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Our Foreign Letter.

THE SKILL OF NATIVE NURSES IN INDIA



As you remark in your note to "H. M. Thacker's" letter in the issue of November 6th, which has just reached me, "the

nursing question is a difficult one in India,"—how difficult none but those at the helm in the country can truly gauge. But as the head of a large Training School in India (and one of the most developed on European lines), which caters chiefly for native pupils, I feel constrained to add a word on this knotty question.

I have twenty-five Indian women always in training (and a few Europeans and Eurasians). As many as I have vacancies for, after obtaining their certificate, which includes midwifery, at which they are adepts, I keep on my staff. My only regret is that these posts are few, and I have to part with many excellent native nurses.

I have now launched what I believe to be the first Private Nursing Institute in India, "for supplying Indian nurses to Indian families," and as it is composed of my own graduate nurses, I am enabled to keep some of the best still on my staff when not at cases; they work wherever sent in the hospitals, thus keeping up to date, and up to the standard of surgical cleanliness and careful ways in which they have been trained.

As to having to fall back on such a system of punishment as fines, etc., which obtains in Calcutta (according to "H. M. Thacker"), my nurses would hide their heads in shame at such a suggestion. Since I took over charge here not a single nurse has been reported to me for coming on duty

late, and practically the only punishment inflicted is a threat on the part of the Charge Nurse that she will send the delinquent to my office for a scolding, or that she will report her to me.

Although there is so little discipline in the home life of these girls, it is little short of marvellous the way they fall into line, and I make no exaggeration in saying that the discipline in these hospitals now falls but little short of a well-conducted hospital at home.

Some few alterations have been made with the cordial support of the First Physician (English), and I have had no trouble in getting the nurses to co-operate with me, outwardly at any rate, so that any changes are effected simply by an explanation, a notice on the board, or by the Charge Nurses telling their juniors. I exercise much caution as to choice of my candidates: they come on trial; each one pays a fee for eighteen months, and a good standard of education is essential. Over and beyond this, I do not hesitate, while giving them every opportunity to improve, to weed out any who show real unsuitableness for the work. In fact, the school is conducted on English lines entirely, modified to Indian life, and it is my firm belief and my constant encouragement that we have laid the foundation of an Indian nursing profession fully worthy of recognition by the Mother Country, and that if only more facilities were offered for Indian nurses to train in thousands (instead of a few hundred) in schools somewhat on the lines of this, great attention being paid to thoroughness in every detail, and, as at home during the last sixty years, gradually leading them on to the more advanced studies and practice of the arts of their profession, Indians would have their hospitals staffed by their own Sisters, and have their sick, whether at home or in hospital, devotedly and skilfully tended by their own thoroughly trained countrywomen.

At present, of course, they need the supervision and example of training by English nurses, but I see no reason whatever why it should not be "India for the Indians" in the matter of nursing, when we have material which certainly needs patient training and teaching, but which at the very outset has some of the essential characteristics necessary for the profession, for they are kind and good to their patients, they are deft with their fingers, and frequently exhibit the greatest devotion.

I have received several spontaneous letters of thanks from the patients of my private nurses, who, of course, are entirely on their own responsibility while at their cases, saying how skilfully and sympathetically they have performed their duties.

Surely this is a very great test, and yet one more proof to me that Indian women of decent education can be trained to become reliable, efficient professional nurses.

Yours faithfully,

S. G. TINDALL,

Lady Superintendent, Cama and Allbless Hospitals, Bombay.

We are not surprised to learn that her India pupils are responding to Miss Tindall's teaching. She believes in their capacity.

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