

## SHORTAGE OF NURSES IN AMERICA.

The Presidential Address of Miss Clara D. Noyes, R.N., President American Nurses' Association, given at Atlanta, after touching on the great progress in various directions, states that it is roughly estimated that 100,000 nurses have registered in order to conform to the nurse practice (registration) acts which exist in forty-six States, that there are about 3,000 schools of nursing from which probably 13,000 student nurses are graduated each year, and for which superintendents and instructors are required. Miss Noyes then refers to the great funds raised by nurses themselves for financing the propaganda for Rank for Nurses, which through their efforts became part of the Reorganisation Bill of the Army, large scholarships and loan funds have been placed within the reach of nurses desirous of preparing for public health nursing and as instructors in nursing schools, associations of nurses have raised great funds for the relief of disabled members—and to build a school of nursing in France (at Bordeaux) as a memorial to those nurses who gave their lives during the War—a very fine record of self-support. Miss Noyes adds: "We find our periodicals well established and our literature increasing." Hearty congratulations on this record. No profession can rise unless it controls its own press. But still all is not well with nursing even under the Commune system in the States.

Necessarily some unrest prevails. The nurses who went into active service, an army 20,000 strong, have come back from overseas or from military hospitals in this country, or from naval stations to which they were assigned, with a new point of view; some dissatisfied, it is true, some exalted by a broader and wider insight into the wonderful possibilities lying within their grasp; some physically unfit for nursing, but equal to some other form of work, ready and eligible for the re-education which the Government offers; others—and, alas! there are too many—held in the grasp of that dread disease, tuberculosis, for whom arrangements for care under proper conditions are being developed as rapidly as possible by Federal departments.

Miss Noyes called attention to a great scarcity of graduate nurses, and asks 'where are they all?' Estimating rather roughly, 15,000 released from active service, add to this the graduates of 1919, of probably 13,000 pupils, we should have at least 28,000 more nurses available for service than we had a year ago. What has become of them? From such information as can be secured, many seem to be leaving the profession entirely, many enter the business field which at present is offering lucrative positions and alluring possibilities; many are establishing homes for themselves in the country or are taking up land grants; as secretaries they seem to excel, while matrimony and tearooms beguile many from the ranks of active workers. We also find many, not leaving for something quite different, but entering related fields of activity, such as social service, anaesthesia, X-ray, and

laboratory technique; more recently our attention has been called to the fact that many are entering the field of oral hygiene. We are naturally concerned by these deflections from the straight path of nursing, for every one turning aside for what may seem a more attractive opportunity weakens our strength and scatters our power for usefulness. The unrest is not confined to nurses, it is noticeable in other professions as well.

"The exodus from our own ranks, however, is our problem, and is a genuine cause for alarm. We should like to see a definite campaign of education of the public to their responsibility in this direction undertaken. The importance and value of a nurse's education, her place in the economic and social scheme, proper schools, separate endowments, should be more generally and better understood. A different attitude should be developed toward the nurse. For example, at one moment she is declared by leading medical authorities the most important factor in our public health movement; at the next she is discredited, her work is belittled, she is deprived many times of an opportunity for initiative. . . . Can any profession grow and thrive under conditions as they now too frequently exist? Is a nurse necessary in the field as a public health worker or in the institution? Is she an important adjunct to the medical profession or is she not? If she is, then what can be done to interest her to enter the profession and keep her there after she has once entered? What can we do about it all? Isn't this one of the questions that we, as nurses, must try to answer? If it seems necessary to retrace our steps and begin all over, then we must begin the education of a nurse back in the public consciousness. There seems little use of urging young women to enter schools of nursing, if, because of conditions within, it becomes impossible for them to remain after they have entered. Every pupil that does withdraw is a propagandist against the system. Nurses cannot alone support or endow good schools. They need, as does every profession, the public back of them. They require the sympathetic understanding of the medical profession, they also require the support of an intelligent and educated public, at the same time they need to educate themselves to a wider comprehension of their own responsibilities toward the profession they represent and to the public they serve. We hear quite generally that commercialism is invading the ranks of nurses and some rather distressing stories are being told of excessive charges and of arbitrary and un-nurselike attitudes.

"Perhaps this is what one might expect as a natural reaction to years of servitude and it is at least in keeping with the times.

"While it is true that 'Every labourer is worthy of his hire,' we believe that we must still continue to make a few sacrifices, we are still pioneers and we should count it still a glorious honour to keep the lamp, lighted by Florence Nightingale so many years ago, trimmed and filled and always burning, we cannot allow it even to dim lest we lose the priceless position that we have gained in the world's work."

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)