

DISCUSSION.

Mrs. Bedford Fenwick said, that in discussing the facilities for women's professional education, one must not omit the fact that the large majority of parents were still quite oblivious of their duty to daughters. Every effort was made on the part of parents to educate the sons so that they could earn a living, but the majority of girls were left to pick up what knowledge they could at the least possible expense, and were thus ill fitted for the keen competition of the day. Nursing education was in a transition stage—twenty years ago, the physical strain of the ward work in combination with the care of the sick, was so great that educated women entered hospitals as pupils, and paid to be relieved from laborious duties, and by this means many excellent women survived; but to-day the majority of training schools were so organised that the work expected from a probationer could easily be accomplished by a healthy woman, and at the same time the standard of education of all classes had reached a much higher level, which appeared good arguments for some relaxation as to the age when women might be admitted for training. Again, character and temperament were such immense factors in the making of nurses, that one would willingly see the Matron given more discretion in the choice of Probationers from the age standpoint, especially in those institutions where they could be tested in a Preliminary School.

Much of the theoretical education of a nurse might be acquired in her teens after leaving school, so that she would be spared the strain of much study during the early period of probation. Matrons had now a much wider choice of Probationers than in the past, and the enthusiasm of youth when rightly directed, had great and endearing charms, therefore let the Matrons be permitted to select Probationers from the age of 21. To come to the burning question of Specialism in Nursing. She would condemn it root and branch, unless founded on a thorough curriculum of general nursing education. Specialism was a professional danger, and most unsound from an economic standpoint. Was it not true that specialists at present monopolised much of the remunerative nursing of the sick. Women who had spent a few weeks in a Lying-in-Hospital at small expense, charging exorbitant fees of from fifteen to twenty guineas a month for maternity cases? Again, the question of mental nursing had been hotly disputed during the past two years, and trained nurses strongly condemned the attempt upon the part of the Hon. Officers of the Royal British Nurses' Association to register mental specialists, and thus recognise the principle that a general nursing education was superfluous. It was the duty of trained nurses to be very firm on this point, and no curriculum of nursing education should be accepted by them which was not founded on the most liberal and comprehensive basis of general knowledge. Everything Miss Nightingale had written on the training of nurses and etiquette of nursing remained indisputable; her opinion on the inevitable demoralization of women ruled by men was true in substance and in fact, and the personal domination of men in the nursing department of a hospital was disastrous alike to good discipline and good nursing.

Miss Pell Smith (Leicester) enquired whether the standard of age, as at present laid down, was not rendered necessary on account of the large amount of

physical work required of many nurses during their hospital training. If this was the general opinion, she would like to ask whether it would not be possible to decrease the amount of work of this sort, at present demanded of probationers.

Miss Mollett (Southampton) did not think that the cases of the standard of age for medical students and nurses were analogous. A student at the beginning of his career was engaged in scientific work, but a probationer from the commencement of her training began *professional* work, she was, to some extent, responsible for the care of the sick from the beginning of her training, and increasingly so as time went on. This was very different to the scientific work of the student, and required concentration of purpose which was rare in very young girls. Girls of 19 and 20 required time for improving their minds as well as ample time for recreation, and it was rather premature at 19 to ask them to knuckle down to a pro's work. She was fully of opinion that it was an immense mistake to place women under the authority of men. She did not mean of bad men only, but of good men also. The tone of women who worked under men, was always lower than that of those who worked under women, and this told upon the work.

Miss Huxley (Dublin) thought that it was very important that some training in mental nursing should be included in the general curriculum of a nurse's work. The average probationer had a horror of the insane, but if experience in caring for these cases were included in her training she would have less fear, and more common sense in dealing with them. She thought, therefore, that mental nursing should be included in any curriculum of training laid down.

Miss Pell-Smith (Leicester) said that she thought the advantage of lowering the standard of age for probationers would be that the training schools would obtain nurses possessed of an enthusiasm which those of more mature age often lacked. Girls of 19 and 20 would bring with them the vigour of their youth, and the enthusiasm of the young for their first work. This would be a distinct advantage. She quite agreed with Miss Huxley as to the necessity for training in mental nursing. In these days the *nerve* element was a complication of so many illnesses, that she considered it most important. There were many patients now-a-days who were not actually insane, but who certainly could not be considered sane.

Miss Breay (Fleet) said that students at Oxford and Cambridge went through a more severe course of mental training at the age of 18 than was ever required of nurses. Speaking as a member of the general public, therefore, she did not see why nurses should not begin their theoretical training at the same age.

Mrs. Walter Spencer (London) said that in special hospitals the probationers were often admitted at an earlier age than that required by the general Hospitals. At present, the standard of age required for probationers, in our large hospitals, was 23, 25, and even 27. In Children's Hospitals they often began work at 18 or 19. The work was frequently as arduous as in general hospitals, and it was not found that more nurses broke down under the strain than was the case in general hospitals. If a nurse did not begin her training until she was 23 or 25, and if the period of training was increased as was suggested to five years, a nurse would not be free to undertake work on her

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