

THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF WOMEN AND THE TRAINING OF NURSES.

As we reported editorially in our last issue, a Resolution affecting the education and examination of Trained Nurses was down for discussion at the Annual Council Meeting of the National Council of Women to be held at Torquay on October 12th.

The discussion on this subject was opened by Mrs. Keynes, of the Cambridge Branch, who proposed the following Resolution:—

“That this Council is of opinion that in order to increase the number of suitable candidates for the Nursing profession it should be made possible for pupils to take part of the preliminary State examination before leaving a secondary school, thus stimulating their interest and relieving the pressure of the first year in hospital.”

Mrs. Keynes said the N.C.W. prepared a Memorandum and sent it to *The Lancet* Commission, after which they were asked to give evidence. She laid stress on the amount of work expected of young nurses during their first year in hospital, and suggested they might be examined in Anatomy, Physiology, and Hygiene before leaving school.

Miss E. R. Gwatkin, Head Mistress of Streatham High School for Girls, and a member of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, seconded the Resolution on behalf of the Head Mistresses Association. She said that parents sometimes consulted Head Mistresses about their daughters' future, and if the profession of nursing were suggested to them, they frequently said that the interval between leaving school and the age of 21 was too long to wait.*

She thought this might be obviated by the method suggested in the Resolution.

Miss Pattison, of East Dorset, opposed the Resolution. She said that every matron she had spoken to was opposed to it, and mentioned that the General Nursing Council had passed a resolution opposing the recommendation.

Mrs. Hartree, of Cambridge, and another delegate supported the Resolution on the ground that the work of a nurse in the first year of her training was too strenuous.

Miss S. A. Villiers, J.P., Registered Nurse, and member of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, opposed the Resolution. She said: “I wish to oppose this resolution on behalf of a large number of trained nurses, for the following reason, that it appears to cut at the root of one of the basic principles which actuated those of us who worked for the passing of the State Registration Act for Nurses, *i.e.*, the one portal entry to the profession of nursing. We feel that the present curriculum of training and the conduct of the examination should remain in the hands of the General Nursing Council, the Statutory body authorised by Act of Parliament to conduct them. We feel strongly that if any alteration is made on the lines suggested in the resolution it will open the door for other associations, especially those associations interested in training nurses for the Special Registers, to conduct their own examinations, and if this happens, the inevitable result will be the lowering of the standard of nursing education in all branches of the profession, and will deprive the public of the services of the most efficient nurses.”

Miss E. T. Bickerton, R.R.C., delegate of the Matrons' Council of Great Britain, also opposed the resolution. She considered that the pupil nurse should be taught Anatomy and Physiology in the Nursing School, where it could be practically applied in the wards.

Mrs. Oliver Strachey, a member of *The Lancet* Commission,

spoke in support of the resolution and said the Commission was informed that in many places probationers were so miserably overworked, that during their first year of training, one fifth broke down. “I suggest we must do something to make things easier for the girl who cannot stand the racket of the first year,” she said.

The audience were now getting restive and demanded that the debate should be concluded, so that other professional nurse delegates—one representing the British College of Nurses, an expert educational body—were ruled out.

The Chairman wished to read an important telegram which she had received, but it was ruled out of order!

The Resolution was adopted by a large majority, the majority of the few trained nurses present voting against it.

Telegrams of Protest.

The following telegrams were sent to the Chairman of the Annual Council Meeting:—

From the British College of Nurses, London.

“Regret inability to attend meeting and desire to enter earnest protest against the Resolution to be proposed by Mrs. Keynes, on ‘Training of Nurses.’ Thousands of nurses disapprove, and those of us who are affiliated to the National Council of Women are of opinion that the Nurses' Organisations should have been consulted before this Resolution was placed on the Agenda. Please read this protest to the meeting.

(Signed) “ETHEL G. FENWICK.”

From the Matrons' Council of Great Britain.

From Miss M. S. Cochrane, R.R.C., President, Matrons' Council of Great Britain.

“Please read following telegram to Representative Council Meeting, on ‘Training of Nurses Resolution.’ The Matrons' Council of Great Britain desires to express its strong disapproval of the resolution to be proposed by Mrs. Keynes, seconded by Miss Gwatkin, which would alter the statutory regulations for the Examinations of the General Nursing Council.”

The attitude of omniscience assumed by the National Council of Women on this professional question is seriously to be deplored, and is naturally resented by the members of the Nurses' Organisations affiliated to it, whose opinions have never been sought concerning their own affairs, nor apparently are they to be tolerated! We hope other Nurses' Organisations will unite with the British College of Nurses in making a formal protest against the autocratic attitude of the Executive Committee and Annual Council of the National Council of Women, when this body, on which the profession is represented, discussed its Statutory Regulations.

We must have the National Council of Women realise that Registered Nurses now possess by Act of Parliament the same legal status as other honourable professions, and must be accorded the same honourable consideration.

The time has passed when the intelligentsia are content to be governed by social influence, we demand self determination, and we commend this truth to the consideration of our newly-elected President, the Dowager Lady Nunburnholme, J.P., who is a woman of wide experience in public affairs.

Letters dealing with this matter will be found in our Correspondence column.

Miss Dora Willis and Miss Vera Vincent, who have both completed 21 years' voluntary service in infant welfare work at the Bromley (Kent) centres, have been presented with illuminated addresses by the doctors, health visitors, co-workers, and mothers attending the seven clinics in the district.

* According to the Statutory rules, Nurses can enter for the State Examination after three years' training in an approved training school, or schools, and be Registered at the age of 21.—Ed.

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