

THE CAP

WITH modern hairdos of different shapes and magnitudes embellishing the head of the modern miss, the nursing cap which is adorned as a symbol and embodiment of her dedication to the noble profession has been thrown to insignificance at the back of the head in various sizes to suit the individual taste and convenience.

The cap now has lost all its original use and purpose and is more a mark of identification and rank with stripes and frills adding colour and glamour. Originally it was meant to prevent the danger of infection and later from being an obstruction in the way (eg. long hair).

It is not the modern nurse alone who seems to question the significance of the cap. The old-time nurses who have risen to administrative positions find it inconvenient and there are yet others who seem to feel belittled with the headgear among officials of other professions.

What is the genesis of this cap which is revered at the capping ceremony? What does it signify? Does the cap help stimulate the wearer and remind her of the pledges and ethics of her profession? Is it for keeping the hair in place? Or is it just an identification mark?

Why a Cap?

No one has ever discovered the true origin of the cap. Its origin is identified with the tradition and custom of women to cover their heads. A great many pictures of Queen Victoria portray her with her cap. Indian women covered their head in olden days as a mark of modesty and maturity evoking respect and dignity. It was a means of security (Purdah).

The cap is as old as nursing itself. Florence Nightingale took her first course of training in nursing from the Protestant Deaconess Institute at Kaiserswerth in Germany in 1836 and the nurses trained at this institute wore stiff white caps. Sisters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul who established the first modern nursing school in Paris in 1864 were in the habit of using a headgear to cover their head and Florence Nightingale was associated with them before she began to study nursing.

The Nurses' cap in India is of British origin. British nurses are said to be the first nurses to land in India to serve in the hospital at the St. Thomas Mount in Madras (now General Hospital) set up by East India Company. British nurses used veils closed at the back for student nurses and open veils for the staff. With the coming of American Nurses and Sisters of Charity in the later centuries a mixed variety of caps were worn by nurses in India and each nursing school followed its own pattern.

Five Reasons

However, the nurses' cap has become a definite tradition of today's schools of nursing and the capping ceremony has become a significant event in the nurse's life when she dedicates herself to the service of humanity. Each nurse's cap speaks for her school of nursing or state nursing service.

The cap makes the nurses' uniform complete and presents her complete professional semblance. The cap is the symbol of recognition and acceptance and one cannot

imagine a nurse without a cap. The cap brings dignity to her personality as a member of a noble profession. The cap signifies her dedication to duty and crowns her as the Queen of her profession.

With the vanishing sense of vocation, the diminishing sense of pride and the growing self-oriented thoughts among nurses, the cap seems to lose its significance.

Caps in the Past

The first cap worn by nurses of the New England Hospital, Boston in 1873 was made of crinoline—a round pleated top on a stiff pleated frill. Student nurses wore only "a cotton dress and a pair of felt slippers."

In 1876 the Bellevue Hospital, New York, introduced a uniform dress for the nurses partly "to distinguish them from nurses coming from elsewhere" and the uniform prescribed included a cap.

The first school for nurses in Canada, Mack Training School, adopted the cap in 1879. The early caps had an edge of double fluting around the edges, the uniforms were of dark blue material.

The Massachusetts General Hospital introduced caps in 1878 "against the wish of the nurses." When the probationer was accepted she was given crinoline, cut according to a pattern, and the ruching. She made her own cap. Later a large cap almost circular was designed to cover the hair.

The first cap worn by the student nurses of Brooklyn Maternity before 1900 consisted of a small lace-edged handkerchief gathered to stand up on top of the head with points front, back and sides. The shape has undergone a change since 1917.

The Woman's hospital of Philadelphia introduced the cap in 1878 for the nurses in training "to cover their hair, to keep their appearance modest and neat." The cap covered most of the hair.

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