

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED

THE NURSING RECORD

EDITED BY MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK, REGISTERED NURSE.

No. 2,000. Vol. 83.

MARCH, 1935.

Price Sevenpence.

EDITORIAL.

A CULTURAL BACKGROUND.

The selection of student nurses, or, as they are more often called in this country, probationers, for training as nurses is one of the most important duties of the Superintendents of Nurse Training Schools, requiring judgment, experience, and a keen insight into character; further, not only must candidates be able to show that they are physically and mentally well equipped, but they should also be able to prove that they are possessed of social experience in addition to academic education.

In North America, that is in the United States and Canada, the demand of nurse-organisers for "a cultural background" for student nurses will be realised to be of definite meaning. Thus, Miss Effie J. Taylor (President of the National League of Nursing Education), speaking at its Annual Convention at Washington last year, said: "Because nursing is so closely related to preventive medicine and so deeply concerned with the building up of the individual as a whole from childhood to old age, the selection of students is becoming a matter of the greatest importance. They should be chosen with care and with deep concern, not only for their usefulness during the period of years they will spend with patients in the hospital, but for their capacity to grow and work in the world of men where the ultimate goals of nursing abide. Young women to-day are preparing themselves through general education for their future work as women in the past have never done. . . . While scholarship is important and to-day fundamental, it is not in itself enough. The successful nurse must also have the personality and the strength of character which will enable her to appreciate and to understand the forces which motivate human behaviour. She must possess a broad sense of justice in analysing the problems inherent in her own life and in the lives of others, and she should have a loyal and deep sense of honour and integrity of purpose in dealing with human frailties and shortcomings. . . ."

"The prevailing concept of nursing is practical, even sometimes commonplace and literal, but how little of nursing can be explained in these terms. The real depth of nursing can only be made known through ideals, love, sympathy, knowledge and culture, and expressed through the practice of artistic procedures and relationships. Nursing is 'a chapter in the book of life'—human, real, and akin to brotherly love. The nurse is in very truth her brother's keeper! She knows his strength and his weakness. She shares his hopes and his fears. She feels his elations and his depressions.

She listens to the whisper from his inmost soul. Nursing shares in life's prosaic gloom, but also it shares in life's poetic beauty. Of such is the nature and the spirit of nursing."

This is a fine conception, and in the demand we recognise a sound basic principle in relation to nursing education, and the vocational school of nurse-educators in this country are in warm sympathy with social education and experience for young women before they are permitted to offer their services to the sick. The culture, refinement, and the broad sympathies and outlook on life developed by travel and contact with all sorts and conditions of men and women, will help, moreover, to a knowledge of foreign languages so important to the nurses of to-day and of which the majority are woefully ignorant.

Too often the atmosphere of the secondary schools in this country, from which many applicants for the Nursing Profession are drawn, is cramped and constricted. Many teachers, moreover, have not taken the trouble to acquaint themselves with nursing ideals and with the requisite qualifications for those who desire to enter the Profession of Nursing. The profession of teaching, as a whole, has never shown itself in sympathy with the aspirations of nurses, nor has it encouraged its pupils on leaving school to regard nursing as a desirable vocation. Now that it has suddenly become convinced that it is the proper authority to instruct future nurses in the subjects for the examination conducted by the General Nursing Council, in accordance with the Nurses' Registration Act, at the end of the first year's training, is it surprising that the Nursing Profession questions whether it is qualified to do so and if its motives are entirely altruistic.

Now that Nurses have gained their Act and finance the working of it themselves, the teachers will be well advised to leave them to carry out the provisions for professional education without outside intervention.

Professor Annie W. Goodrich, until recently Dean of Yale University School of Nursing, claims a college course as the most essential foundation upon which to build the professional course, through the greater maturity of the student, the broadened and deepened social experience, and above all, the discipline of the science courses, courses which she deems to have a spiritual value sometimes overlooked—for science requires that greatest factor in character building, integrity: integrity of purpose, of method, of interpretation.

This certainly affords the cultural background which is of the utmost importance for all classes, so that they may be fitted to fill higher social positions.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)