

THE FUTURE

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BEFORE the immensities of this title one may, I trust, be pardoned, for faltering, and for taking the liberty of modifying it to something of a less venturesome nature; to an attempt instead to consider briefly the educational foundations we are making for the future of nursing.

"The Communion of Saints," says our most modern of philosophers, Alfred Whitehead, "is a great and inspiring assemblage, but it has only one possible meeting place, and that is in the present. The present contains all that there is. It is holy ground, for it is the past and it is the future."

The present does indeed seem "holy ground" as we gather in this city of memories; a city whose archives preserve, and whose beautiful statues enshrine the story of the heroic deeds nearly three centuries ago of Jeanne Mance, the founder and first nurse of the Hotel Dieu; a city which has watched the endless throng of devoted women, long of one faith, now of many faiths, who have followed where she led the way. We can still catch the glow of the flame which inspired them in the generous lives and labours of the nurses of to-day.

The rise of nursing is one of the great movements of a great period in history. It began, when, nearly seventy years ago, the idea was set free in the world that knowledge and training were essential in the care of the sick. Notable in itself, as designed to revolutionize the age-old task of nursing, not merely by advancing new ideas about it, but by setting in motion a system of training through which these ideas could be put into effect, the event becomes momentous when seen in its true perspective as an advance which was to release the energies of women in widely fruitful directions, and lead the way to many new opportunities for them. "You have started them. There will be a woman in the Cabinet in 1930," says Lord Palmerston to Florence Nightingale, in the delightful play about her by Reginald Berkeley, now appearing in London. It is called "The Lady with a Lamp."

Behind Florence Nightingale's conviction that nursing is an art requiring careful training based upon scientific knowledge, was the driving force of a constructive imagination and of administrative genius. Behind it was a plan, a workable plan, through which the idea took on form and substance and grew and spread, until now it is found in nearly every part of the civilized world in the modern profession of nursing.

This Congress of the International Council of Nurses, with representatives from forty countries, is in itself evidence of the growth and vitality of the profession and we are glad that the brilliant founder of the Council, Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, is here to see the results of her handiwork—the living, growing unity of nursing which caught her vision many years ago. To see how, one after another, many of the reforms and advances which she envisaged, and for which she so vigorously strove, have been brought about.

A study of the past can tell us a good deal about how we have reached our present stage of growth and development, and it is easy to trace in various phases of these, throughout the years, the ideas and efforts of those among our predecessors who were constantly searching for better ways, and constantly laboring to bring them into being.

We can almost as easily trace, too, the results in the present of those who have avoided all such effort. There is an old Latin proverb which says, "He who is silent consents." There are others, too, who, satisfied with existing conditions, have striven to preserve and perpetuate them. I do not, of course, need to mention that the latter is the more common point of view and that by far the larger number of people dislike change heartily, and will often work hard to prevent it. Quite familiar in our present is the old cry of Hezekiah, "Let not the evil come in my time, O Lord."

In trying to see what kind of a future is in the making for nursing and for nurses we shall need not only to know existing conditions but to know also something of conditions in the past, in order to understand the nature of the influences which have shaped the present. Let me pause here to say that while the subject in its elements is of the gravest importance in the development of nursing anywhere, I must necessarily limit my discussion to the conditions in the United States with which I am most familiar.

A distinguished educator thus describes three successive stages of growth through which the professions usually pass. The first stage is *expansion*—more schools, more students—this makes inevitable the second stage, that of *standardization*,—set up standards and enforce them as far as you can. Then follows the period of criticism—the educational effort must justify itself by its results. Nursing is still expanding, still trying to create its standards and is very much engaged in critical study and analysis of its work and education system. But before there was any professional education, there was the still earlier stage of *apprenticeship*. This still exists widely in nursing though not elsewhere, and nursing is therefore peculiar in that it seems to be struggling along in all four stages of growth simultaneously.

The writer describes nursing aptly as an *emerging* profession—unquestionably professional on its highest level, but not completely so on its lowest.

For some obscure reason this picture of nursing affords me a good deal of satisfaction. Perhaps the fact that we are struggling along in all the stages at once may explain some of the surprising contradictions that appear whenever one attempts to show the progress of nursing. That substantial gains have been made in the education of nurses is evident when we compare the present with the past. It is only when we compare nursing educationally with the other professions that we see how far behind them we are in certain important ways, and what a vast amount of work is still ahead of us waiting to be done. One is impressed not more by what has been changed than by what has remained unchanged.

