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Editorial.

THE TEACHING OF NURSING BY EXPERTS.

The question of the teaching of Nursing to the members of the Voluntary Aid Detachments of the Central Red Cross Society, under the authority of the St. John's Ambulance Association, by medical men, is arousing a great deal of interest, as will be seen by the letters already published in our correspondence columns.

When the St. John's Ambulance Association was founded in 1877 there were probably few nurses who could have lectured on the theory and practice of their own profession, for most of the nursing schools were still in their infancy, and the teaching given to probationers was, as a rule, very rudimentary. Besides which, many of the duties now performed by nurses, as a matter of course, were in those days undertaken by medical students.

But scientific medicine has developed marvellously in the last quarter of a century, and so also has nursing. The professions of medicine and nursing are analogous and interdependent, but diverse. The education of the medical practitioner does not include training in the practical details of nursing, and we claim that what a person cannot do he cannot teach. It is because the old belief dies hard that a nurse is an inferior doctor, that the doctor is taught all that the nurse is taught, and more besides, that the public consider the doctor the right person to teach nursing, whereas medicine and nursing are really distinct professions. No doubt a doctor can teach the theory underlying the practice of nursing, but should it ever happen that the enemy is at our gates, and our soldiers need first aid and nursing assistance from the Voluntary Aid Detachments in the temporary hospitals, it

will avail little if the members of these Detachments have learnt only the theory of nursing, and not the practical methods of making the sick and wounded comfortable.

Thirty years ago the general practitioner learnt by experience, if not in hospital, some of the art of nursing, for he frequently had to nurse his patients, as best he might, for lack of any trained help. To-day he relies on the assistance of nurses who have often spent almost as long in learning their special work as the doctor has in learning his, and the patient is much better cared for in consequence. Surely it is now time to acknowledge that nursing should be taught by experts in nursing—that is, by trained nurses. Such matters as bed-making, devices for the comfort of the patient, bathing, the care of the teeth, mouth, hair and nails; the preparation and serving of food, the best methods of feeding helpless patients, the administration of medicines; the purposes of irrigation and of simple enemata, and the best methods of giving them; the application of poultices, plasters and blisters; the management of sick infants and children; the care of the surroundings of patients, their linen and crockery; the disinfection of rooms, and innumerable other details, are all matters which need a nurse to teach thoroughly, because she alone possesses the practical skill and dexterity which results from the repeated performance of these duties under trained supervision.

We do not wish to undervalue the services rendered to nursing by the profession of medicine—they are many and great; but every man to his trade. Let doctors teach theory and nurses practical nursing, and the best results will be obtained, because in each case the teacher will be an expert.

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