

The American Nursing World.

THE EDUCATIONAL BASIS OF PROFESSIONAL NURSING.

Two very able lectures on nursing questions have recently been given by medical men. One by Dr. S. Weir Mitchell on "Nurses and their Education," a lecture which was delivered to nurses in Philadelphia, and the other, "Is Nursing Really a Profession?" an address given by Dr. A. Worcester at the recent graduation exercises of the Long Island Hospital Training School, Boston.

NURSES AND THEIR EDUCATION.

Dr. Weir Mitchell calls attention to the lack of uniformity at present existing in the training of nurses, and the fact that women sent out from little village hospitals and even private hospitals "expect to compete on even terms and for like wages with women who have had the discipline and training of the really competent education of our great schools." He shows that the same evil exists in the profession of medicine, not all medical schools being equally competent to educate the doctor. In this case, however, the law provides a Board of State Examiners, a system which, while excellent in theory, does not keep out all that it should.

Nevertheless, says Dr. Mitchell, "as concerns the nurses, the time may come when such a board will be needed to stand between the public and the worst of the half-educated. To some extent the nurses' directories, not the private agencies, effect this purpose, and do much to keep the nurses a superior body."

He goes on to say:—

"I was one of the first men to see the value of specifically educated nurses and use them. Ever since I have watched with a critical eye the changes in nursing, the gain for all three concerned—the patient, the nurse, and the doctor. The gradual appearance of evils or defects in the trained nurse, in her education, and in some other ways, I now wish to discuss. I have long felt that as concerns nurses we require very radical alterations in education, and some broadening of opportunities for those who want to be not merely educated, but accomplished."

The need of definite education for nurses is now generally admitted. "Once," says Dr. Mitchell, "all women believed that they were always the best nurses for their own children—were, in fact, nurses by Divine decree. Some doubts as to this have of late been entertained by the better educated mothers. At all events, civilised communities have reached the conclusion that to be competent as nurses, women require a technical education."

He then criticises the present method of training, and points out where it fails, and indicates the need for and the manner of fuller training.

And, first, he says in regard to our claim to be recognised as a profession:—

"Is yours a profession? You so believe. Well, let us admit it. But by your own desire to be classed as a profession you subject yourselves to such critical treatment as I and others have mercilessly applied to the physician. I am not sure that you were wise to so label yourselves. This descriptive word is perilous. It means much; it pledges. Are you prepared to accept a code of ethics? Is all your labour to be paid? Shall you give free service to a sick nurse, or charge her? I have known it done. I have never in my life taken a fee from a physician. There is more pledged than these things when you call yours a profession. A business may prosper with honesty—a profession exacts honour, a stricter code."

After discussing the preliminary period of probation "during which there will be some chance to decide upon those moral, mental, and bodily qualities which cannot be otherwise tested, and which no certificate really covers," and expressing his "regret that the doctor also is not tried by a similar tribunal," the lecturer proceeds to compare the methods of medical and nursing education thus:

"The doctor pays for his education; the nurse does not. She receives an elaborate training without charge. Unpaid physicians or highly trained nurses lecture and teach her. She will urge that her services in the wards repay the hospital. Not so. While serving she is the subject of care, thought, discipline, and lavishly given instructions, often made difficult by her want of preliminary education, and sometimes taken by her as only a slight return for her valuable services.

"I propose here at the beginning of the nurse's education two reforms in present methods. I should prefer that the student-nurse pay for the whole of her education. What is paid for is more valued. To lead up to this fuller reform, I should insist that at least during the first year of her training the nurse-student should pay the hospital; the second year she should not pay; and the third year, if there be a third year, she should be paid. This is a compromise.

"But if, as you urge, yours is a profession, why, indeed, should you not pay all through, just as we do? The student of medicine pays, and when he is graduated serves hospitals unpaid, or, later, gives endless unrequited service year after year. How much do you thus give? You will still urge that you give while learning. This is measurably true, but you are paid, as he is not, and lodged and cared for.

"I do assure you that your first hospital year is to us worth little, and that even after you are trained and sent out your first year or two of private work is ridiculously over-estimated as to its value by most of you, and to this question I shall return later."

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