

## OUR PRIZE COMPETITION.

### WHAT IS MATERIA MEDICA? OUTLINE A PRACTICAL COURSE FOR NURSES.

We have pleasure in awarding the prize this week to Miss Dora Vine, Eversleigh, Exmouth.

#### PRIZE PAPER.

Materia medica is that branch of medical science which deals with the materials employed as curative agents in the practice of medicine. Such "medical materials" are many and varied, and additions are constantly made. Those that have been proved to be of value are embodied in the "British Pharmacopœia," together with their dosage, &c. This official work is kept up to date, and all new substances of proved efficacy duly added, by the General Medical Council.

The term "materia medica" comprises substances obtained from the animal, vegetable, and mineral kingdoms. Most of these substances are prepared for administration in the form of what is popularly called "a bottle of medicine"—*i.e.*, drugs are manufactured and prepared carefully from various sources. The word "drug" originally meant "a dried herb," or simples, and these were collected in the country, and later herb gardens were planted to supply herbs grown under favourable conditions.

Nowadays, in addition to simples, mineral substances are largely used, and recently animal preparations have been employed.

In arranging a course on materia medica for nurses it must be remembered that the object in view is to render the nurse a more efficient help to doctor and patient by supplying her with the knowledge that will answer this purpose. A nurse should learn dispensing from a qualified chemist. The course I should arrange for nurses would be planned to extend through their training. That is, after a course of twelve lectures, during the nurses' first year, a monthly meeting would be held, in order to keep their knowledge up to date, and also to draw attention to actual cases in hospital that demonstrate some particular point.

The twelve lectures should be planned much on these lines:—

1. Materia medica: its meaning and uses.
2. General survey of substances used in medicine.
3. Outlines of history of materia medica, illustrated by reference to superstition, folklore, &c.
4. Simples (vegetable drugs) in common use.
5. Minerals in common use.
6. Animal preparations in common use.

7. Dressings and kindred preparations.
8. Mechanical agents (electrotherapy, &c.).
9. Natural waters, baths, &c.
10. Dispensing in relation to nursing, weights, measures, &c.
11. General rules to be observed with regard to drugs.
12. Methods of administration in common use.

The nurses should have these lectures in their *first* year, in my opinion, for it is then possible to imbue them with a due respect for the possibilities and dangers of their work, and this will have a great influence on their practical work and their patients during the second and third years' training.

#### HONOURABLE MENTION.

The following competitors receive honourable mention:—Miss Amy Phipps, Miss P. Robinson, Miss M. James.

The subject is evidently a difficult one for nurses to write upon, and is one on which, in many training schools for nurses, no systematic instruction is given.

We should advise all nurses to master the contents of the "Materia Medica for Nurses," by Miss L. L. Dock, of which the fourth edition has been published this year. It is in conformity with the "British Pharmacopœia," and is published by Messrs. G. P. Putnam's Sons, 24, Bedford Street, Strand, London, W.C., price 5s. It is designed to meet the needs of nurses, and fulfils this purpose admirably.

Miss Dock points out, for instance, that individual peculiarities have much to do in modifying the physiological action of drugs. The more highly strung nervous organizations respond more quickly, as a rule, to the action of drugs than do those of coarser fibre, and more quickly show evidence of over-dosing and mild poisoning. Among these temperaments are found many examples of what is called "idiosyncrasy"—that is, an increased susceptibility to the effects of a drug which entirely forbids its use, and for which no reason can be discovered.

#### QUESTION FOR NEXT WEEK.

State what you know of the care of patients suffering from a cerebral tumour.

#### IN SUPPORT OF STATE REGISTRATION.

The President of the Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses acknowledges with gratitude the following donations:—Anon., £2; Miss B. Kent, £1; Mrs. Lidyard, 10s.; Miss J. M. Grant (Patna), 5s.; Miss S. M. Marsters, 5s.

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