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EDITORIAL.

A CRITICAL DECISION.

The demand of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association for recognition as an examining authority for Mental Nurses, notwithstanding the fact that under the Nurses' Registration Acts, 1919, the General Nursing Councils were created by Parliament the Statutory Authorities for this purpose, brings to a crisis a question of vital importance to mental nurses, and also to all Registered Nurses, for if once a breach is made in the one portal system of registration, so earnestly contended for, and won by the Registration pioneers, the whole foundation of this system, in relation to the other parts of the Registers, is also endangered.

As we report elsewhere, the General Nursing Council for England and Wales agreed at its meeting on May 18th.

That a Conference be called with Representatives of the General Nursing Council for Scotland, and of the Joint Nursing and Midwives Council for Northern Ireland, to discuss the relationship between the General Nursing Councils and the Royal Medico-Psychological Association.

This invitation the General Nursing Council for Scotland unanimously decided to accept. Incidentally, it may be remarked that as the General Nursing Councils of the two countries met on the same day the invitation must have been sent to the General Nursing Council for Scotland before the recommendation of the Mental Nursing Committee to issue it had been before the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, and sanctioned by it.

The majority of the Medical Superintendents of Mental Hospitals associated together in the Royal Medico-Psychological Association object to giving effect to the decisions of Parliament in regard to the training, examination, certification and registration of nurses trained in Mental Hospitals; it is their desire that the Association shall usurp the power granted under Statutory Authority to the General Nursing Councils, and endeavour to obtain recognition of its examination as qualifying for registration, and, "failing that, by obtaining the insertion of a provision in any new Lunacy Bill, to secure that the possession of the Certificate of Proficiency in Mental Nursing of the Association entitles the holders thereof (both present and future) to be registered, on payment of the fees, in the Mental Section of the Registers of Nurses of the General Nursing Councils, and to enjoy all the privileges of registered mental nurses."

It therefore behoves the General Nursing Councils and Registered Mental Nurses to carefully watch any new Lunacy Bills introduced into Parliament, lest they should contain provisions inimical to the rights of Registered Nurses.

The elected members, *i.e.*, the Registered Nurses, on these Councils, are in a substantial majority, and, therefore, if they stand firm in maintaining the one portal system they are in an impregnable position, and will conserve the prestige of the Councils, and the rights of the Nurses. Should they, however, give away this principle they will injure the status of nurses to such an extent as to depreciate the whole system of Registration; for the injury will not stop short with the Mental Nurses, other bodies will also claim recognition for their examinations and certificates, and the educational and registration edifice, erected with so much care will be imperilled, and these direct representatives of the Nursing Profession will signally fail in the discharge of the very responsible duties entrusted to them.

In those Mental Hospitals, where the Medical Superintendents are active supporters of the policy of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association, the position of the pupils in training is a very difficult one. Controlling the course of training, and urging these pupils to take their own examination, while failing to explain the vital importance to them of State Registration in their subsequent careers, they exercise a most prejudicial influence on the future of these nurses. Naturally nurses look for guidance to the head of the hospital, and it is most undignified and unfair in those holding these responsible positions to endeavour to keep a stranglehold upon the nurses, and maintain an overbearing autocracy over them. Few nurses in training would be able to stand up against such autocracy, and, should they do so, their position in the hospital while training, and the prejudicial influence on their future careers is easy to estimate.

Moreover, the position of these Medical Superintendents cannot be considered wholly disinterested, for Professor George Robertson, of Edinburgh, in moving the resolution containing the proposal which we have quoted, at a General Meeting of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association, stated that "the Association may as well break up altogether if its members cease to be interested in the education of the nurses in our mental hospitals, and to grant certificates to them."

The more the Royal Medico-Psychological Association clings to power in relation to the examination and control of Mental Nurses under its personal direction, the more should the General Nursing Councils stand firm in protecting the right of these Nurses to training which will enable them to enter for the State Examinations, and to personal liberty of action.

It is an opportunity for these Councils to demonstrate their realisation of their responsibility in this connection. We hope they will appreciate the duty and the wisdom of so doing.

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