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EDITORIAL.

CRAMMING.

The legitimate function of examinations in nursing and kindred subjects is to test the knowledge of candidates after a sufficient period of theoretical instruction and practical experience, the former affording a grounding in the principles underlying the practice of the art necessary for an intelligent grasp of the subject and its application, while skill in the performance of practical details can only be gained by their constant performance under expert supervision; both are therefore essential to the production of the finished and highly tempered article.

The illegitimate use of examinations is to regard them as the end, instead of as a means to an end—namely, the testing of knowledge. It is quite possible, as every one is aware, to “get up” a subject in a short time sufficiently to pass muster with examiners, and gain a given certificate, if that is the object of the candidate. But the knowledge so acquired may be as quickly forgotten when the certificate is gained, in which case the examinee is left with the barren satisfaction of possessing documentary evidence testifying to her possession of knowledge which, as a matter of fact, has been quickly lost.

The aim of all examiners should be to make this “cramming” impossible, and with this object the testing of practical work in any examination into the knowledge of nurses should be very thorough, for in no science or art is the old proverb more true than “practice makes perfect.” This part of the examination should therefore be conducted by trained nurses, themselves expert in details which make for perfection.

It is worthy of note that several speakers at the recent Nursing and Midwifery Conference commented on the short term of training and consequent cramming entailed

in branches of work in which they were specially interested. Both Miss M. O. Haydon and Mrs. Parnell deprecated the short term training in the case of midwives, Miss Haydon pointing out that, with the usual three months' course, the position of midwives undertaking the practical instruction of pupils was inevitably that of crammers, and Dr. Hawkes said much the same in regard to the teaching of massage, strongly advocating that a longer course of study and practical work should be required of candidates for the examination of the Incorporated Society of Trained Masseuses, and stating that it is impossible for the average pupil to assimilate and retain the knowledge required of her. In each case a three months' course is all too short in the case of a trained nurse taking these specialities as post graduate courses, and when the pupil has no previous knowledge of anatomy and physiology, or of practical nursing, it is absurdly inadequate. The whole three months is needed for the assimilation of knowledge concerning the special branch under consideration.

It may be “crammed” in three months sufficiently for pupils to pass muster with examiners, but no one knows better than those who have prepared the pupils, and, as successful coaches can show a long list of pupils passed, the unsatisfactory nature of that success.

Now that this country is apparently at last desirous of improving its educational methods let us hope that the quality of nursing education will receive consideration, and that thoroughness, not a mere smattering of superficial knowledge will invariably be required of pupils in both general and special branches of nursing. As Miss Huxley rightly stated to the Prime Minister recently, our profession needs quality as well as quantity, if it is to be really helpful to the profession of medicine and to the public.

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[previous page](#)

[next page](#)