

THE LEAGUE NEWS.

One of the greatest deprivations which the Registered Nurses have suffered during the war has been the loss of their official organ *The League News*. We have greatly enjoyed reading the current issue of *The League News* of the Charing Cross Hospital Nurses, and congratulate those who have produced so admirable a number, and have great pleasure in reproducing the following article from the pen of Miss Dorothy M. Dickinson, the Matron.

We heartily congratulate the Honorary Editor, Miss G. Hunter, on the production of this number, and feel sure all the members of the League will be delighted to receive it.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO THE NURSING RECRUITMENT PROBLEM.

BY DOROTHY M. DICKINSON
(*Matron, Charing Cross Hospital*).

Nearly every day there is some mention in the Daily Press of the great shortage of recruits for the nursing profession. Conditions of training, discipline, "off-duty" periods, freedom and many other points are discussed at length; but the whole situation is regarded in a spirit of pessimism and despair, and the necessary recruits are not forthcoming, and I, personally, am not surprised. The problem is being approached from the wrong angle.

Wherefore this pessimism? Nursing is not the "black sheep" of the professions, but one of the most honourable open to women. Perhaps we have been too reticent and unobtrusive in the past, and not taken our place as one of the leading women's professions.

Nursing is the only profession open to women where training is given free, and where she is paid during training. In these modern days Nurses are taught by highly-qualified tutors employed by the hospitals and institutions, and also by members of the medical profession. While on holiday, Nurses are now given additional board money. Indoor and outdoor uniform is also provided. In hospitals where the accommodation and staffing situation has allowed the introduction of the Preliminary Training School and the "block system" of intensive periods of theoretical study, student nurses are paid their salary while undergoing these periods of intensive study, during which time they are rendering no actual service to the hospital, but are being paid to study. Does any other profession offer facilities equal to these to its trainees? A nursing training is not easy, but it is worth while, and anything worth while must be attained by personal effort and striving. In the past the youth of these islands has never needed to be tempted by easy conditions, but have gloried in overcoming difficulties and attaining the impossible goal, and so we have produced many fine pioneers.

For many years prior to the war, hospitals have been improving living conditions for their staff, and many Nurses' Homes are very luxurious and compare very, very favourably with the homes from which the recruits are being drawn. How many of the average homes have hot and cold water installed in every bedroom, and how many people can have a daily bath at any hour of the day? How many homes are centrally heated?

The Nurses' diet in hospitals has been greatly improved and, personally, I consider the Nurse in hospital is better fed these days than the average civilian, and she has to make no effort to obtain it, no standing in queues, no worry with ration book problems or the spending of points. Nursing staff in hospitals have more domestic services than the average civilian, although at present it leaves much to be desired.

Regarding the vexed question of discipline, I find very few of the present-day trainees resent reasonable discipline, but many when they have left and gone to hospitals where discipline has been relaxed, have disliked it intensely, and

have then realised the value of having been trained in an atmosphere of discipline. Discipline is necessary for any communal life and for any highly skilled training, so why belittle it? We all need discipline in our youthful days and until we have learnt to discipline ourselves.

Where, however, I think the grave error has been made, is that we have not appealed to the youth of to-day in the right way. When we ask for recruits for the Nursing profession, we talk of salaries, conditions, relaxation of discipline, but not of the great call of the work itself, and this, I am sure, would appeal to the modern girl. During the war our civilian hospitals in London and all over the country have been staffed by Sisters and Nurses (some of them very young), who have been full of the spirit of service, and no high explosive or flying-bomb has ever daunted them in the carrying out of their duties; and I am proud to pay this tribute to them and also to the District Nurses and Midwives who carried on courageously under most impossible conditions. Hours of duty, conditions of service never entered their heads; it was the best they could do for each patient that was uppermost in their minds. Now the war is over and we have thousands of patients needing nursing attention, surely there are 30,000 young women in this country imbued with the spirit of service and anxious to help their fellow men. I think it is very essential to make the appeal in this spirit, otherwise the wrong type of girl is attracted and very soon finds she does not like the work, and this is one of the causes of the great wastage in trainees. It is the wrong method to attract recruits by the offer of higher salaries during training and easy conditions. Offer them a thorough and well-planned training for one of the finest professions in which they can help their fellow men, which also offers them a wide scope of service in the various branches of nursing after they have qualified, at good remunerative salaries, and recruits will not be lacking.

Nursing is a vocation, so is teaching. It is useless to train as a teacher if you have absolutely no ability to teach, and the same applies even more to nursing. The Nurse must have the sympathy and understanding with her patients which comes from the love of her work and a sense of vocation.

What of the prospects for the State Registered Nurse? There is very little likelihood of unemployment for her. If she wishes to travel there are the Naval, Military and Air Force and Colonial Nursing Services open to her. The foreign Missionary Societies attract a number of trained Nurses. In this country there are Public Health Services, the District Nursing Services, and the Industrial Nursing Service all needing highly qualified women. Private nursing appeals to another type of professional Nurse, and to those who prefer to remain in institutional work there are opportunities of Sisters' posts, leading to administrative posts. For those with special teaching ability and qualifications there are opportunities of Sister Tutorships. Surely if this aspect of the Nursing Profession is put clearly before girls of to-day, thousands will volunteer in the right spirit, and they will not be disappointed at their choice afterwards. When adequate recruits come along, many hospitals at the moment hampered by shortage of staff, will be able to introduce improved conditions and shorter hours of work, which they are only too anxious to do when the staffing permits it.

I know there is a spirit abroad just now of "get all you can" and "be sure and get your rights," but there are still many young people coming forward for the Nursing Profession because they want to do "something worthwhile," and I am sure if more emphasis was laid on the fact that thousands of people in our general hospitals throughout the country were needing adequate nursing attention, and that children in special and fever hospitals were needing

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