

## The Old Nursing and the New.\*

BY DR. ARTHUR V. MEIGO,  
Visiting Physician, Pennsylvania Hospital.

(Continued from page 112.)

The change from the Old Nursing to the New was gradually effected. In 1876 a Training School was talked of, and Miss Irwin was appointed Acting Matron, with the intention of working in the direction of having such a school, but none was instituted until Miss Bunting came here in 1879. The minutes do not tell exactly what office Miss Bunting was brought to the Hospital to fill, but to all practical purposes, she performed the functions of Head Nurse. She instituted a Training School, and it had some connection for a while with the Women's Medical College Hospital, that institution sending its nurses here to receive a portion of their training. This arrangement continued only for a short time. During the greater portion of the term of Miss Bunting's official connection with the Hospital, she interfered but very little with the management of the men's wards, leaving them almost entirely to the old men nurses, and almost all the training was of women nurses in women's wards. In 1885, for the first time, the trial was made of putting women nurses in charge of the men's wards. A woman was appointed head-nurse of the Men's Medical Ward. Since then, a man has never had charge of that ward. There must have been great difficulty and friction at first, for an old employé of the Hospital has told me that the nurses themselves were soon disgusted and said it was not fit work for women. In January, 1886, Miss Bunting was elected Superintendent of Nurses, being the first one to hold that position, and two months later she resigned. In April, 1886, Miss Marion Smith was elected to the office of Superintendent of Nurses, and with her advent really began the nursing as you know it now. She worked actively for the perfection of the Training School, and soon all the men head nurses of wards disappeared and were replaced by women. At one time the experiment was made of putting a woman in charge of the receiving ward, but here the line had to be drawn, for it did not take long to find out that the necessity for the existence of men nurses had not ceased. A woman could not be found who was able to keep order among those who came to the receiving ward, and it is now the only citadel left within the Hospital of which men nurses still continue in possession. It almost seems as if the man nurse was doomed to extinction; but there are some branches of nursing that he is better fitted for than woman can ever be, and I believe it will

be a pity if he is crushed out of existence by the rising power of his sisters.

Though it may not seem to you to have any direct connection with my subject, I wish to recall to your minds that in the year 1879, there was a great scandal in connection with the management of the Almshouse Hospital, which ended in the trial in Court of one of the prominent officials. The man was convicted of malfeasance in office and sentenced to a term of imprisonment. Soon afterwards, a new Board of Guardians of the Poor came into office, which contained a number of disinterested and public-spirited men, among whom were the late Mr. R. C. McMurtrie, Mr. Edward F. Hoffman and Dr. Thomas Biddle. This Board effected many improvements and reforms, which were greatly to the advantage of the paupers, the sick and the insane; but probably the most important and useful thing they did was to institute a Training School for Nurses; which still exists. They brought from England to be the head of this School, the late Miss Fisher, and by means of the School and its efficient and devoted head, a great impetus was given to the cause of nursing in this city.

Since I have now told you so much of what nursing used to be, and have expressed my opinion that it has greatly changed for the better, it is necessary that you should know, as far as possible, the reasons for improvement, in order that you may be able to make still further advances. In this world there is no such thing as a stable equilibrium; even the rocks gradually disintegrate, and so nursing must go on and continue to improve or it will retrograde. I believe that there are two main causes to which the improvement in the modern nursing is due—first, the force of nurses has been increased so as to make it possible to effectually carry out refinements of treatment that in the old days with the insufficient force were impossible; and second, there is the system of training to which you are subjected, and the manner in which your work is kept continually under the supervision of your various teachers, who act as inspectors to see that your duties are fulfilled. In support of this opinion, let me give you a few striking and curious figures. In the years 1872-3, the average number of patients in the Hospital at a time was 160, and the number of men nurses employed was 11, and of women nurses there were 5. In the years 1897-8, the average number of patients in the Hospital was 210, the number of men nurses was 11, and of women nurses, 67. It is not necessary to make much comment on these figures. Think of the changes! An increase of patients from 160 to 210, the same number of men, and 67 as against 5 women nurses, more than thirteen times as many. Is it

\* An Address to the Graduating Class of the Pennsylvania Training School for Nurses, December 15th, 1898.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)