

## SPECIAL MEETING TO PRESENT REASONS FOR OPPOSITION TO DIVISION OF PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION OF NURSES.

A Special Meeting was held at the British College of Nurses, 39, Portland Place, London, W.1, on Tuesday, March 20th, 1934, at 5 p.m., summoned to present reasons for opposing the Division of the Preliminary Examination of Nurses, as recommended by *The Lancet* Commission. Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, President, was in the Chair, and the principal Speakers were Miss M. S. Cochrane, R.R.C., and Miss Isabel Macdonald.

In her opening remarks, the Chairman said that all present had been invited to attend to discuss the reasons why the Preliminary State Examination of Nurses should not be divided. At present there was but one body responsible for the examination and registration of Nurses, the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, authorised to perform these important duties by Act of Parliament. *The Lancet* Commission, a self-appointed body largely composed of unprofessional people, proposed to split the Preliminary Examination of Nurses, and hand over the teaching of anatomy, physiology and hygiene, and presumably their examination, to unprofessional teachers in secondary and other girls' schools—subjects taught from books and not applied to human needs as now taught by Ward Sisters and Sister Tutors.

The General Nursing Council is divided in opinion on this vital question, and on voting on it recently, the majority in opposition to splitting the Preliminary Examination was only three—but the quality of the vote was instructive and a warning to the profession—the supporters of the split being, with four exceptions, composed of nominated persons, lay and medical, whilst the majority included the nurses' elected professional representatives. Thus the nominees of Government Departments (with one exception) voted in direct opposition to professional opinion; you will realise, therefore, the extreme danger to the conscientious convictions of Registered Nurses, and why it is that they must realise their responsibility in this matter.

### THE EDUCATIONAL POINT OF VIEW.

The Chairman then called on Miss M. S. Cochrane to speak on the question of the Educational Point of View.

Miss Cochrane, on rising, said :

“ Madam Chair, Ladies,

“ I have been asked to speak on the educational side of this question, which has arisen by a Resolution proposed by *The Lancet* Commission in its Report, which advocates the splitting of the preliminary training for the Preliminary State Examination of Nurses. For over 50 years the training of nurses has been carried out in the Nurse training school by Nurses, and I think has successfully fulfilled all that was required of the trained nurse in her work. It has progressed side by side with the new developments of Medicine and Surgery, and the standard of theoretical knowledge has been augmented from time to time as necessity arose. In early days each nursing school had its own methods and standards, but with the passing of the Registration Act, a standard was set up by the statutory body appointed by Parliament, which all training schools had to accept, and with which all had to be in accord. That this has been done, and is being done, is evident when we observe the excellence of the work done by English nurses during the last war, and the desire in other countries to emulate our methods and standards. Now, this Resolution would, if put into practice, destroy, in part, the value of that training. At present a girl is admitted into a hospital, and begins to *live* her training.

It is carried on with an uninterrupted continuity, and at the end of three years she is in a position to become State Registered. What will be the value of this tuition which it is proposed shall take place in the general schools? She will be taught Anatomy, Physiology and Hygiene, but it does not specify by whom. It was suggested that the Games mistress might add it to her duties, but a Games mistress would teach from the point of view of physical health, the nurse has the instruction given her from an entirely different point of view, a pathological point of view. What then does this mean? She absorbs a certain amount of knowledge which, when she comes to practise it, she has to revise or the Sister Tutor has to revise for her, and it is well known that to unlearn a thing and relearn it again, takes three times the amount of time. When a man desires to become proficient in golf or tennis, does he go to a professional sculler for tuition? No, he takes lessons from a professional golfer or tennis player; therefore it seems a little hard on the nurse that she should take one of the fundamental parts of her tuition from a person who has probably never been inside a hospital, or attended professionally upon a sick person.

“ Then again it is suggested that these lessons should be given at the age of seventeen or thereabouts, as at present the girls leave school at sixteen. The general hospitals do not admit probationers until they have reached the age of nineteen or twenty, so that there would still be a hiatus between leaving the general schools and entering the Nursing schools, of a year or more. Quite long enough to enable these girls to forget all that they have learned, certainly make it less easy of application.

“ There is another aspect of the question: the probationer does not in her first year in hospital learn only theoretical Anatomy, Hygiene, Physiology, etc., she, in the hospital, is under the greatest medium of education there is, that of environment and example. In the hospital she learns self discipline, etiquette, principles and tradition which enable her to maintain her standard of correct behaviour to the medical profession and to her patients; in fact she is taught that particular brand of good manners which is inseparable from a nurse.

“ Now we all know that manners are acquired best when young, and yet this resolution would take the beginning and most impressionable time of a girl's training and hand it over to those who, however well meaning, could only give a glimpse of the intangible things which are learnt in hospital, as the pupils would have no environment and no continuous example before them. It would be of as little value to the girls as the knowledge of the theory of music without an instrument on which to practise. It will lengthen the time of training, as nurses will still have to spend three years in the wards of a hospital to qualify for the State Register, and learn systematically the greater part of that which had been attempted in the schools.

“ I do not think the doctors complain of the technical knowledge of the nurses, but they do complain of the inability of some of them to write and spell correctly, and use elementary grammar in their speech; and I suggest that if the extra time which is proposed to give these girls at school be utilised in attempting to perfect their general education and manner, it will be better spent than in trying to take over part of a technical education—as nursing is a technical education—which can only be taught satisfactorily in the special schools already existing, and by people expert, by reason of experience and knowledge.

“ The proper place for a nurse to be trained, and be wholly trained, is in a hospital, and by nurses qualified by knowledge and experience.”

Miss Cochrane's speech was received with applause.

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