

then proposed from the chair the following Resolution:—

RESOLUTION.

"That the members of the Royal British Nurses' Association and the organized Societies of Nurses affiliated to it desire to express to Her Royal Highness the Princess Christian their sorrow on learning that she is unable to preside at their Conference, and their sincere hope that she may speedily recover. Also they wish to convey to Her Royal Highness assurances of their loyalty and their deep sense of gratitude for the support which, as President of the Royal British Nurses' Association, she has given to them in their efforts to organize the nursing profession on lines which are just to the liberties of the Nurses."

This was carried by acclamation.

THE ECONOMIC POSITION OF THE TRAINED NURSE.

Miss Heather-Bigg then called on Miss Helen Pearse to present the first paper.

THE PROFESSION MUST BE SELF-SUPPORTING.]

Miss Pearse said that the trained nurse of to-day is the sufferer from the "vocation" of trained nurses of thirty years ago; at that time there were very few openings for the employment of educated women, and a woman who entered a hospital for training took no thought of proper remuneration for her work. She was supposed to be above such sordid ideas, and she therefore saddled her on-coming sisters with many struggles, and, to the hospital authorities she gave a chance to run the institution on cheap labour.

The result of this self-sacrifice was that her attempts since then to make her profession self-supporting had been (until the last year or two) systematically opposed by various authorities, the work of which had been to train nurses.

The speaker then pointed out that had the efforts of pioneers to obtain the State recognition of their profession, as advocated by Mrs. Bedford Fenwick been attained, we should not have had the present wretched economic position of nurses.

The nurse was handicapped throughout her career by the late period at which her training began, and the one-sided contract which she was asked to sign, in which the safeguards were on the side of the hospital.

She then discussed the nurse's chance of making a fortune, when fully trained, in private nursing, district nursing, or public health work, and from the statistics which she gave the likelihood seemed remote.

Referring to Public Health Work Miss Pearse said that if the trained nurse is to obtain a position of responsibility in health work she must be given a better economic position, and her long and careful training must be given its proper value.

Poor salaries made poor nurses—poor, because

unable to give themselves good lodgings, food, or holidays, so essential to anyone's growth in usefulness.

The profession must be self-supporting, and be given a chance to make provision for early retirement, for one of the disabilities of nursing was the comparatively early age at which members of the profession were "too old" for further use.

If the earning life was so short, so much the more should it be well paid, and then we should be independent of appeals in the streets, and on posters, to give charity to the poor nurses; that was not the way to repay them for their sacrifice; yea, even to the death, in the cause of freedom.

Let people learn to value the trained nurse for her devotion to duty, her carefully acquired skill, and her conscientious work, and give her a just remuneration while she could make use of it, rather than please themselves by exploiting her dependent economic position. (Applause.)

THE HOSPITAL SISTER.

Miss Jentie Paterson dealt specially with the hospital sister, viewed from an economic standpoint. She pointed out that hospital authorities realize that the nurses they appoint as Sisters should have special qualifications but there was no evidence that they were prepared to pay for such qualifications; in fact, the remuneration specified in advertisement columns was often less than that offered for domestic servants. To fill the post of Sister the authorities aimed at choosing one whom, by reason of education and manners they termed a lady, who would prove herself capable of performing nursing duties in the most efficient and advanced manner, who would be capable of and interested in the training of probationers, realizing that their future greatly depended on her activities, and that the prestige of the hospital as a nursing centre and a training-school was in her hands.

The medical staff expected to find in charge of their wards a woman to whom they could safely depute the duty of carrying out their directions, to whose discretion they could entrust the more responsible duty of modifying treatment should the occasion arise; they relied on her to observe and report on their cases, and, often, to help them when engaged in research work. The surgeon, when he had proved his Theatre Sister, relied on her entirely. The Sisters' responsibilities involved life and death, and the pittance they received in this country for the forethought, tact, and work involved in running one hospital department for a day, worked out at £40 a year—the average Sister's salary—at 2s. 2½d. a day, or at £50, at 2s. 9d. a day. True she got board, lodging and uniform; domestic servants got the two former though not always the latter. Over and over again women, eminently suited for the post of Sister were forced by economic reasons to resign and try private nursing. On £40 you could not save for old age, and such a post was only comfortably tenable if the Sister possessed some private means. This should not be so.

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