

Shall Training Schools for Nurses be Endowed?*

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The modern training school for nurses owed its origin, as has often been repeated, to the charitable impulses of devoted women who wished to acquire a knowledge of the best way to nurse the sick and to impart this knowledge to others. As the art of nursing had no definite beginning—it simply grew—so it may be said, without in any manner seeming to undervalue its importance, that the work of the training school was not originally fostered and developed for its value as a means of education or mental training, but rather as a species of handicraft. Some persons engaged in the care of the sick in certain hospitals or institutions had evolved through observation and experience fixed methods of nursing which they taught to others, who in turn practised them until, through many repetitions they had become proficient in them, just as housekeeping, spinning, weaving, and other domestic arts were taught to our ancestors a century ago, not from precept or text-books, but by example and often strictly in accordance with precedent. It was sufficient to know that certain procedures had been found useful in the care of the sick, and that they had the warrant of long-established usage for their continued employment; they were accepted as orthodox, and there was little disposition to call in question their superiority or to modify them as the result of any spirit of inquiry or through scepticism as to their intrinsic value born of the scientific spirit. Great comfort to the sick has followed the pursuit of nursing simply as a handicraft, and many there are—principally those whose faces are set towards the setting rather than the rising sun—who still lament that the methods of instruction in nursing did not continue to be manual as of a handicraft rather than educational as of a profession. Handicraft concerns itself most in learning the way in which some other person has performed a given piece of work, and generally considers facility in doing it. Education, on the other hand, gives good reasons for doing the task in a specified way, and teaches the principles which underlie any proper method of accomplishing it, and which may be effective in the fu-

ture, and thus enable one to meet an unexpected emergency or cope with a new difficulty. Manual dexterity or handicraft renders one skilful to do what someone before you has already done; education in the principles of an art renders one resourceful in the face of new problems and fits one to assume unexpected burdens. I have no desire to minimise the importance of manual training or to be classed among those who would train the head rather than the hand. Manual training has, however, been sufficiently emphasised in our modern educational methods, and needs no elaborate advocacy at the present time. It is interesting to note how, even at this time, the ancient contention among the Greeks as to the value of the liberal as opposed to the practical arts is constantly reappearing. Plato declared that arts like music, literature, mathematics, and philosophy were liberal arts, because, as he believed, through their study it was "easier for one to see the good and to realise its perfection" than through the study of practical arts. These so-called liberal arts were avowedly without any practical outcome. They were woven out of the imagination or were the results of abstract philosophical speculation, and their pursuit was a purely intellectual one. Those who followed them always manifested a degree of condescension towards those who practised the practical or technical arts. This distinction has gone through the educational systems of every people for many centuries, and the last word has not been uttered concerning them even yet. It has been impossible for many minds to conceive that theory and practice may be combined, and that the best way to see the beautiful and good and to realise their perfection is to give the beautiful and good a concrete form in noble, philanthropic acts to develop civilisation and uplift the race.

It is related in a university town that a distinguished mathematician was once approached by a talkative lady with an inquiring mind, who asked him to tell her all about the practical utility of higher mathematics, and received the rather unsatisfactory reply, "Thank God, madam, it has no practical use." Such a conception of knowledge may be of the highest interest to a mathematical genius, but to an ordinary person a science or an art which has some practical utility appeals much more strongly than one which exists wholly in the realm of imaginative speculation and never comes down to earth.

In the evolution of nursing we see a happy combination of liberal knowledge and practical experience. The mind of the nurse is instructed to perceive the bearing of scientific laws and to apply them to the better care of the sick; the

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