It is necessary, however, to remember that nursing is a calling in which tradition has always been a peculiarly powerful influence, richly stimulating in certain ways, but given to the forging of chains in others—as, for instance, in setting up poverty, obedience and self-immolation as ideals in themselves—and it is important also to keep steadily in mind, that nursing is a work almost entirely performed by women, in most countries, and that advancement has not always been made easy for them.

Let us glance at the picture which nursing presents to-day. It is an impressive one in numbers—there are hundreds of thousands of nurses in the working world, and they form, next to teachers, it is said, the largest existing body of professional women. Impressive also is their field of work; the vast ranges of human effort concerned with the relief of suffering, the care of the sick, and with the protection of health among the people. This vital field is so varied, so continuously expanding, that at times it seems almost to defy limitation.

Hospitals in great number take the first place here, numerous and diversified in large cities, provided in many towns, appearing in rural communities, and increasing apparently everywhere.

The complex mechanism of the modern hospital cannot move without an organized body of nurses. To carry on its unceasing activities they must be here, there, everywhere—at the bedside, in the operating room, in clinic, in laboratory. There are those who nurse, those who supervise nurses, and others who are responsible for the direction of all nursing in every department of the hospital, day and night—the hospital, indeed, seems to belong to this body of nurses—to be its natural home. In many hospitals this nursing service is also a school for the training of nurses—the duties just outlined are performed by student nurses, the supervisors are their teachers and the Superintendent of Nurses combines her executive task in the hospital with the administration of the school and assumes the educational duties which it involves.

I know of no way of presenting adequately the difficulties inherent in this combination of tasks, so widely differing in nature, without seeming

extravagant. The theory being, that the hospital and the school are one, and that their needs are virtually identical—the practical problem is to make the facts in the situation square with the theory. And since the purposes and functions of hospital and school are in reality of a fundamentally different nature, the attempt to do this sets up naturally a perpetual conflict of interests and loyalties.

The task of endeavoring to harmonize these into a justly ordered scheme, protecting equally the sick in the hospital and the students in the school, falls upon the single individual who directs both the school and the hospital nursing service. No one will doubt her need of extraordinary qualities and qualifications.

By far, however, the larger number of sick people are not cared for in hospitals—they must be nursed in their own homes; and since no two households or individuals are alike in their needs or demands, since the crisis of sickness sets up in each troubled domain its own special requirements, it is inevitable that this sphere of nursing should be peculiarly exacting. It is an important and difficult field of ill-defined duties and responsibilities and of delicate personal adjustments. It calls for the judgment that comes from knowledge, and for sympathy born of understanding. More than half of all nurses, it is said, are engaged in this work of private nursing in families.

The early idea of nursing was the care of the sick, but Florence Nightingale had a different conception of the meaning of the word, and pointed out that there were nurses of the sick and nurses of health, and to-day it is recognized that the successful growth of the public health movement has become dependent, in essential ways, upon the activities of such workers, now called public health nurses. Their energies are centered mainly in efforts to prevent sickness, to detect disease in its incipient stages, and bring it under medical care at a time when it can be controlled, and their tasks call them to such points in the social structure as offer the largest promise of fruitful results. They are thus occupied in thousands, and their lines of work are interwoven between homes, public schools, clinics, factories and shops, and in increasing numbers in the health departments of city and state.

This meagre presentation of the field of nursing does little more than barely outline the three main branches of work in which nurses are now universally engaged; and as we consider the seriousness of their nature, the unusual and varied conditions under which they are carried on, the responsibilities they involve, and the amount of knowledge and understanding required, we are impressed anew with the extraordinary difficult problem which the educational preparation of such a body of workers presents. It has always been and is to-day, the great problem in nursing.

Up to a recent period the only preparation available in most countries for any branch of nursing, was that provided in hospital training schools, and this is still all that most nurses can obtain. There are, however, certain nursing schools conducted under independent auspices, of which noteworthy examples are found in France and Italy, but these are few in number.

These hospital schools exist in thousands—there are well over two thousand in the United States alone—and they are still rapidly increasing in number.

They represent an established system in which the essential characteristics are alike throughout in each institution, a system which places schools of nursing in the position of hospital departments, responsible for the conduct of all nursing activities. The educational ideals of these schools are shaped to conform with such hospital activities, and their growth and development are, in the main, restricted to the opportunities lying within the spheres of the hospitals with which they are connected, or with other hospitals of special types.

After fifty years of continuous experiment with this educational system, we are, I think, in a position to come to some correct conclusions about it, to determine how far it is answering the needs of the present day.

