

The Progress of Nursing in Germany.*

BY SISTER AGNES KARLL.

It is not easy for a German to address this meeting on the subject of Nursing Education and Training. Though it is an acknowledged fact that Kaiserswerth was, so to say, the birth-place of systematic nursing, and though we all know that its fame has spread through all civilised lands, and that it may be regarded as the pattern on which professional nursing has been moulded, we professional pioneers are none the less clear that during latter times we have loitered by the way, and have been left behind by many other countries, even those of the Far East. It is not so very long since nursing was almost exclusively practised by religious communities, and looked upon as purely a religious duty, and that long after the advance of science had caused doctors to demand the aid of women whose nursing duties might be regarded as professional, and in no way likely to clash with their religious duties or exercises. To-day the social conscience is awake in all countries, and in proportion as people are beginning to recognise the fact that prevention is better than cure, so are the demands made upon the capabilities of a nurse increasing; demands which can only be met by those who possess an adequate, thorough, and versatile professional training.

The demand for trained professional nurses has so increased during the last few years that even the many and different nursing institutions in Germany are unable to furnish a sufficient number. Although the returns of the last statistics show that there are 40,000 women engaged in nursing, who for the most part belong to a religious or denominational community, still the want of nurses is growing to be felt more and more daily. And how much more do we, who see clearly, feel, that whilst the demand as regards numbers is still greater than the supply, the quality of that material with which we work is decidedly in many cases below par.

The careful training and education in humane as well as professional duties, which in former years a deaconess-home accorded to its members, is almost a thing of the past, nor is now-a-days the same care as formerly bestowed upon the admittance of probationers, which formerly secured only those really fitted for it to the profession. A great hindrance to the training of a thoroughly professional nurse

is the lack of unity existing as regards the standard of their requirements, and the apparent want of comprehension of the fact, that the greater the demands on a nurse's capabilities, the longer the time of training required for fitting her to meet them.

Nearly 100 years ago one of our large State-hospitals founded a training school, and fixed the time of duration of the training at five months; to-day this same Institution is content with a period of three months for training. It is true that the number of lessons has been lately doubled, but against that must be urged that the demands of to-day upon a Nurse's capabilities have increased one hundredfold! It is true that occasionally one finds the desire for improvement in nursing education existing. A few municipal hospitals, as, for instance, the training schools of the Diaconie-Verein, have instituted a training course lasting *not less* than a year; and this rule is strictly kept. But by far the greater number of institutions are content with a period of six months, and in many Mother-houses even these six months are an illusion for the greater number of the nurses, as the want of hands makes itself so felt on all sides that frequently probationers are during this six months sent away to other stations, and so lose all chance of any theoretical training, even should such training take place. It is an unfortunate fact to which we cannot close our eyes that in Germany it is no uncommon thing for probationers of a week's standing to be entrusted with a night watch or sent to take charge of a responsible case. Examinations at the end of this truly inefficient training are by no means the order of the day. We cannot be too thankful, that the growing discontent with the existing state of things has awakened the State to the duty of improvement. About 15 months ago the Bundesrath passed a decision for examination for the German Empire, fixing a year's training as the time which should precede a Government examination. Unfortunately, this is, however, only optional, not obligatory. There can be no doubt that as soon as this law comes into force competition will cause all nursing institutions to adopt it. At present many are in doubt about its efficacy, but before the tide of time and facts they will not be able to hold out.

Those countries which are fortunate enough to enjoy a period of two, three, and even more years' training will be much astonished to hear that we Germans are thankful to have achieved a period of *one* year. But when one remembers that our responsible profession can be invaded and entered upon by

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