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Editorial.

THE PROBLEM OF NURSING EDUCATION.

What constitutes an efficient training-school for nurses is a question which is engaging the attention of all who are interested in the problem of nursing education, and one which must, sooner or later, be authoritatively settled. We are all somewhat prone to consider the question from the point of view in which it has been personally presented to us. Thus, those of us who have been educated in one of the great training-schools, knowing full well the value of such an education, are apt to think that only in a large hospital can an efficient training be given. On the other hand, there are those who have received their training in comparatively small hospitals, and further, those who trained, in large hospitals, have subsequently been placed in charge of small training-schools, and hold that there are valuable opportunities afforded for acquiring knowledge in the smaller schools which rarely come in the way of the pupils of large schools, and that well-organised general hospitals of from 50 to 100 beds are able to give an education which shall fit their graduates for the work subsequently required of them. To arrive at any useful conclusion, we must approach the matter in a liberal and dispassionate spirit, bearing in mind that the object of a training-school for nurses is fulfilled if it is able to impart to its pupils an all-round experience in the principles of nursing which will fit them to be competent attendants on the sick.

If we apply this test, then, we must eliminate as training-schools, unless associated in groups which will offer together efficient experience, all those hospitals which only afford special training. Take, for instance, the hospitals which most often claim to rank as general training-schools, namely, those which receive children only. True, these hospitals provide much valuable experience, and, moreover, experience in the nursing of general diseases. But they certainly cannot efficiently educate a nurse to undertake the nursing care of adults. Many diseases of adult life are never seen in the wards of children's hospitals; there is no experience obtainable in the moving of heavy cases, while the large and important class of gynæcological cases are, of course, wholly absent. The education such institutions are able to afford can, therefore, in no sense be considered complete. The same truth is even more applicable to hospitals which care for only one class of cases, such as fevers, women's diseases, mental cases, and so on.

Turning to the general hospitals and infirmaries, we are at once confronted by the fact that the test of this efficiency cannot rest solely upon the number of beds they contain. The nature of the cases received, and the skill of the teaching staff, more especially the efficiency of the Superintendent of Nursing, are quite as important factors in the making of a training-school as the number of beds. Given a well-organised nursing school in a hospital where there are a variety of cases, we think that a general hospital of from 50 to 100 beds should be able to provide a sound education which should entitle a woman, who successfully passes through the curriculum, to rank as a trained nurse.

It is useful to compare the basis of nursing education with that of general education; and we shall at once find that while such schools as Eton, Harrow, and Rugby impart something undefinable, but tangible and valuable, to those whom they educate, yet there are many smaller schools which afford a sound education which equips a man for the battle of life. In like manner our great nurse-training schools will always hold a unique position, comparable to that of our large public schools, but at the same time they will be well advised to hold out the right hand of fellowship to those smaller schools which maintain an efficient curriculum and effective teaching power.

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