

THE BRITISH COLLEGE OF NURSES.

REPORT OF THE COUNCIL.

The fifty-fifth Meeting of the Council of the British College of Nurses was held at 39, Portland Place, London, W.1, on Saturday, May 16th, at 2.15 p.m. The President, Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, was in the chair, and the following members were present:—Miss M. Breay and Miss M. S. Cochrane, R.R.C., *Vice-Presidents*; Miss A. M. Bushby, Miss Norah Farrant, Miss D. K. Graham, Miss I. Macdonald, Miss K. A. Smith, R.R.C., *Fellows*; and Miss H. G. Ballard, Miss A. M. Bright, and Miss K. M. Latham, R.R.C., *Members*.

Prayers having been read by the Secretary, the Minutes of the last meeting were confirmed.

DEATH OF MISS ALICE CATTELL, F.B.C.N.

On rising, the President reported, with deep regret, the death, after a serious operation, of a valued Fellow, Miss Alice Cattell. She paid a warm tribute to the character and life's work of Alice Cattell, and said she had been buried that day, and that Miss I. Macdonald had represented the College at the funeral. A tribute of flowers had been sent, "From the President and Council of the British College of Nurses."

"In grateful remembrance of a lifetime devoted to the sick, and of unswerving loyalty to the best interests of the Nursing Profession."

By a rising vote, the Council expressed its sorrow for the loss of a courageous and valued colleague, and of sympathy with her family.

BUSINESS ARISING.

The Necessity for Female Attendants in Public Mortuaries.

It was reported that seventy-seven letters, enclosing a copy of the Resolution expressing the need for Female Attendants in Public Mortuaries, so that the handling of dead women should be the duty of women, preferably Registered Nurses, had been sent to the Coroners of large centres in England, and so far eighteen letters in reply had been received. All were in favour of the appointment of women officials—but not all of Registered Nurses; some difficulties were pointed out, and several helpful suggestions were offered.

The President of the Coroners' Society agreed with the Resolution in the interests of the feelings of bereaved relatives, but the duties should not be exclusively those of Registered Nurses.

The Coroner for Middlesbrough, entirely in sympathy, asked the Council's opinion *re* converse side of question, whether it is fit for women to attend the bodies of men?

The Assistant Secretary, Coroners' Association, advised Council to approach Local Councils, and "thinks handling of living men should be done by men."

The Coroner of Bournemouth, in sympathy with resolution, "will do anything to effect the desired reform."

At Oldham and Hereford, female attendants are employed; at Halifax, "this work usually done by Police Matron."

Several informative letters were read:

Dead Body dumped in Bakery.

1. One Medical Coroner writes: "Whilst I sympathise with the Resolution, I cannot agree that this is pre-eminently a trained nurse's work—it is waste of skilled labour, which is, first and last, for living humanity."

"As to female attendants, I agree—the chief objection is the old one, that women are not equal to men, and, physically, I don't see any woman, or two or three, lifting a dead body about on a mortuary table, or from a cart into a cowshed."

"As to mortuary attendants, in this county it is not

the duty of the police or mortuary keeper to handle the body. Personally, I have laid it down (owing to disputes, etc.), that it is the duty of the *undertaker* bringing the body to the mortuary to leave the body naked, and covered with a sheet, for my inspection, and it is the duty of the doctors, examining or making post mortems, to leave the body in precisely the same state for removal by the undertaker. (This arose from a doctor leaving the body so 'messed up' that undertakers complained to me.)

"But I agree if public bodies and undertakers had a corps of women attendants for handling female bodies, it would be more seemly, and less offensive to the relatives of the dead."

"I might add that the whole question of provision of mortuaries is a disgrace to this century."

"The County Council have no power to compel local authorities to provide other than a 'roof' No table need be provided, and no aids towards doing post mortems, and no water, etc."

"I consider myself lucky in some spots if I can persuade a farmer to lend us an old shed—an empty garage is a luxury, but only a winter-time one. I have known my unfortunate police officer trundle a body about in a hand-cart for four hours, and finally get lodging for it in a bakery in a large village on a main London road! With this sort of thing to contend with, you will realise that, though I sympathise with your aims, I cannot but feel they are Utopian, and the idea of 'female officials at the disposal of the Coroner,' little more than a dream."

2. A Coroner who sympathises with the resolution sees "some financial and practical difficulties" and sends copy of correspondence with the Watch Committee of the City Council.

A Chief Woman Inspector writes: "I have given the above matter (Female Attendants in Public Mortuaries) due consideration, and I cannot see any justification for the employment of a fully trained nurse at the Public Mortuary, as the work would be so intermittent that I do not think any local authority would sanction the expenditure, but I think it would be rather nice if, say, the wife of the mortuary porter could give a little assistance with regard to the reception of the dead bodies of females at the mortuary."

"The handling of dead bodies is rather heavy work for women, and, therefore, they could only assist, and I do not think for one moment the doctor would want a nurse or woman attendant to be present when he was doing a post-mortem examination."

Mr. F. Danford Thomas, the well-known Coroner, Tower of London Liberty, County of London, sent a very helpful note. He writes:—

"The handling of *all* bodies in Public Mortuaries is by the mortuary attendants, who are appointed by the Public Body which builds the mortuary. In London, these are chiefly in the hands of the Borough Councils, but a few Coroners' Courts were built by the London County Council, but all mortuaries are under Borough Council control."

"I think, therefore, your Council had best approach the Local Councils."

"Regarding the ethics of decency, I feel a difficulty in discussing the subject, as if 'decency demands the handling of dead women should be the duty of women' would it not also demand with greater force that the handling of living men should be the duty of male nurses only?"

The President felt sure that, after hearing read the various letters acknowledging the Resolution, the Council would realise the importance to the community of furthering reform in connection with Public Mortuaries.

It was unanimously agreed to act on the advice of Mr. Danford Thomas, and communicate with the Borough Councils, inviting their consideration of the matter.

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