

not only be Superintendents but should also be the friends and comrades of the nurses under them.

DISCUSSION.

Sister Helene Meyer hoped that the Congress would strengthen the hands of the Matron in administration. She considered she should have a direct voice on the management, and mentioned the case of a highly qualified sister who could not get justice done in a difference with a young medical man, though she was absolutely in the right, because there was no one to voice her point of view, and the Oberin was unable to help her.

Miss Nutting said that she could not let the discussion pass without a few words. She emphasised the need of well educated women as the heads of training schools, and said that in all countries there was some danger lest the Matron should be principally a practical housekeeper. No one without a good general education could conduct a nurse-training school, which was a complicated organisation, on the best lines. There was need to urge the selection for admission to the training schools of women of good education, and appointments to the higher posts should certainly be limited to them.

DEFINITION OF DUTIES NECESSARY.

Miss Dock then summarised a paper contributed by Baroness Mannerheim, who said that there was great need for discussion on the position of the Matron, for nothing could vary more than the ideas on her duties and responsibilities, and it was important that those duties and responsibilities should be clearly defined.

In many countries the belief was held that the non-Matron system was best, a conviction based on the wrong impression which people received of what was really meant by a Matron at the head of a hospital.

Perhaps the fear of "petticoat government" was not wholly without foundation, for there were certainly instances of hospital rules which seemed written on purpose to crush all individuality out of those governed, but to mend an evil by going to the other extreme could never be considered a wise policy, and when the change advocated was not a step forward but a retracing of steps already taken, and a revival of dreary times gone by, reason should condemn such a change.

For it was not as if the non-Matron system were a new innovation. It was just the old order of things making for muddle and confusion, and which the genius of a woman once condemned with the words: "In disciplinary matters a woman only can understand a woman"; and "A training school without a mother is worse than children without parents."

She had seen nurses from several countries where this non-Matron system was now prevalent. She knew many of them, influenced in great part by their physicians and surgeons would, on being asked, say that they were much happier and felt much freer to do what they liked, and arrange

their life and their work as they pleased without a Matron to superintend them; but she knew also a number of nurses working under the same conditions, many of whom—especially those who had anything to do with the training of probationers—felt deeply the deficiencies of a system where there was no one to carry the responsibility of the whole, and to see that the instruction the youthful nurses had a right to receive was really systematically and thoroughly given.

Baroness Mannerheim urged strongly the need of a Matron to carry the responsibility as a whole, to see that the instruction the pupil nurses received was really systematic and thorough in its scope, and that each pupil received her share of training in the different wards. Also who should keep in mind the question not only of the work to be done by the young girls entrusted to the care of the hospital, but also the care of their health of body and mind if there were not a woman at the head of the institution? Sisters and nurses also needed sometimes someone to go to, and consult on questions upon which only a woman could give advice, and there must be someone to decide upon the work to be done, and when and how to do it, to arrange off times and holidays for the nursing staff, and many other things concerning the internal arrangements of the hospital.

She had often heard medical men say that if the Matron would limit herself to the housekeeping and be content with looking after the linen-room, they would not object to her, but it was her meddling with the nursing which could not be tolerated, and made the non-Matron system preferable. Baroness Mannerheim said that she had always come to the conclusion that what was meant by the *nursing* was the *treatment*, which was naturally a matter between the doctor and the ward sister; but this was not what was included in the nursing proper, the daily attendance to the needs of the patients, and to the cleanliness and hygiene of the wards, which ought not to be left entirely to the judgment of the different ward sisters.

If the sisters and nurses of the hospital, as ought always to be the case, had been chosen by the Matron who thoroughly knew them and their qualifications, she must be able to believe in their loyalty and goodwill, but nevertheless it was she who, either in person or with the help of assistants, must superintend the work and see that it was always done in a certain approved fashion, and that no slackness was allowed to creep into it. Only thus would she rest assured that the patients under her care received the attendance due to them, and only thus could the standard of work be reached without which no hospital could ever aspire to give the pupils entrusted to its care the training they had the right to receive.

The personality of the Matron was of the greatest importance, and permeated the whole hospital. If she were really as good and as strong a woman as she ought to be, you felt the happy harmonious spirit of the hospital at the gate. In the manner

previous page

next page