

THE INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF NURSES.

TUESDAY, AUGUST 6th.

MORNING SESSION.

The whole of Monday, August 5th, at the Cologne Congress, was devoted to the business of the International Council of Nurses and the reports from various countries. On Tuesday morning the sessions of the Congress begun.

THE OVERSTRAIN OF NURSES.

Miss M. A. Nutting, Director of the Department of Nursing and Health at Teachers' College, Columbia University, presided, and in opening the Session said that in these days, when we were considering afresh the capacity of the human machine, it was highly appropriate to consider the position of nurses—a body of workers who had given freely of their physical and mental strength—when industrial workers and universities were regulating the hours of pupils. She then called on Geheimrat Hecker, of Strasburg, to address the Congress on the subject of the overstrain of nurses.

Dr. Hecker, in an exhaustive and masterly treatise, discussed the whole question and said that a vital question of the day was the excess of work of nurses with consequent overstrain and undue demands upon their strength. Fatigue was physiological, over fatigue was pathological. He briefly reviewed the origin and development of nursing, beginning in the home with the care of the children and the ailing, and the dressing of injuries received in encounters with wild beasts. In ancient times also Germanic women followed their men to the battlefield in order to bind their wounds, and this, according to Tacitus, was the reason why the German men of those times held their women in such veneration. After the introduction of Christianity Religious Orders were founded, the members of which were animated by a love of God and of their neighbours. They gave their services freely, receiving no compensation, but provision for times of illness and old age was assured to them, so that when a woman helped her neighbours in illness it was considered quite natural that her services should be rendered gratuitously.

The advancement of civilisation, the increase of wealth, the development of science, and the recognition of the importance of health, and consequently of adequate nursing and the observance of the laws of hygiene, created demands which the Religious Orders were not able to meet. At the same time the desire of modern women for a suitable sphere of work developed, and thus nursing by seculars originated. Whilst the Old World, with its traditions handed down from the Religious Orders, still found it difficult to regard nursing otherwise than as a charitable duty, needing little or no pecuniary compensation, in the New World it had been founded on the basis of a recognised profession. At the close of the

nineteenth century domestic servants were so well paid, that they were unavailable for nursing, and at the same time it was necessary to find avenues of work for educated women. Nursing, therefore, was organised with the object of gaining the support of the intellectual woman. Women were taught steadfastness of aim in social reform, but from the beginning they were placed on an independent economic footing. Secular nursing and the organisation of private nursing on an independent basis did not, said Dr. Hecker, receive the same support from German hospital authorities as in America or England.

In Germany hospitals train their nurses for their own use and try to bind them to the service of the institution by a long contract and the prospect of a pension ultimately. In the United States of America a three-years' training was the rule. The nursing of the hospitals was thus adequately provided for, and it was natural that at the end of three years the nurses should move on, either to private work or to study some other branch of the profession. In England the conditions were similar.

Formerly in Germany each institution was allowed to determine the length of training for its nurses. Since 1900, however, a State examination had been introduced to be taken after a year's training in hospital. Only those who passed this examination might receive the diploma entitling them to the title of certificated nurse. In Prussia there were now 171 institutions in which nurses might prepare for the State examination.

After a short physiological sketch of the dangers of overwork, Dr. Hecker said that experience proved that a higher percentage of women workers than of men broke down because they were less able to bear the mental and bodily strain.

In Germany there were 6,300 hospitals with 370,000 beds, and in May, 1904, the number of professional nurses employed, principally in institutions, was 27,675. Of these 14,235 were Roman Catholics, 7,250 Evangelicals, 6,172 Seculars, and 11 Jewesses.

ORGANIZATION.

Turning to the organisation of the nursing profession, Dr. Hecker said that it was owing to the high educational standards of American nurses, many of whom had received a college training, and to the subsequent period of professional education enforced, that the standing of the profession was so high, and that its members enjoyed economic independence. A careful selection was therefore possible. In England conditions were much the same. Only those candidates were admitted who were of sound health and without hereditary taint. Germany was the third country to join the International Council of Nurses, but its conditions of training and organisation were totally different. Side by side with the Religious Orders many associations had sprung up, and ten years ago the German Nurses' Association was founded.

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