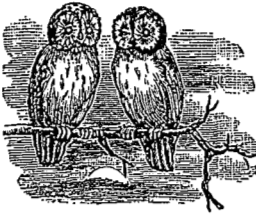


Matrons in Council.

DISCUSSION ON MRS. STRONG'S PAPER.

(See page 307, November 10th.)



The CHAIRMAN (Miss ISLA STEWART) said she fully endorsed all that had been said by Mrs. Strong in her admirable paper. But her scheme suggested one difficulty—that of expense. This probably would not be excessive in Glasgow, but would be almost certainly heavy in a place like London. All Matrons knew from their experience that the well-trained Nurse was the most obedient, because she had learnt to recognise her own ignorance; it is the untrained Nurse who trusts in her ignorance, and makes a law for herself. Miss Stewart strongly advocated a preliminary examination of candidates who desire to enter a Hospital as Probationers. The ten minutes spent by the Matron in choosing a Probationer was insufficient, for some who appeared to be most intelligent often afterwards turned out to be disappointing. The preliminary course of education and examination would therefore give the Matron greater opportunities, and so enable her to gauge more accurately the various capacities of the candidates for admission into the Hospital. (Applause.)

Mrs. BEDFORD FENWICK said that the meeting was undoubtedly an historic one, as she believed it to be the first time Matrons had exercised their right to meet together as Hospital officials to discuss matters concerning their work and duties. About seven years ago a small meeting was held in London, attended by about fourteen Matrons, all enthusiastic, perhaps somewhat inexperienced, but very much in earnest. They drew up a small programme in which they advocated much that Mrs. Strong had now suggested in her paper. Upon presenting this, however, to the leaders of the medical profession, they were told that it was, in their opinion, rather premature, and that various preliminary steps were needed to lead up to it. Thereupon they hid away their advanced programme, but hoped, and indeed were determined, that though they might have to wait ten, fifteen, twenty years, they would do all in their power to bring about the reforms which were therein embodied, and which they knew, from practical experience, were urgently needed. (Applause.) But the beginning was made, the Royal British Nurses' Association was started, and formulated a tentative scheme of Registration for Nurses, by which both Nurses and the public could be protected from incompetent persons, claiming to act as trained Nurses. The scheme met, of course, with much opposition; but the Association knew precisely what it wanted; it meant to succeed, and it had succeeded. (Applause.) It was now working quietly, steadily and successfully towards its ultimate goal, and the final realization of the programme of 1887. But there had now arisen the feeling amongst a number of Matrons that they also require to be very specially educated, in order that they should be able to take a more active interest and sympathy in the work and opportunities of their subordinates; and this has led to the formation of the Matrons' Council, which was now holding its first Conference. As they all knew, a Matron is responsible for the health of her Probationers; and what causes so many Nursing pupils to break down, is not so much the manual labour involved in their work as the combination of physical and mental strain which it entailed. The suggestions made by Mrs. Strong, and which are being carried out in her Hospital, would improve the character of the work done, and obviate the danger to health. But, in connection with these efforts on the part of Matrons and Nurses, another reform is needed. It is necessary that the Governors of Hospitals, Chairmen and Treasurers, should learn more con-

cerning the responsibilities which they undertake. If this received its due recognition, there would be far less inefficient Nursing in Hospitals and Infirmaries than there is to-day. (Hear, hear.) Then, further, those who undertake the work of teaching Probationers must be trained to teach. Too much stress could not be laid upon the necessity of choosing those who have the sympathy and aptitude to teach to take the post of Ward Sister; and all Matrons would do well to bear this in mind in selecting such officials. (Applause.) As to the proposal to draw a hard and fast rule as to how much a Nurse must not learn, Mrs. BEDFORD FENWICK considered that no human being had a right to dictate to another on such a matter, or to attempt to place a boundary to the acquisition of knowledge by a fellow-creature. (Applause.) Of course there must be a minimum knowledge and qualification; but no one should presume to say that a Nurse must only know the elements of this, or of that, subject. Concerning the question of initial expense to Probationers—of course, if each small Hospital kept up an efficient training school for a few pupils the outlay would be considerable; but that difficulty could be obviated by instituting a central school, to which the Probationers at surrounding smaller Hospitals could go to obtain their theoretical instruction. The R.B.N.A. had started this winter an educational course, which may in time develop into an invaluable centre of preliminary education. It is undoubtedly wise that the elements, at any rate, of the theoretical knowledge necessary for a Nurse to gain should be obtained before she entered the wards. In addition to these reforms, they would finally require State recognition. Each Nurse would then be hall-marked. Such a step would result in protection to the public and the Nurse, and would give far greater legal and social status to the profession than it possesses at present. (Much applause.)

Dr. COUPLAND said: We may congratulate the Nursing profession upon the step taken at the Royal Infirmary, Glasgow. Mrs. Strong alluded to the prevalent plan of carrying on theoretical teaching concurrently with ward work. Under such circumstances it is difficult, if not impossible, for a young woman to get time at all adequately to grasp the elementary basis upon which the Nursing profession is founded. Yet there are those who would strongly advocate the maintenance of the present state of things on the ground that it is advantageous for the student to see the body in action; in short, that practical experience and theoretical knowledge should be combined. He, however, could not take that view; and hoped that Mrs. Fenwick's dream would one day become a reality, but it must be waited for because even in the establishment of a central association great opposition was encountered. Turning to the financial side of the scheme, he believed that many who enter upon the career of Nursing have practically no means; and he feared that to impose an entrance fee in the shape of an expensive preliminary education would tend to deprive many who would make excellent Nurses, of the power to enter the profession. However, he hoped the Paper would be widely circulated, and be read not only by Nurses, but by Hospital Managers, and the general public. (Applause.)

Miss ANNESLEY KENEALY begged to entirely disagree with the remarks of the last speaker as to the expense of a Nurse's preliminary education. She supposed the expense of becoming a doctor was a bar to many promising young men; and many would like to go to the Universities but could not afford it. But it has never been suggested that medical or University fees should in consequence be done away with. (Much laughter.) It is too generally agreed in the family that all the money should be spent on the boys, and nothing on the girls. (Laughter.) As a woman she entirely disapproved of such a division. (Much laughter.) Of course some women would be prevented from becoming Nurses because of the initial fees; but the standard should not be lowered to save a few poor women. Turning to the subject of Uniform—she said they had heard of a uniform

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