

## Nurses in Council.

### Overcrowding in the Profession.\*

By Miss L. L. Dock.

THE profession of the trained nurse is so young that the questions of overcrowding, competition, and the maintenance of high standards, both in the nurses' work and in her mode of life, are but lately beginning to come up. They have been familiar enough in other lines of work, but nurses have been under peculiarly advantageous conditions in belonging to a calling new and popular, and in which, for a long time, the demand has exceeded the supply.

But the rapid increase in the number of training schools has been such that a correspondingly rapid change is being wrought in the condition of nursing, and the special advantages of the nurse, industrially speaking, threaten to become somewhat diminished in the near future. Nurses, then, as a body of working women, do well to study the general features of their work, and to become familiar with the tendencies likely to affect it favourably or otherwise. They can thus follow the trend of events, and be prepared to adapt themselves to changes; also, when necessary, to direct counteracting influences toward one point or another.

Miss Jane Addams, than whom there is no wiser woman, says, in speaking of industrial changes in general, that those workers who are permanently displaced by changed conditions, are those who fail to adapt themselves to changes; whereas those who have knowledge and insight, and are in touch with their time quickly reorganize.

Let us then consider, first, the present causes which tend to overcrowding, and discuss remedies, if possibly there may be such, and then inquire in what ways the nurse may adapt herself to changing conditions.

The chief cause of crowding in the nursing profession is the yearly increase in the number of small hospitals which establish training schools. No one knows exactly how many there are, but from what we hear, see, and read, we know that they are many and that they multiply; so that, in time, unless some check is placed upon this source of supply, it will act as injuriously upon nursing, by overcrowding the rank and file and lowering standards, as the unregulated mushroom medical schools acted for years upon the medical profession, which was at last compelled for self-preservation and the maintenance of standards

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to attack the liberty of the small schools, and restrict them by State laws requiring State examinations, followed by registration of practitioners. That this injurious process is already making itself felt is evidenced by the movements toward higher standards of education for Nurses; longer courses of study and training, more searching preliminary examinations, uniformity in practical work, and the removal of the pecuniary advantage of the monthly payment in money, thus establishing the pupils' standing on a more scholarlike basis. These changes are now being initiated and carried on by training school superintendents all over the country, in response to the stimulus of competition and their recognition of the need of continuous advancement. Graduate nurses do not always fully comprehend—perhaps cannot always know, just what training schools are doing, yet these movements are of great importance to them, and they ought to follow them all, and lend their support to every innovation tending to oppose the over-crowding forces. As time goes on it will no doubt be found that the higher standards thus attained must be guarded by legislation, or they will be nullified by the lower, as always happens if there are no restrictions. Then some form of final examination will be sought, as medical men have had to seek it, and registration, or some other uniform testimonial will follow. Such tendencies, while they may not entirely prevent, will certainly largely discourage, the training school system in hospitals too small or two poorly equipped to give nurses a complete education. Public sentiment also will do much, and nurses can help in creating this among the people with whom they are thrown. You may ask, "What alternative can one offer these hospitals?" The subject is a large one, and has been treated by others more competent than I. Some suggestions that have been put forth are: post-graduate courses in special hospitals; co-operation with other small ones, or with one large one, for many, and still others, teach the sound doctrine that the expense of permanent nurses' salaries would be the most legitimate expense that they could bear. Surely every little place ought to have its hospital, and every hospital ought to have good nursing, but *not* every one ought to have a training school. Some small hospitals do recognize this principle, and act upon it. They deserve to be encouraged by the heartiest support of graduates.

Another general movement, in which graduates may well take an active interest, is that tending to entirely abolish private duty by pupil nurses. Although largely given up, there are yet some schools where undergraduates are sent out to private cases to the direct injury of the graduate nurse. It undersells her, and crowds her by

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