

THE NURSING AND MIDWIFERY CONFERENCE.*

(Continued.)

MASSAGE.

A PLEA FOR A BETTER AND LONGER TRAINING IN MASSAGE.

Dr. L. A. Hawkes said that Peter Ling, of Stockholm, was the pioneer of the movement which raised medical gymnastics and massage out of the realm of empiricism and placed them on a sound scientific basis, while massage by direct contact of hand and skin was studied, and subsequently elaborated into a system by Metzger, of Amsterdam. Swedish Medical Gymnastics and massage as at present practised were really a combination of Ling's and Metzger's methods. Neither belonged to the medical profession, and its ever cautious members then, as now, looked with suspicion upon any form of treatment which did not come from one of themselves as savouring of charlatanism.

In the end the recognition of massage came through a medical man. In the eighties a treatment for neurasthenia originated by Dr. Weir Mitchell, of Philadelphia, was introduced into this country by Dr. William Playfair. Its principle features were isolation, rest in bed, and forced feeding, and massage was employed to replace exercise.

Owing to the lack of expert masseurs, who would maintain a moral influence over the patients, Dr. Playfair picked and trained his own nurses. The Society of Trained Masseuses was founded in 1894 and received its Charter in 1900 and had raised a profession from a condition which tended to sink as low as that to which 1900 years ago the practice of massage had fallen in Greece to one recognised and honoured by the English-speaking race.

THE TRAINING.

The value of massage and remedial exercises was now fully recognised by the medical profession, and every large hospital had its massage department, and in many a special teacher was engaged to instruct the nursing staff. With this advance, the masseuse had shared. More and more knowledge was required of her; and to obtain that knowledge, a longer period of training was required.

Outside the hospitals, physicians and surgeons felt the necessity for calling in the skilled assistance of the masseuse and medical gymnast; and the directions for treatment given to these skilled workers were often of a general character. It, therefore, behoved the masseuse to have some knowledge of the illness or injury from which the patient was suffering, the effect her massage and movements would produce, and to note quickly whether the results were beneficial or the reverse.

Dr. Hawkes said that it was in many ways to be regretted that the practice of massage had been so absolutely free and unrestrained, without any controlling power, either by legislation or

by some body with powers similar to those exercised by the General Medical Council, or the Incorporated Law Society.

The foundation of the Society of Trained Masseuses was an act of self-defence; and a protest against the results of insufficient training, which was bringing the whole body into contempt. The granting of the charter was but an act of grace.

It would have been better at that period to have established a Board of Control (perhaps, even now, it was not too late), whose function would have been to hold examinations which every man or woman wishing to practise massage would have to pass—with the power to supervise and inspect all training institutions. There would doubtless have been the usual protest against interfering with the liberty of the subject—but if liberty meant the power to grant certificates after a few weeks' training, with the natural aftermath of bad, or at any rate indifferent work, there were few who would not agree that servitude was sometimes better than independence.

Setting aside the methods of irregular practitioners, Dr. Hawkes discussed the training for the examination of the Incorporated Society. The requirement of the Society was that no student should be presented for examination who had not completed at least three months' study.

He thought that this period of training must have been decided upon in the days when less knowledge of the subjects was required, and when the standard of education of the students was not so high as at present. More importance was then attached to the practical work, and the other subjects were of a more elementary character than they are now.

While the demand for a higher standard of knowledge had increased, the regulation had remained unchanged, so that the examination which could have been passed at the end of three months in the early days could not possibly be successfully attempted now without resort to a process of cramming fatal to good work, and much to be deprecated. The speaker said he did not believe that any ordinary person could possibly absorb (so as to be of real practical use afterwards) the anatomy in Mrs. Palmer's book in less than six months, still less that in Miss Despard's book, giving 1½ to 2 hours a day to the work.

The subject might be taught, but the absorption of the teaching entirely depended on the receptivity and diligence of the student which was quite another thing.

Further, Dr. Hawkes showed that much more practical work is now demanded than formerly, of which he expressed his approval, but maintained that in elaborating the training great responsibility was accepted, and therefore it should be insisted that more time was given for training efficiently in the subjects required for the examination. He considered that greater opportunity should be taken to give instruction in the causes and symptoms of the diseases to be treated. This

* Held in London, April 1913.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)