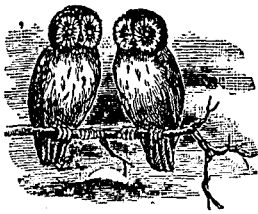


## Matrons in Council.

### How Far are Training Schools Responsible for the Lack of Ethics among Nurses?\*

BY EVA ALLERTON,

Superintendent Homœopathic Hospital, Rochester, U. S. A.



THE subject assigned me by the Council does not admit of argument. It assumes that there exists a laxity of morals in some graduates from our training schools, and the question arises, to what extent are the training

schools responsible for a state of affairs which we must admit exists to-day in the nursing profession.

We must take into consideration the fact that it is only within the last decade that women have come so prominently before the public as bread-winners. Not very many years ago the father, husband, or brother, dictated the mode of occupation for the female members of the household. If necessity demanded, a woman might teach school, music, clerk in a store, or sew; but she was daring, indeed, who ventured beyond these lines. In this age, without any special training to develop the stable side of a character, a woman may support herself, or an entire family, by her professional work. Here she suffers from comparison with professional men, not only as regards the question of efficiency, but also in that of remuneration. This is largely the cause of so much adverse criticism of what is known as the "new woman."

While the public tolerates shortcomings in women who are engaged in other occupations, without any great amount of comment, it has fixed a higher standard of morality for the professional nurse. Why? Because her duties are of vital importance. She is brought face to face with the great problems of life, the mystery of death, and suffering in every form; she is taken into the confidence of the family, where she is thrown into close relations with the inner life. Her duties are exacting, and if she fulfils her post, and meets all the requirements, she is often regarded as little less than an angel. If the reverse obtains, as is frequently the case, the faults and blemishes in her character appears more glaring than in any other class of professional women.

Fortunately, or unfortunately, the criticisms we hear are those in regard to conduct rather than lack of skill or knowledge on the part of the nurse, except among one class of people known as the "newly rich," who apparently consider it a duty to find fault with any paid service rendered.

\* Read before the American Society of Superintendents of Training Schools for Nurses, in Toronto, Canada, February, 1898.

Now, to whom should the applicant for membership in our training schools be referred? Just here lies a great responsibility. I have made no attempt to learn in how many of the schools, represented in this body, the selection is made by the Superintendent of the hospital, who may be a physician, a minister, or a layman. In some institutions, a committee, composed of physicians and lady managers, pass upon applicants; or a single individual, man or woman, as the case may be, is vested with power to act. This is all very well, provided the acceptance or dismissal of the applicant, at the end of the probationary term, is left with the Training School Superintendent, who is, of course, a trained nurse. Almost every Superintendent here could tell of the great difficulties experienced in getting rid of pupils, who, from a moral point of view, are not desirable, though they may be adapted to the work by virtue of natural gifts and personal advantages. If at all pleasing in appearance and manner, and able to cry becomingly, it is easy for a pupil to obtain one or more advocates among those interested in the management, in which case it is made so difficult for the Superintendent to act that she yields the point in despair; the pupil is allowed to remain in the ranks, and to graduate, only to bring disgrace and shame upon the profession.

We need a more uniform method of selection. Assuming trained nursing to be a profession, is it not right and just that the question of fitness should be decided by members of the profession into which the applicant aspires to enter? Doctors, lawyers, ministers and dentists, are passed upon by those who have been graduated in their own special line of work, and who are, consequently, best able to judge of fitness. Therefore, it seems right and just that the matter should be left with the Superintendent, who is, of course, a trained nurse.

The question of age is of prime importance. Every girl must have her silly age, and she should have passed this before she can be considered a desirable pupil in any training school. I think I may say that the majority of schools represented here do not admit applicants under twenty-two years of age. I prefer to take them at twenty-five, when every girl may be judged as a woman, and it should not be found necessary to excuse misconduct on the plea of youth.

It is my judgment that the first steps to be taken toward elevating the standard of ethics in nursing, is to allow time for the development of the practical side of character. Have we, as women, the moral right to bring into this work girls of unformed character, thus to obtain, before they are able to resist its influence, a knowledge of the many phases of life so peculiar to our hospital work? It becomes the duty of a nurse to administer to saint and sinner the same kindly,

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)