

## OUR FOREIGN LETTER.

## FROM HOLLAND.

DEAR EDITOR,—It is a long time since I had anything of interest to tell you about nursing matters in Holland. Now at last there is some news worth telling; rather disheartening news.

I suppose you remember that in 1907 *Nosokomos* sent two petitions to the Government asking for State examinations for nurses. Both petitions were sent by the Minister of the Interior to the Central Board of Health for advice, and at last, a few months ago, the Special Committee, appointed by the Board of Health from amongst its members, issued its report. The Committee was rather slow in its work: it took three years and a half to consider the matter. Perhaps the members did not think the task very congenial, for *Nosokomos* is not beloved by the authorities.

The Committee began its work by instituting an inquiry as to the conditions in the hospitals and training schools in regard to working hours, preliminary training, training and examinations, sending out a long questionnaire to the Medical Superintendents and Matrons of all hospitals, asylums and nursing homes in the country.

In this way much valuable information was gathered. In the report the Committee first gives its opinion on the most important questions pertaining to nursing education, and concludes with expressing some advice as to necessary reforms. But this advice is very disappointing. It is true that the desirability of some control of the examinations is advised, that certain gaps in the training are admitted, and that the wish to remedy these is expressed, but all is done in such a hesitating way, and is interspersed with so much flattery for the *Nederlandsche Bond voor Ziekenverpleging*,\* that really it is sickening. It is most difficult to know what the real opinion of the Committee is, for every time it points out some fault, or proposes some improvement, it recedes quickly, as if saying, "*tout est pour le mieux dans le meilleur des mondes.*"

In its petitions *Nosokomos* asked for the intervention of the State in regard to the training of nurses, because the education given to our probationers up to the present time does not prepare them for the different kinds of nursing and social work the community requires of its nurses, but only for hospital work. It is still the same training that was given twenty years ago, when all social work was unknown, when medicine still ran in the old groove, not doing any preventive work. In those days the method of training in force was sufficient for the needs thereof, but at the present time more is required. The inquiry proved what *Nosokomos* has asserted for many years, that our nurses' training is quite insufficient for those who go in for social work and visiting-nursing. It was therefore a great disappointment to perceive that the Committee

\* A conservative association of doctors, nurses, and lay-people.

sides with the Medical Superintendents and Matrons, and considered the matter from the point of view of what kind of training is necessary for hospital service, instead of taking the broader view.

The inquiry proved:—

1. That a preliminary training is given hardly anywhere.
2. That there is no uniformity in the conditions of admission to the training schools for probationers.
3. That there is no uniformity in training.
4. That there is no uniformity in the examinations.

Of course, all hospitals insist as the first condition for admission to their training schools on good health and good morals. As to previous education, some hospitals desire the certificate of a higher school, most think the instruction given at a primary school sufficient, and a few do not even ask as much as that. To anyone knowing that in Holland children leave the primary school in their twelfth year, it is evident that the Committee has made a great mistake in declaring that the primary standard of education is sufficient for a nurse. It shows so clearly in what a low estimate nursing is held by the authorities, how it is in their eyes no more than an industry which any uneducated person can exercise.

The inquiry brought to light the sad lack of uniformity in the practical training, every hospital has its own views upon this matter and acts accordingly, no matter whether that training is sufficient to fit the nurse for her future career or not.

It is my opinion that in order to obtain a real, good, all-round training, some of the methods on which it is conducted now should be abolished. One of these is that the probationers form part of the staff from the very first day of their arrival and receive a small salary. This system is not right, and I do not know, at least in Holland, another professional school, for whatever profession, that has adopted a similar method of education. As soon as a school pays the pupils for their work it has the right to ask from them the kind of labour which gives most profit; it becomes a workshop instead of a school. The hospitals, as a result of giving a salary to the probationers, make them do work which could as well be done by servants, except for the fact that servants are more expensive than probationers, a fact that is admitted by none of the authorities. They say to the probationer, "A good nurse, one who loves her work, who is devoted to it, does not shun hard work, even to the detriment of her health," and make her do much household work during the whole time of training, thereby taking up the time which should be given to study and real nursing work. Whereas, when the probationers pay a small sum for their training, they will have the right to demand a thorough one in all the different branches of nursing.

*Nosokomos* is of opinion that the hospitals are in duty bound to give the probationers a good

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)