

THE PROFESSIONAL POINT OF VIEW.

Miss Macdonald then spoke on the Professional Point of View.

After introducing her subject, Miss Macdonald said:—"Before I go further I would like to say, that in discussing this question, it is most important that it should not be lifted out of its context at the present time. When it stands in that context we have not one question before us but two, and the second is of, perhaps, even more vital importance to the whole future of the profession than the divided examination. You analyse the voting when the General Nursing Council came to the decision (by the small majority which your Chairman has indicated) not to depart from the present system; you find that twelve members of the nursing profession on the Council voted against the split preliminary examination and four for it. But *when we consider the vote of the whole Council, in arriving at its decision, the majority is reduced to three.* In other words, one of the nominated members of the Council voted for the present system and the remainder of those nominated members, present at the Meeting, voted for the split examination—very easily it might have been a narrower majority still but for the fact that this one member, to whom I referred, took the trouble to ascertain the views of a large number of important schools of nursing. Now, that a professional vote should be subject to such danger, as is here indicated, is a very serious matter. And the ominous question arising is—are the decisions of the General Nursing Council to be subject to a group of people who do not hold their seats by the suffrages of the nurses, but are nominated to those seats? You see, by the example before us, how easily nursing opinion might become the humpty-dumpty of the General Nursing Council, how easily, by voting with a minority of the nurses on the Council, the nominated members might transform a majority in the professional vote to a majority of the full Council, against the professional view point. Please understand, I am not delivering a philippic against personalities on the Council, nothing of that sort, I am putting a principle, a consideration of great moment to you. Is a group of nominated members of the Council going to hold the balance of power and stultify the considered professional vote on the Council? That is what it may come to when we consider this question of the split preliminary examination in its present-day setting, in its context. *It is a burning question, a grave danger from a professional point of view.*

"Now it may be that you consider that I stress overmuch the word profession—some people think that we do! I looked into the dictionary just before I came here this afternoon for a definition of the word profession. Its meaning was given as "an occupation," "a class of people engaged in some particular branch of work." Curiosity led me to the "Encyclopædia Britannica." The word did not appear there, but the "Catholic Encyclopædia" laid vast responsibility on the word profession. I daresay the man in the street would agree with the dictionary! We see something more in a profession than that. If we regard it from a serious point of view, I think we are bound to recognise a Profession as a definite organism—almost you might say an individuality—in the body politic—an entity functioning in that body, an entity possessed of its own code of ethics, its own aspirations in the pursuit of knowledge, its own ideals as to what it shall bring towards the welfare and amelioration of the lot of humankind. What I have just said implies, as existent, a professional spirit, a professional soul, whichever you please to call it. Now, if that creative, professional spirit is to function, if it is to keep on *growing*, it must have freedom—self-government, responsibility, freedom of choice. All that is very important, for free-will does not mean doing what

you like, it means the power to choose the right as against what you regard as the wrong. Is the result of such exercise of free-will to be destroyed by the action of those outside the profession whose interests lie in government from outside its boundaries? If this is to be, I put it to you that the profession is no entity, but a nonentity! There is a good word in German to describe what it will become if this is so—*der Knecht*—it means a vassal, a bondman, something like that. We stand to-day at the cross roads, whether we realise it or not the issues involved are great (if not sufficiently superficial for observation sometimes), and any one, with vision, can see that it is a time of testing for us. Which way are we going? Are we to use vision and spirit—that professional spirit—and protect the privileges so dearly won by the creators (of whom your Chairman is one of the greatest, through what has been achieved by the Registration Acts which others would seek to stultify), or are we going to drift? The responsibility is there to-day with us, not with the future; if we show weakness, as a profession, the results will not reach down but to the third and fourth generation of the inheritors of our actions, but far beyond. Study of history always shows that it is not easy to turn the current of a wrong course of action once it has made its channel down the river of time.

"The commonest argument against our view is that the new system suggested is to be *easy* for the nurses, *easy* for the hospitals. Well, such an argument is beneath contempt, completely *non-professional*. Moreover, to follow the course suggested, would be a retrograde step from forty years back, for when Mrs. Strong established the first preliminary school for nurses in 1893, she made a definite stipulation that the teaching of physiology, anatomy and hygiene should be confined to medical men and nurses. I agree with my colleague, Miss Cochrane. Let the teachers do their work and prepare the ground by so educating their pupils, in the school subjects, that there will be no educational handicaps to meet what should remain the teaching in the nursing schools. But further, is teaching, of what many regard as the most scientific of our subjects, to be handed over to those whose qualifications need not, of necessity, bear any connection with science? I am bound to say that the anatomy and physiology likely to be taught in the secondary schools, however correct, would be an abstract and not an applied anatomy and physiology, a material aspect of those sciences as compared with that living aspect of them that dwells with every phase of nursing procedures. I need not touch on the professional slight, which many would feel it to be, upon that splendid branch of the nursing profession the Sister-Tutors, of whom we have just reason to be proud, if a good part of their responsibility were thrown by our legislators, on the General Nursing Council, to another profession to swallow.

"To conclude, I tried this afternoon to trace a reference from Thoreau, that man of odd Bohemian habits and of crystal-clear thinking. I failed to find the remark, but in effect it amounts to this—voting for the right is doing nothing very fruitful for that is only an easy way of expressing a desire that it should prevail. He would imply thereby, I take it, that effort, sacrifice is required of us all if right is to prevail. The road is made thorny often but in the goal there lies—Freedom. And, again, I would punctuate the true meaning of professional or personal free-will—it is the power to choose to do what is right. Let us strive then to retain professional free-will." (Loud applause.)

THE ECONOMIC ASPECT.

On rising to speak on the economic aspect of the question, the Chairman said we could not have listened to more

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