

afterwards. She has been taught nothing about the choice of suitable and nourishing materials, their careful preparation and economical use, the art which is required in feeding a sick or helpless patient, and the observation necessary to note changes in the appetite and quantity of food consumed by the patients, all of which demand from the very beginning an amount of knowledge, care, and thought far beyond what is possessed by a young pupil nurse. We find her, further, administering medicines and learning how she ought to administer them and what effects to observe possibly weeks or months later. She begins early the personal care of her patient, with its countless details and its countless possibilities of danger to him through her ignorance of what she is handling. Some previous study of anatomy and physiology might not only prevent possible errors, but would have the further value of making her work comprehensible from the beginning and of avoiding the establishment of wrong or confused ideas.

That these statements are absolutely correct will be seen from statistics taken at random from the recently published reports of methods of instruction in several of our representative schools. In eleven out of twenty of these schools we find materia medica taught in the second year; in six it does not come until the third year; yet those familiar with the training of nurses know that the pupil may begin her practical handling of drugs within two months after admission. Dietetics are taught sometimes in the second year, sometimes in the third. Anatomy and physiology, while more uniformly a feature of the first year's teaching, are yet to be found both in the second and third years. It is reasonable to infer that the pupils have obtained the practical part of their instruction with much less advantage than if they had received some systematic preparation for it. Among the arguments in favour of this method we find it stated that the pupil is always taught individually by a head nurse or senior nurse before being allowed to perform any act of work. In a busy hospital ward this is frequently quite impossible, and the statement is one which after some years of experience and observation the writer is unable to accept; even were it true, such a method would be a poor substitute for careful, thorough, and systematic preparatory teaching.

A moment's consideration of such a system as now prevails shows its crudity and weakness. It is no argument to say that a pupil can quite well acquire the little necessary knowledge of the principles of her work as she goes along. She can acquire them much better before she goes along, and her going will inevitably be attended

with more benefit to herself and to the patient, and with considerably less chance of injury to him. Beyond all question practical skill is the thing, and all instruction must have constant reference to practical ends. But this should be preceded by an understanding of some of the principles and an acquaintance with some of the facts.

Our methods, while containing much that is admirable, have never grown beyond the stage of infancy. What was done of necessity years ago in the effort to provide better nursing in hospitals is now continued partly as a measure of economy, and partly through indolent adherence to a custom which saves us the trouble of thinking.

To lengthen courses of instruction and increase the number of subjects taught, or to show long and elaborate schedules of lectures, does not necessarily mean that we are thereby greatly advancing in the education of nurses. It is equally important that there shall be a wise division of theory and practice, and such an arrangement of each that practical work shall in all instances be preceded by previous study.

A system whereby the pupil is prepared to some extent for the practical side of her work by previous study and preparation is founded on a rational basis, and it is in this direction that the writer believes the greatest improvement will come about in the teaching of nurses. This method may for us have the stamp of novelty, but it is in accordance with existing methods in every other branch of education, every art, trade, or profession. Is it not time to bring methods of teaching nurses in training-schools into harmony with those employed in other branches of education?

The Popular Matron.

The excellent work of Miss Shirley, the popular Lady Superintendent of the Staffordshire Nursing Institute, at Stoke-on-Trent, is not only known and appreciated in the Midlands, but is recognised throughout the nursing world by all her colleagues. We were not surprised, therefore, to learn that on the occasion of her first birthday in the new century the members of the Staffordshire Institute availed themselves of the opportunity to give evidence of the respect and affection with which they regard their Lady Superintendent, and presented her with a handsome travelling bag, which, no doubt, will be greatly valued. Miss Shirley is a member of the Matrons' Council, and her support of any movement which advances the interests of Nurses is always assured.

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