That the close connection of nursing schools with hospitals is indispensable in the training of nurses may be taken for granted; we can see no rational scheme for the education of nurses in which hospital training would be any less essential or important than it is to-day. We would, in fact, make it more important; but we can also see, that long before this there should have been proper safeguards erected to protect nursing schools from the complete subjection to hospitals into which they have fallen; from becoming the proprietary schools which they now are, almost universally.

The Chancellor of a prominent American University, in a recent discussion of the education of nurses, pointed out that nursing exhibits the only profession left in which the student is looked upon as a source of profit. Inherent in the system that permits this lie almost measureless possibilities of exploiting student-nurses in the service of the hospital; the only check upon this must come from the conscience of the individuals directing their activities; the system itself provides none.

But people transcend the systems they create, and in the hands of women of exceptional ability, courage, and devotion, and under the better and more generous type of hospital administration, schools of nursing have slowly been brought to a notable point of efficiency. The needs of hospitals have been unfailingly met, and the public provided with an ever-increasing number of nurses of a high level of skill and competence.

Moreover, in a good many schools a fine spirit of idealism has prevailed. Time does not permit me to review the long struggle of these women to build up in their schools a satisfactory system for the education of nurses; to establish suitable standards of fitness for admission; to work out and maintain adequate courses of instruction; to secure funds for the payment of teachers and lecturers; to shorten the hours of duty for students in the hospital; and to reduce for them the burden of unsuitable and educationally unprofitable tasks. I can only repeat that the progress made under the conditions has been remarkable.

At the close of its long and searching study, the committee on Nursing Education, in the most important report ever made on the subject, could only say, "It is a progress made in the face of indifference, negligence, and of active opposition from those who should have been the first to encourage it. . . . a progress moving squarely against the vested interests of hospitals long in control of the destinies of nursing education."

A justifiable expedient of early days, in keeping with the conditions and needs of the times, this system has survived for over a half-century, and still lives in an era with which it is strangely out of harmony. In all this long period no change in the position of the nursing school in the hospital has ever been effected. It is still without independent life of its own, without funds, with little freedom to initiate or change educational policies or methods, and burdened with heavy responsibilities and routine duties in the service of the hospital. As the Medical Director of one of our leading hospitals said to me recently, "The School of Nursing is the backbone of the hospital." To paraphrase Strachey, "The string by which the school is tied is sometimes long, but it is always tied." Confronted with new problems in the education of nurses, whose widening fields of work made new demands upon their knowledge and capacities, our schools have, for the most part, found themselves powerless to make the necessary readjustment of ideas and methods. An interesting example of this is seen in their efforts to develop an adequate scheme for the preparation of public health nurses.

It has long been recognized that a system so fundamentally wrong in principle should not endure, and for years the subject has been the theme of discussion and controversy. Much has been said to show the necessity of securing for this large, active and rapidly growing profession, freedom to develop its schools in conformity with the changing requirements in an ever-changing world. To those who have given the most serious study to the question, it has become increasingly clear that such freedom could only be gained by separating the school from the hospital, and transforming it into an institution concerned wholly with the education of nurses, and provided with the form of government and resources which

would best enable it to carry out that purpose. But the practical advantages of retaining the existing relationship of nursing school to hospital have proved so great, and the practical difficulties in the way of creating and maintaining independent schools have seemed so insurmountable, that progress has been slow.

Nevertheless, progress in this direction has been made. Gradually a new element has entered into the situation which has resulted in a co-operation between schools of nursing and other educational institutions, and has brought to the education of nurses certain necessary resources and facilities which hospitals could not provide.

Early traces of such co-operation appear in the efforts years ago, to secure for student nurses some elementary instruction in the sciences, as a foundation for the later hospital training. The early "Preliminary Courses" were provided in institutions entirely unconnected with hospitals. But the first strong impetus in this direction came from an effort some years ago by a group of superintendents of nursing schools to prepare themselves for their educational responsibilities. Though they were all teaching or directing teaching, few of them had any preparation for such work, and they sought and obtained opportunities for the needed further study, in a well-known College for Teachers of a great university.

A few years later another great forward stride was made and a School of Nursing was established in an important state University, on the same basis as other professional schools, with the creation of a special degree for its graduates.

These mark the first stages of the new movement in the education of nurses, which has brought it within the realm of university activity and is awakening much general educational interest. It has opened up for nurses the wealth of intellectual opportunity long freely open to students of many other professions and occupations; for those who would be doctors, dentists, pharmacists, for engineers of many types, for teachers, social workers and business men or women. While the movement began in this country, and has reached a stage of considerable importance both in the United States and Canada, it has extended into other countries where certain promising beginnings are being made.

