

REPORT OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE ON THE GENERAL NURSING COUNCIL.

(Continued from Page 219.)

We publish below a brief *Résumé* of the Minutes of Evidence given by witnesses before the Select Committee appointed to consider the rules of the General Nursing Council with regard to the prescribed training for nurses, and the reservation of seats on the Council for Matrons:—

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

Mr. L. G. Brock, C.B., called in and examined.

Mr. L. G. Brock, in reply to questions by the Chairman, said that he was Principal Assistant Secretary in the Ministry of Health, and in charge of the Division which deals with the administration of the Nurses' Registration Act.

In regard to the phrase "prescribed training," Mr. Brock stated that it has always been held that where the phrase came in (as in subsection (2)) it had always been held that "prescribed in statutes relating to a rule-making authority meant "prescribed by rule," and, therefore, the Council were required to make some rules about training; but the Minister was advised that it was not necessary, and "prescribed" did not mean that they were bound to embody in those rules all the details of the way in which the training should be carried out.

It was the view of the Minister that the main function of the Council was educational. So far only one nurse had been removed from the Register, but in course of time it might well be that disciplinary work would perhaps bulk rather larger than it does now.

THE ELECTION SCHEME.

In regard to the Election Scheme, Mr. Brock stated that the General Nursing Council (Scotland) had adopted a different basis to that for England and Wales, there had been no reservation of places for Matrons there. It would always be possible with election from a common list that any particular section of the profession which was specially well-organised might sweep the board. It was conceivable, for example, that the Poor Law nurses, if they felt there was a divergence of interest between them and the nurses in the voluntary hospitals, or in private practice, might attempt to carry all the seats, and might succeed in doing so—there was always that danger. He thought the nurses in the Poor Law hospitals would outnumber the nurses in the voluntary general hospitals. They were probably better organised than any other section, and it was a thing that might happen.

"PRESCRIBED TRAINING."

In regard to "prescribed training," Mr. Brock stated that there was a compulsory syllabus of examination, but not of training, the latter being issued on the authority of the Council for the guidance of approved Nurse Training Schools. The adequacy of training in the subjects comprised in the compulsory syllabus of examination was left to be tested by the candidate's success or failure in the examination itself.

The Chairman remarked that two points arose in connection with that statement. First the point of legal interpretation, and secondly that of policy. He understood it was the view of the Minister of Health that legally speaking it was not necessary that the course of training should be compulsory.

Mr. Brock replied that was so. The language of the subsection was intentionally vague, because it was desired to leave the Council quite free to take whichever course they thought better, and the Minister has been advised that the rules which had been made by the Council which do not require the compulsory adoption of the syllabus of training were valid, and in accordance with the Statute.

Of course, it would have been perfectly competent to the Council to have made the syllabus of training compulsory had they thought it desirable to do so, and that was their original intention. It was partly at the suggestion of the Minister of Health (Sir Alfred Mond) that the proposal to make the syllabus of training compulsory was reconsidered. It was never the view of the Minister that the syllabus of training should be compulsory. There was a time when the Council desired to make it compulsory.

ADVANTAGES OF COMPULSORY SYLLABUS OF TRAINING.

Mr. Brock enumerated the advantages of a compulsory syllabus as follows:—

The advantages claimed for the compulsory syllabus of training were as follows: (1) It protects the probationer by securing that, whatever approved school she enters, she will receive all the theoretical instruction required; (2) it secures on the whole better training, since the examination test of the efficiency of a school is at best partial and capricious; and (3) it is a help to the less experienced schools by making it clear exactly what teaching must be given.

OBJECTIONS.

The objections to a compulsory syllabus might, in Mr. Brock's view, be summarised as follows: (1) It stereotypes training by imposing on all schools a rigid code, which can only be varied by the cumbersome procedure of an amendment of the Rules made under the Act; (2) a compulsory standard being universal must tend to be a low standard, since it is difficult to demand more than the majority of schools can give and the effect may be to bring the best down to the level of the average, and (3) it penalises the small schools, which may be able to teach quite effectively if they are left to do so in their own way but which may find the adoption of a rigid code impracticable and costly.

INEFFICIENT TEACHING DISCOVERED AT EXPENSE OF PROBATIONERS.

Mr. Brock added: In regard to the first point where I am setting out the advantages that, of course, so long as candidates from a particular school fail to pass the examination, for so long will that school find it very difficult to recruit probationers at all. If the teaching is not in fact efficient that is bound to bring with it its own penalty. The school that cannot get its nurses through will very soon find it will not get probationers, but I think it can fairly be argued that while inefficient teaching brings its own penalty, it does so at the expense of a large number of probationers, and that the innocent probationer who finds it very difficult to know whether she is entering a good school, or an inefficient one, ought to be, if possible, protected against the risk of spending her time at a school which is not going to be able to give her the theoretical training required to get her through the examination.

COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE AT LECTURES PROBLEMATICAL AS A SATISFACTORY METHOD OF INSTILLING KNOWLEDGE.

As regards the second point, it is argued that if a nurse is required, as a medical student is required, to attend systematic courses of lectures, and has to be signed up before she can present herself for examination, that automatically ensures at least a minimum amount of theoretical instruction. It is perhaps a matter of opinion how far compulsory attendance at lectures is a satisfactory method of instilling knowledge; but at any rate it would secure that even in the smaller hospitals regular theoretical instruction was given.

In reply to further questions, Mr. Brock said that the probationer is not merely a student, but also a worker in the hospital, and there is always the temptation to a hospital to try to get more work than is fair to get out of a student.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)