

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR.

Whilst cordially inviting communications upon all subjects for these columns, we wish it to be distinctly understood that we do not in ANY WAY hold ourselves responsible for the opinions expressed by our correspondents.

MENTAL NURSING.

To the Editor of THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING.

DEAR MADAM,

Permit me to touch upon certain points in your leading article on Mental Nursing. Hospital Nurses, I regret to say, know little about this subject and it has been one of my ambitions to bring together on equal terms the two classes of Nurse.

Your first paragraph is based on an inaccurate reading of the Nurses' Registration Act 1919. It is incorrect to say that "the General Nursing Councils were created by Parliament the Statutory Authorities for this purpose" of conducting examinations. Examinations are not prescribed by the Act but the General Nursing Councils have the option of prescribing them. If prescribed by them they have the statutory right of "making rules . . . for regulating the conduct of any Examination." They need not, however, conduct these Examinations themselves and the Select Committee of 1905 recommended that they should not.

Let us now consider some of the problems connected with the Registration of Hospital Nurses and of Mental Nurses, for they differ greatly.

No one knows better than you do the difficulties that had to be surmounted before Registration for Hospital Nurses became an accomplished fact. In the first place there was great opposition within the profession itself. Ten years after the Select Committee of 1905 had reported in favour of Registration, 335 out of 479 Matrons of Hospitals in England opposed Registration and these included the Matrons of Barts., King's, The London, Middlesex, St. George's, St. Mary's, St. Thomas's and Westminster. In addition to this powerful opposition, difficulty also arose from the fact that every Hospital had its own course of training and its own examinations. Indeed in many Hospitals, Nurses obtained their certificates almost automatically after three years, provided they satisfied the Matron that they had conformed to the discipline of the Hospital. In the presence of such opposition and in the absence of all order, the institution of a uniform training and examinations by the General Nursing Councils was absolutely necessary. No other course was possible.

Now contrast this opposition and want of order with the willing spirit and wonderful organisation connected with Mental Nursing. Everyone, without exception, concerned with Mental Nursing, was in favour of the Registration of Mental Nurses. Registration was indeed demanded because the Association for the Registration of (Hospital) Nurses endeavoured to exclude Mental Nurses and the President of the Medico-Psychological Association had to petition the Prime Minister on their behalf. So much for the friendly spirit of some Hospital Nurses!

Secondly, since 1890 there has existed a uniform Course of Training and a simultaneous and identical Examination for Mental Nurses all over England, Scotland, Ireland and some of our Dominions as well, conducted by the Medico-Psychological Association. Its Certificate for Proficiency in Mental Nursing is recognised throughout the English-speaking world, including America. Its Examinations, according to the Royal Commission, are possibly too severe. There is nothing comparable to this organisation in any other branch of Nursing. It is without a rival. There can be no excuse for attempting to sweep away so useful an

institution, and in place of it to establish three or four lesser Examination Schemes, at a frightful increase of cost to the Nurses.

Yet the interests of Mental Nurses have been ruthlessly sacrificed by the General Nursing Councils to make the scheme for them similar to that which was found necessary for Hospital Nurses, for the reasons given.

Finally, what have been the results of these superfluous and uncalled for Examinations promoted by the General Nursing Councils? Just what might have been expected!

Last November it was found that 3.5 per cent. of Mental Nurses had passed the State Examinations and had registered and 96.5 per cent. had taken the Certificate of the Medico-Psychological Association—126 as contrasted with 3,509!

The State Register of Mental Nurses—so much desired by all—is at present a fiasco! Because hard facts have been ignored, the will of Parliament cannot be carried out and 4,000 of the best trained Mental Nurses in the world are being most unjustly treated by exclusion from the Register. The remedy is a simple one. It can be prescribed by the General Nursing Councils, if and when they please.

I am,

The University,
Edinburgh.

GEORGE M. ROBERTSON.

[We cannot agree with Professor Robertson that our reading of the Nurses' Registration Act is inaccurate, more especially since having been responsible for the first draft we cannot fail to be aware of its intention.

The Act provides (Section 3) that "the Council shall make Rules (c) for regulating the conduct of *any examinations* which may be prescribed as a condition of admission to the Register." This surely assumes that when set up the Council would prescribe examinations.

The Report of Select Committee of the House of Commons was published in 1905, fifteen years before the Registration Acts were passed. Parliament in 1919 did not see fit to give effect to all the recommendations of that Select Committee, and did not adopt its suggestion as to the Registration of Nurses holding the certificate of the (Royal) Medico-Psychological Association.

The opposition to Registration "within the profession itself," of which Professor Robertson writes, from the Matrons of Training Schools, was, in the main, opposition which followed the lead of the opposing hospital committees. That it was not "within the profession itself," which was overwhelmingly in favour of State Registration, is proved by the fact that when the opposition of the hospital committees ceased that of the Matrons ceased also.

There was no desire upon the part of the Nurses organised in the Central Committee for State Registration to exclude Mental Nurses from the Nurses' Registration Act. On the contrary, they invited the co-operation of the Asylum Workers' Association, but this invitation was declined.

We submit that the Mental Nurses do not enter in large numbers for the State Examinations because the majority of the Medical Superintendents, who so largely control their destinies, advise them to enter, and prepare them for, the Examination of the R.M.P.A.

If they adopted the juster and more generous policy of explaining to pupils in training in Mental Hospitals the benefits of entering for the State Examination, one and all would choose that Examination.—ED.]

PRIZE COMPETITION QUESTION FOR AUGUST.

What is Thrombosis? In what surgical conditions is it liable to occur? What precautions should be taken against its occurrence, and what are its possible effects?

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)