always existed from time immemorial.

As a Superintendent of Training Schools, it was for some years the writer's main effort to send out from the School into the world women who should be well equipped for their duties; and yet on every graduation day the thought would arise that the work of preparation under the most favourable circumstances cannot then be more than half done. A University professor of my acquaintance used always to impress upon his students the fact that the taking of a degree signified, not that their education was completed, but that it was then only just begun, and this can quite as aptly be applied to graduates of training schools. How, then, can opportunities for the continuance of the education of nurses be provided for? Failing any one panacea, I believe that the nearest approach to a solution of this intricate problem will be found in the proper organisation of graduates.

Eight years ago the first Alumnæ Association of graduate nurses in America was formed in connection with one of our largest training schools. Shortly afterwards one or

two other similar societies were established, but their organisation attracted but little attention, and met with little co-operation from graduate nurses as a body. Within the past three years, however, a great reaction has taken place, and hardly any Training School in America or Canada is now without its Alumnæ Association.

But can we hope that these will supply even in part the proper organisation which we have just stated to be necessary for the best interests of the graduate nurse and for the public at large? Let us turn for a moment to the consideration of the condition of affairs which existed before the formation of these Alumnæ Associations. The founding of training schools seems to have been conducted more or less upon the close corporation plan. The graduates of the schools which then existed kept too much to themselves, and regarded, it is to be feared, with a certain amount of antagonism and rivalry the new schools which were coming into existence. It is true that the commercial spirit of the age was partly to blame for this, inasmuch as training schools utterly unworthy of the name were springing up everywhere. But, nevertheless, the honest, though small, schools were undoubtedly slighted, and the spirit pervading the older and larger ones could not fail to result in a certain amount of narrowness, selfishness, and undevelopment.

Again, in the case of the pupil nurse, her theoretical teaching was confined almost entirely to the first year, and the remainder of her time was devoted to practical work, so that when she was ready to graduate her inclination to keep up her reading was in most cases lost, and when she left the hospital and its practical work to begin private nursing she was left with absolutely no stimulus from within or without her school to keep up her interest or foster a desire for further development. Nor can the training school be held accountable altogether for this state of affairs. With constant fresh material sufficient to occupy its entire attention it may justly be pardoned for feeling that it had sufficient to do without burdening itself with the affairs of its graduates. Thus from the very beginning of her career the graduate nurse found herself with little better to look forward to than the routine life of going from one case to another, and of spending her intervening time within the walls of some lodging house, with not even proper opportunities for rest and quiet. Even where chances for more congenial companionship were offered it was but rarely possible for her to keep in touch with improvements or new methods of caring for the sick or combating disease. Small wonder, then, if she sometimes in her loneliness became narrow in her views, commercial in spirit, or else a spend-

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