

The Education of Nurses.*

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I have been asked to say something on the education of nurses, and to define a minimum standard qualifying for registration. Ten or twelve years ago I could have done this with ease. My opinions were very definite, and my standard clearly defined, but after seventeen years' work at the head of a great training-school I find my views have somewhat altered. My opinions are less definite; my standard, though higher, is not so defined.

During the past seventeen years the material we have to work on has altered very much. The young woman of to-day is not, in many ways, like the young woman of twenty years ago. She uses much more freedom of speech, is much more pleasure-seeking, and submits less easily to discipline. We cannot say this change is for the worse; living as we do in the middle of it, we cannot see it in sufficient perspective to judge accurately of its results, and I have a sincere belief in the progress and gradual perfecting of human nature. I believe that, when time has helped to remove the disadvantages, this greater freedom will produce greater women, and even now the women who are fully trained are not in any way behind former generations either in technical skill, tenderness of treatment, or ethical standard, but they are certainly more difficult to train and teach in many ways, and this results chiefly, I think, from two causes—the absence of discipline in the home during their childhood, and a curious lack of education.

In past times the child was severely disciplined. The doctrine of original sin was strongly believed, and severe measures were thought necessary to drive it out. Such discipline is long out of fashion, and indulgence and care are the order of the day, with the result that when girls enter a hospital as probationers they are unaccustomed to discipline and are inclined to rebel against it. The second cause of difficulty lies in their lack of education. Formerly, girls were not well educated, but what little they knew they remembered; it had been drilled into them, often mechanically, and received sometimes not very intelligently; with the present system some girls seem to be able to escape education altogether. I know very little about the present methods of education, and I believe that some women are splendidly educated, but it does not seem to suit the majority—the rank and file, I mean—who don't think and don't want to work or take any mental trouble. These are the girls who largely fill our hospitals, and, what with the lack of home discipline and some success in evading education, the material we have to deal with is very raw indeed. What we have to do is to discipline and educate those girls, so that when trained they become self-reliant, open-minded women, with sufficient technical knowledge to nurse efficiently, and are mentally capable and eager to grasp such opportunities of knowledge as may come in their way. The training-school which accomplishes such results most completely is undoubtedly the best.

In attaining this desirable result, I think the first and most important point is that the whole three years

of their training should be spent in the wards of a hospital, working among the patients and under experienced and somewhat exacting supervision. This is beyond all question the most important part of a nurse's training; it is sufficient discipline and teaches the technical part of the work. Next in importance is her life in the Nurses' Home, on equal terms with so many varying personalities with the same rights and performing similar duties. In order that the probationer may get the best and most from her new surroundings, the Sisters of the wards under whom she works must be very carefully selected. They should be technically skilful, well educated, of good social position, interested in the education and progress of their nurses, and with a high and declared standard of duty and loyalty. The nurse should be under one Sister for not less than six months at a time, so that she may thoroughly understand the method and management of the ward. During her training it is useful for at least six months that she should be passed quickly from ward to ward, as when a nurse takes the night nurses' nights off duty or fills casual vacancies on day duty. This I think most important, as it necessitates a very rapid mental effort to grasp the details of ward after ward each night. A rotation of wards should be followed. It is always easy to arrange for male and female medical and surgical wards, but special work, such as gynaecological or ophthalmology, is more difficult, as the number of patients are few, and the continual change of nurses in such wards is not beneficial to the patients.

As to theoretic work, this should be got over before the actual ward work begins and at the expense of the pupil, but there should also be classes and lectures weekly in the Home. During the first year they would be on nursing details and elementary anatomy and physiology, and given by the Matron or one of her staff. During the second and third year the nurses should attend lectures given by the medical staff on medical and surgical cases, elementary bacteriology, gynaecology, and ophthalmology, and by an expert on food, its composition, preparation and care. The elements only of these subjects can be taught, and the lectures should be most simple and made as interesting as possible, for the minds of the nurses to whom they are addressed are already almost fully occupied by the immense mass of practical detail they are assimilating in the wards. The average human mind is not capable of benefiting by too much instruction, and what is given to it beyond what it is able to bear is apt to produce a severe attack of mental indigestion, when little or nothing is assimilated. Lecturing as a form of instruction is of very little use in permanently increasing the knowledge of anyone, and the little knowledge which is attained is very evanescent. Lectures are really only useful as a guide to study, and the great point of all those teachers should be to teach their pupils to teach themselves. Each nurse, as indeed everyone, "must work out her own salvation with fear and trembling." I have been attending some lectures by a Hungarian professor, and he took up this point very strongly, and, impressing it on his audience, often said with vehemence something to this effect:—"These things that I tell you will never be of any use to you. The only knowledge which you will ever be able to use is that which you have acquired in solitude, with much trouble, with sorrow, and sometimes with tears." That is perhaps somewhat exaggerated, but there is a slight

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