

# Royal British Nurses' Association.

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## AN IMPORTANT CONFERENCE.

On Friday, March 8th, a Conference was held in order that Members of the Association might discuss the suggestion which has been made by the Royal Medico-Psychological Association that their examination should, in future, be taken as qualifying for State Registration for Nurses trained in the Nursing of Mental Disease.

Miss Macaulay, O.B.E., S.R.N., F.B.C.N., in addressing the Conference on this subject, said that she would like to put forward a Resolution as follows:—

### Resolution.

"That this Meeting of Members of the Royal British Nurses' Association most strongly deprecates any attempt to interfere with the one-portal system of admission to the State Register such as would result from the adoption of the proposal put forward by the Royal Medico-Psychological Association that its Examination shall be taken as qualifying for admission to the State Register of Nurses trained in the Nursing of Mental Disease."

Miss Macaulay said she felt very strongly on the subject of the proposal of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association as, in her opinion, it was calculated to hinder rather than help the healthy development of Mental Nursing. She had the cause of the Mental Nurses very much at heart and she had very strong views as to the necessity for attracting into that branch of the Profession women of fine character and good education. Before speaking to the Resolution as such, she would like to put forward some of her reasons as to why those engaged in Mental Nursing should be of the highest type possible. "We have heard," she said, "a good deal about the qualifications and status required of officers in Mental Hospitals and it is equally important to consider the qualifications and status of those who make up the Nursing Staff there, in fact, there is no single factor of more importance to the mentally sick than the personnel of those employed to nurse them." The nurse in the Mental Hospital, said the speaker, is always in contact with the patient and she does more for his comfort than anyone else. She it is who creates the atmosphere in which the patient lives and she is the important factor in his cure, if he is curable, and the one who contributes most to his wellbeing if he is not. Hitherto, she has been somewhat of a Cinderella among her better recognised sisters and it is our duty to protect the facilities and opportunities which will qualify her for the place which, by right, belongs to her in the ranks of the profession, for no one can doubt that it requires as great qualities of heart and head to nurse a mind diseased as to nurse a body diseased. The nurse in the latter case, has to deal with the most highly organised system of the human body—the nervous system—and all too often with the nervous system in an exquisitely "nervous" state. She has to deal with patients perverse, suspicious, ungrateful, antagonistic, resistive and often aggressive, patients unduly emotional and indifferent to anything that life has to offer. Therefore, must she have intelligence to appreciate the reason for their conduct and sympathy to understand it;

in order to control others she must be able to control herself and possess a spirit of broad humanity, self sacrifice and, not the least of all, she must have the "mothering instinct."

It may be that some may consider that we are far from attaining these ideals, but we must not be pessimistic when we consider that less than a hundred years ago one of the qualifications for those chosen to nurse the insane was the capacity to "overawe" them. The "keeper," for instance, was selected for his size, strength, and domineering mien and he was given to understand that his business was to subdue his patients by every means possible; we even read that the attendant of a royal patient was instructed, if he had any trouble, "to knock him as flat as a flounder." Owing very largely to the efforts of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association all this has been changed, but there still lingers a prejudice in the public mind which, however ill-founded, is readily awakened by such articles in the Press as those inspired by Mr. Lomax's book. It is high time that prejudice disappeared and one means of achieving this is to protect and foster the operations and regulations of the Nurses' Registration Act.

Miss Macaulay said that she hoped that this Meeting of the Royal British Nurses' Association would, realising the points which she had placed before them, be prepared to give all the support possible in this direction. No one admired more than she the work accomplished by the Royal Medico-Psychological Association which had come forward and established its examination at a time when no State Examination existed, but surely it should now loyally co-operate in making the Nurses' Registration Act as effective as possible by sustaining a one-portal system, rather than try to further its own ends by seeking powers and privileges which rightly belong only to the body constituted to deal with State Registration.

The Resolution was seconded by Miss D. K. Graham who said that she considered it of the greatest possible importance that everything should be done to encourage as large a number of nurses trained in mental hospitals to enter for the State Examination as possible. She had met many of them who were of the opinion that the State Examination was one which ought to stand alone as qualifying for Registration and if all nurses would support them—nurses in other branches of the Profession as well as their own—they should have a good backing. Miss Graham said that she had had experience herself of how Registration had improved the educational work of the hospitals. Prior to the passage of the Registration Act many of the hospitals had not the equipment wherewith to teach their nurses and nothing had shown more the value of the Act than the way in which many of these hospitals had risen to meet the requirements for preparing their students for examination.

### Discussion.

In the ensuing discussion, in which a number of Members of the Association took part, it was pointed out that by adopting the proposal of the Royal Medico-Psychological Association a precedent would be created which might well bring about the destruction of the whole system of a one-

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