

Educational Questions.

MENTAL NURSING.

It was inevitable that sooner or later it should be claimed for the asylum nurse that she is just as efficient as her colleague who has received training in a general hospital, and that, if she holds the certificate of the Medico-Psychological Society, this is a guarantee that she is qualified to take any position of responsibility in an asylum. The attempt of some medical members of the Royal British Nurses' Association to place women with practical experience in an asylum for the insane on the Register of *trained* nurses fostered this idea, and though the strong feeling expressed by the nurse members in a public meeting prevented this measure from being carried into effect, yet, at the present time, it is still claimed for mental attendants that training in an asylum is all that they require. We quote from the *Journal of Mental Science*, the remarks of Dr. Yellowlees, one of the past presidents of the Medico-Psychological Association on this subject:—

"I wish to protest against a practice which is becoming too common. When a vacancy is advertised in the higher ranks of asylum service it is frequently stipulated that the applicant must be a hospital trained certificated nurse. It surprises me greatly that any asylum superintendent can approve of such a limitation, for it utterly disparages the training prescribed by our Association and the certificate it grants, while it greatly discourages and disappoints every asylum official who is striving to excel.

"What can have suggested such a condition? Four-fifths at least of our asylum patients are in excellent general health and need no medical "nursing." The remainder whose insanity involves much disorder of bodily health—the epileptics and paralytics, the cases of senility or gross brain disease—are far better nursed by an asylum nurse who is familiar with the work and with the allied mental states, than by any hospital nurse. Our asylum training is sufficient, under the resident doctor's guidance, for any medical case, and the rare event of any serious surgical operation can easily be met by obtaining, if necessary, a special nurse.

Is our certificate of so little value that it is ignored even by our own members? Possibly the certificate when first instituted was granted to some whose experience had been far too limited, possibly the examination may have been in certain cases deficient in scope and strictness. These defects if they existed, have been remedied, but most assuredly similar faults could be alleged against many hospital certificates, though these are now deemed essential.

Is it, then, that hospital training is so vastly superior to asylum training? A hospital trained nurse who has learned to carry out carefully and intelligently the doctor's instructions, to record accurately the patient's symptoms, and to minister kindly, patiently, and cheerfully to the patient's wants, is, of course, invaluable and worthy of all due consideration and esteem. But an asylum trained nurse must learn to do all this and much more. She has to deal, in addition, with all the vagaries of talk and conduct developed by a disordered mind, to calm the restless, to guide the perverse, to rouse the apathetic, to comfort the desponding, and to be continually on the watch against dangerous impulses and suicidal attempts. Thus she must be constantly alert and observant, must exercise unflinching self-control, and must frequently and without hesitation act on her own judgment and responsibility in dealing with critical emergencies.

"Of course proficiency in any kind of nursing must largely depend on the individual nurse, but surely no one can question which of these has the highest, the more difficult, and the more important duty. The hospital wards of a good asylum afford ample opportunity for learning the bodily nursing of the insane, as well as their mental nursing, and to make ordinary hospital training indispensable for promotion in asylum service, is, in my opinion, quite unjustifiable, and an unworthy slight on the staffs of our asylums."

We agree with Dr. Yellowlees that it is hard for conscientious asylum workers to be debarred from promotion, but the fault lies with the asylum authorities who do not require their nursing staffs to receive training in an institution where general diseases are treated. The time has gone by when a woman can be considered competent to nurse one section of the body while ignorant of the needs of the other equally important parts, and it is time for the curriculum of education of asylum nurses to be revised, and amended in conformity with modern ideas and a basis of general nursing education insisted upon. Dr. Yellowlees would not, we imagine, consider a medical man who had only been educated in the treatment of mental disease, competent to act as medical superintendent of an asylum. The same principle holds good in the nursing as well as in the treatment of a patient. At the same time we also consider that women appointed as superintendents of nursing in asylums should, in addition to general training, have had experience in the care of the insane, and in the management of asylums. The appointment of a nurse who only holds the certificate of a general hospital on the one hand, or of a woman who has only had experience in a hospital for the insane on the other is fair to neither side. What is needed is that a

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