

A HISTORY OF NURSING.

THE RISE OF THE GERMAN FREE SISTERS.

The first chapter in the fourth volume of "A History of Nursing" relates the story of the rise of the German Free Sisters, a story of great importance and interest. Miss Dock writes:—"One who found it interesting to study the calling of the nurse, under the varied forms it took on in its evolution from the Middle Ages to the present day, would have been richly rewarded by a visit to Germany at the end of the last century. There, side by side, in full panoply, with all their characteristic features still in the bloom of vigorous life, could have been found Nursing Orders illustrating each historic variation, each successive phase in religious and economic status, as rural, feudal Germany changed to a modern industrial empire.

"The industrial revolution, silently and irresistibly advancing, altered nursing communities, too, as it shook the foundations of the home, turned wealth away from the convent, built the factory town, and cast thousands of women out into a new world to support themselves, and, often, others dependent upon them, as they best might. The Churchly Orders that had been so harmoniously adapted to the social conditions of a different age saw their supremacy slipping away. Germany shows perfect examples of hardworking and efficient Catholic Nursing Orders. They are practical, and follow the lead of medical science, but their numbers no longer sufficed to meet demands, nor did they as yet open secular schools. Then came the Deaconess Mother houses, but they, too, soon found their patriarchal basis was too limited—they could not expand indefinitely. Next were the first large secular schools for nurses upon the English pattern, Victoria House in Berlin, and the Nursing Association of the City of Hamburg." In the former, of which Fraulein Louise Fuhrmann was the first Superintendent, pupils were accepted without reference to their spiritual creed, "a matter of course now, it was revolutionary, or at least daring, then."

It is interesting to note that, "in 1869, the great scientist Virchow gave a lecture before an association of medical women in Berlin, in which he declared that nursing should be organised on strictly secular lines, with purely humanitarian purposes, and urged the following proposals:—(1) Men's wards should be nursed by women; (2) every large hospital

should have a training school; (3) small localities should have training committees; (4) nurses should unite in organisations; (5) special institutes should provide preparatory teaching in hygiene, dietetics, &c."

Amongst other of the more modern organisations were the Hamburg Nurses, whose home is the Erica House at the Eppendorf Hospital, the Associations of the Red Cross, the *Evangelische Diakonie Verein*, an association which owed its inception to Professor Zimmer, who held that the sisters should "retain as much individual freedom and independence as possible, and who therefore, after passing through definite preparatory stages, shared in the management of the Society's affairs, and were expected to choose their own work, a radical departure from the custom of the older associations.

"There were also nurses trained by the modern Societies of St. John, usually women of good family, who would not voluntarily work for a living, and were satisfied with a superficial training for philanthropic work, and cottage nurses, trained in rural districts or in provincial towns, who were expected to perform the labours of five women (mother, nurse, cook, cleaner, and housekeeper) in the houses of the poor, and whose willing patience and industry often excited the envious admiration of philanthropists from countries where women were not quite so strong or so submissive."

This, then, was the position at the beginning of the new century. There was a steady exodus of nurses from the older associations, "driven chiefly by the need of earning a more ample living, but partly also by revolt against an arbitrarily narrowed existence and starved personality," and "lonely and isolated, atoms tossed about in the labour market, were trying to support themselves at private duty or in positions. They were called the 'Free' or the 'Wild' Sisters. In reality, these were pioneers in the revolt against the unpaid labour of women." The problem facing these Sisters was "to obtain a living wage in competition with Motherhouses partly supported by charity or endowments, which had set the price for nursing service at a minimum impossible for those who were self-dependent workers."

A leader was needed for these isolated workers, and with the need, as so often happens, "when the opportune moment came she was ready, a woman more forceful and able than those already prominent, of executive ability superior, and with a sympathy and comprehension that excluded none"—Sister Agnes Karll.

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