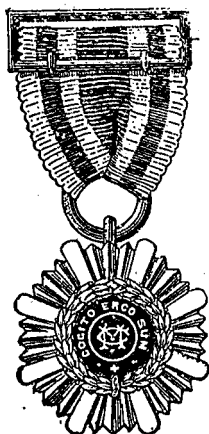


The Matrons' Council.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY MATRON.

DISCUSSION.



The discussion on Miss Isla Stewart's paper, "The Twentieth Century Matron," was opened by Miss Mollett, Vice-President of the Council. We refer briefly to a few of the points brought forward, as to give a verbatim report of informal discussions would do much to detract from their usefulness and pleasure.

Miss Mollett said that she felt proud and honoured to be the first to thank Miss Stewart for her fine paper. It put into words what she was sure all present felt, and emphasised the importance of the higher and more ideal side of the

profession.

She went on to say that the position of a Matron depended much upon the size of the hospital. In large Metropolitan institutions with nursing schools attached the Matron was in effect head of a very important college.

In the country Matrons had to combine a multiplicity of duties with that of Superintendent of Nursing—housekeeping, supervising domestic details, book-keeping, supervision of laundry; in fact, the Matron was practical manager of the whole household.

As hospitals were primarily for the care of the sick, and not educational establishments, the Matron of a country or smaller hospital must necessarily always be an all-round practical worker.

The organization of nursing, as Miss Stewart had shown, would naturally emphasise the importance of professionalism in the twentieth century. Miss Stewart had said that in professional feeling women are inferior to men. They will refrain from doing things because they are wrong and inconvenient, but they very rarely refrain because they are unprofessional. That was true, but it was a mistake to put professionalism before right.

Miss Stewart's paper had dealt so exhaustively with the question in the abstract, that it was somewhat difficult to speak after her. It was hardly a paper to discuss, but to admire and praise.

Referring to the stern Matrons of the past, Miss Mollett said she was of opinion that nothing was a greater factor in education than a certain amount of hardship. The difficulty of overcoming was a wholesome and good discipline for all.

She had had to learn this lesson. She could not overstate her indebtedness to the lady now occupying the chair for many things. When she first went to Bart's she was a very casual pro., but experience had taught her to appreciate a strong, firm rule. At the same time Matrons who wished to maintain a wide outlook on life as a whole, must not bury themselves within four hospital walls, but

must have plenty of play and change of environment to enable them to maintain a wholesome balance of rule. She advised them to play according to their own tastes and not to order. In regard to work, it was a wise rule to do one's very best and then to refrain from worrying.

The Chairman (Mrs. Bedford Fenwick) said in the last century Matrons had to evolve order out of chaos. They had to create Nursing practically and professionally, and in many instances they had to make bricks without straw. Their work had been mainly constructive, and in moulding they had had to use the firm hand approved by Miss Mollett. She too was a great believer in a somewhat austere training, and simple life. Nurses in the past found their chief interest, and in consequence pleasure, in their work. She could not honestly say she was in sympathy with the pleasure-loving Twentieth Century.

In regard to professionalism, why should not the highest form of professionalism be identical with the highest form of right? She believed it to be so. Moreover, if the ethical code governing a profession was based on purest morals it must be so. But were our twentieth century nurses inspired with this spirit? As a class they were not, or they would find more favour in public opinion. And who was to blame if the tone of the profession was not of the sweetest? The Matrons. She thought the fault was to a great extent the Matrons.

Mrs. Fenwick considered that the probationers of the present day should have a high professional standard placed before them by the Matrons. From early days they should not only be taught their duty to the sick, but their duty to their colleagues. They might also well be taught the History of Nursing, and of the women who had evolved it from crude humanitarian beginnings. She knew of nurses who did not know where to find Sarah Gamp, and the fine lessons to be learnt from the characters and work of many pioneers in the past—such as Frederika Fliedner and Agnes Jones—had not been effectively used.

Amongst the "old Sisters," also, there were examples of character and capacity worth recording. She had met many strong loyal women whom she sincerely venerated, whose strenuous lives should be an example to future generations of nurses.

In the United States these lessons were being introduced into training-school curricula by modern Matrons. Without a knowledge of the history of our profession it was difficult to inculcate a sense of professional co-operation, and very difficult to inspire a profession with a sense of responsibility. Here was work for the Twentieth Century Matron.

The lack of co-operation in this country between Matrons, as a class, was also to be deplored. It was their duty to co-operate, to discuss professional affairs, and set an example of unity and concord. It was time Matrons were more liberal-minded and sisterly and altogether less popish. Mrs. Fenwick considered the example set by the American Matrons of professional solidarity was one which the Twentieth Century Matron must emulate, and which would be the chief factor in her twentieth century progress.

The following members took part in the discussion.

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