

Preparatory Work for Nurses.*

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In the first issue of the *American Journal of Nursing*, October, 1900, the editor mentioned the fact that a movement was on foot in Boston to establish a preparatory course for those intending taking up nursing as a profession.

In view of the long-continued absence of data regarding it, the movement, if it made any impression at all, must have seemed simply a ripple, made by the premature plunge of a restless spirit, just then in need of an outlet for an unaccustomed plethora of time, or by one who, not "sitting down and counting the cost," has been since overwhelmed by the magnitude of the plunge, both in its physical and financial aspect, or who, seeing that such a movement was widespread, and the establishment of the preliminary course in some hospitals an entity, is content to allow that the ideal course is with us, and that nothing remains to be done except to urge each school to establish a course for itself.

While admitting that there may seem grains of truth in the first group of ideas, the last I am not at all content to allow; and as I have been given the credit of this movement, I am pleased with this opportunity to make known my ideas of a preparatory course, with a few of the reasons for them, and the difficulties that stand in the way of its accomplishment. To begin at the beginning—it may interest you to know the point where the desultory, vague impression that lack of proper early educational advantages in the science of domestic life was too serious a handicap to be altogether offset by the natural or scholastic abilities of the probationer, or more than partially atoned for by the routine methods without technical instruction which obtain in the training-schools, began to assume proper proportions and take definite shape.

Some ten or twelve years ago, in the early part of my career as a nominal superintendent of nurses, I was asked by one of the "managers," who in visiting the wards of the hospital was struck by the not very prepossessing appearance of a probationer, if we were going to accept her, and, receiving an affirmative reply, launched a series of questions which in substance amounted to this—on what basis do you make your selection?

Up to that time I had not given the acceptance or rejection problem systematic thought enough to be ready with any more intelligent answer than an enumeration of the requirements set forth in the

circular supplied to applicants, which are approximately the same in all schools.

While giving the answer I became suddenly conscious that I was making a rather lame statement, if not misleading, and I hastened to throw in "personality," "temperament," "aptitude," and a few more qualifications that came at random to my mind, being all the time aware that in this particular instance the "weight of the evidence was against me," and that it was superior educational advantages both in academic and household branches that made her acceptance possible.

A careful after-study of the situation led to the conviction that while it was true that without the qualifications *à la* circular she could not be accepted as a probationer, it was equally true that the possession of them was not sufficient to ensure her acceptance as a pupil, unless accompanied by higher intellectual attainments than the circular called for, combined with the domestic sciences of which manual dexterity is the exponent.

From observation and experience of the failures or successes of the majority of probationers, I arrived at the above conclusion; co-existent with another, which was that, in assuming the burden of this higher education, we were unwisely making ourselves responsible for all the defects and deficiencies in the training of nurses, and bearing the criticisms against the profession—aimed, for the most part, not against her nursing education, but the concomitants.

You can see at once that, following up such a train of thought, a preparatory course for an entrance standard was inevitable, which resolved itself into a technical school, entirely free from domination of hospital or training-school; planned and conducted by mutual arrangement between the two schools, where anyone possessing certain qualifications and paying a nominal fee might take the course.

At the end of the school term a certificate would be given to the successful pupil, which would be honoured by the training-school, only so far as to accept the holder as a probationer.

It binds the training to nothing more than a trial, and will in no way conflict with or supersede the existing regulations.

The time-honoured custom of probation will continue, robbed of the greater part of its terrors and objectionableness. The tests of physical capability and mutual balance will still be made by the school authorities, and gauged by the standards of the profession. If the probationer fails to grasp the situation or master the nice points in the handicraft which cannot be taught by precept or imitation, or, if the attitude is at variance with the ethics of the profession, she will be rejected, then as now, but with far more certainty of finality.

This entrance standard I know is calculated to "take away the breath" of the superintendents,

* Read at the ninth annual meeting of the American Society of Superintendents of Training-Schools for Nurses, held at Detroit, Mich., September 9th to 11th, 1902.

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