The relationships through which universities and colleges are combining in the education of nurses are of different types, ranging from the independent, endowed nursing schools of which Yale and Western Reserve University afford conspicuous examples, and the endowed graduate department of Teachers' College Columbia University, to affiliations of various kinds which nursing schools may gain for their students opportunities to secure through properly equipped teachers, laboratories, libraries, the needed knowledge. These affiliations include not only universities

and colleges, but such other educational institutions as may be able to co-operate satisfactorily.

Already the vitalizing influence of these new relationships upon the education of nurses are seen in many ways. The most important, of course, appear in the larger number of more highly qualified women entering our schools; they appear further in the whole range, scope and character of the instruction offered; in the larger significance given to the entire scheme of hospital activities, and the new meanings they take on. The conditions of student-training are improved, there is a different kind of supervision; hours of hospital duty for students are shorter, and more graduate nurses are provided to make this possible. It is of the advances in this respect made in a university school that its Director can write, "Our School is really supplementary to the nursing staff."

The co-operation of the university with the hospital makes easily possible the opening up of a whole new field of post-graduate training, hitherto educationally undeveloped, in the special branches of nursing, in which highly-trained workers are so sorely needed.

Finally, and of the utmost importance is the influence exerted on the public mind. People are taking more interest in the educational needs of nurses. All substantial endowments for these have, I believe, been given to schools of nursing connected with Universities.

"The task of the university," says Whitehead, "is to weld together imagination and experience." Its combination with the hospital in the education of nurses seems an almost perfect adaptation of that idea, serving at once to strengthen, to energize, to enrich and to deliver it from some of the benumbing effects of continuous routine. We are too near the event to appraise and evaluate truly the changes that are taking place, but what appears to be certain is, that we are in the midst of a liberalizing movement in nursing—some thing destined to set free the mental and spiritual energies of nurses, and to permit them to flow into new and wider channels of usefulness to human beings, into better care for the sick, better protection of the well, better and more hopeful lives for the nurses themselves.

To the question therefore that may arise, how far can we go in these efforts to add the resources and powers of universities and other educational institutions to the opportunities and experience of the hospital; to obtain for nurses freedom for educational development in their own field of work, I must answer unhesitatingly, just as far as is possible. Believing as I do that universities, and all educational institutions, as well as hospitals, exist for the service of the people, I would see that service furthered, by placing schools of nursing among the professional schools of the universities of this country and of other countries as far as existing conditions would make that relationship a practically wise measure.

And I would see it furthered by every effort to enlist the aid of other institutions capable of providing for the training of nurses those essentials which the hospital alone proves unable to supply.

The movement in this direction will set its own limits, but to the application of the principle of freedom in education for which it stands, there are no such limits. And to uphold this principle is quite within the power of most hospitals of such standing as would justify their participation in educational work. It is within their power to work out and establish a different form of organization for their schools, and a kind of government securing for them freedom for the proper development of every phase of their legitimate work. It is within their power to co-operate in efforts to obtain resources for the conduct of their schools, and to create an informed public opinion on this most important subject. May we not venture to assure hospitals that they will gain and not lose in such a sharing of power and responsibility?

I am sorry to leave untouched some of the important questions in nursing which must in the future be answered, and will call for exceptional knowledge, ability and courage. The grave problems of unemployment, which is now very serious in many parts of this country, is perhaps the most pressing of these at the moment. But this is in part an outcome of the educational questions which we are considering here.

My discussion this evening has been centered upon one issue—the need for providing for the nursing of the future an educational foundation; of different character from that upon which nursing in the present is built. We lay that foundation when we ensure as far as we are able, that those who follow us shall be women who can bring to the changing problems of the future a good measure of intellectual capacity, and that the schools in which they are trained shall be given freedom and resources to strengthen and develop such capacities. The need for intelligently educated nurses will not diminish in any future of which we can conceive, but there can be no final conception of the right education for them; this must be a steady evolutionary process.

No one of us knows what the future may hold. It is beyond any reckoning of ours. But living as we do in an era when scientific discovery is transforming the world, when “the elements are changing visibly before our eyes,” we can hardly fail to see that nursing so intimately bound up with the deepest necessities of human beings, must share the changes which affect them. The systems, methods and institutions we cherish to-day may fade and pass, but the developed mind and imagination of future nurses must be equal to the task of creating new ways, new ideas. I know but one foundation upon which the nursing of the future with all its inspiring possibilities can be safely built, and that is the educated minds and spirits of those whose work it will be.