

A REVIEW OF THE TRAINING OF NURSES IN THE LIGHT OF MODERN HISTORY.

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In view of the present fluid condition of the Nursing Profession and the prolonged futile attempts to solve the difficulties connected with it, of which the problems connected with the training and re-organisation of "Student Nurses," I consider, to be the outstanding ones, it would be of interest and probably of value to review the modern history of them, which I will do to the best of my ability briefly, from my own personal experience of half a century.

The history of Nursing from earlier times has already been told many times more efficiently and fully than I could pretend to do.

Starting from the year 1894 (approx.) this was the position:—Probationers were recruited for the most part from the daughters of the professional classes and were required to pay a premium, such Probationers, as may be expected, were girls of good education and adopted the profession as a "vocation."

Then approximately six years later times were changing and the professions became generally relatively less lucrative and the supply of Probationers from this source tended to fall off.

The result was the next stage, *viz.*, that on condition that Probationers at the end of three years' training agreed to work a further year for their training school the premium was remitted.

A very unsatisfactory condition of affairs was thus created as two classes of Probationers came into contact in the same hospital, the so-called "Lady Probationer," premium paying and the "Ordinary Probationer" non-premium paying—this created an invidious class distinction, the "Lady Probationers" got preference in staff appointments, usually it is true on justifiable merit, still not a desirable situation for the other class.

Then owing to a still further falling off of these paying Probationers and the non-paying ones also, small salaries were offered, extremely small, I admit at first, only of the nature of pocket money, but bear in mind that everything was found as at present. The usual method was that Probationers came for a three months' trial period without any pay, and if they were accepted and decided to stay for training, they signed a binding contract.

This ruse was not successful in getting the necessary number of Probationers, except in some schools that ranked high in popular estimation, so competition was next adopted to attract recruits by offering increased monetary inducements in the form of higher salaries graduated from the first to the fourth year.

This competition has gone on and on, but I have throughout this evolution been contending that it was very undesirable as girls were coming into nursing for financial considerations, and the vocational call was gradually being eliminated and the future prospects were poor.

If the salaries of Trained Nurses had been raised and no salaries offered to Probationers the present impasse would never have arisen, but I should add here that to effect this Probationers should at this stage have been "Student Nurses" and treated as Students and not as exploited labour.

THE REGISTRATION OF NURSES.

1904.—A Nurses' Registration Bill, drafted by the Royal British Nurses' Association, was promoted in Parliament.

1904.—A Nurses' Registration Bill, promoted by the Central Committee for the State Registration of Nurses, a very representative Committee of medical men and nurses from England and Wales, Scotland and Ireland, with the late Lord Ampthill in the Chair, was brought into the

House of Commons every year until the war of 1914, when professional demands ceased pending the end of the war.

1908.—The late Lord Ampthill presented the Bill in the House of Lords, where it was agreed without a Division at any stage, but the Premier (Mr. Asquith) refused time for its consideration in the House of Commons.

1918.—The Bill promoted by the Central Committee for the State Registration of Nurses passed its First and Second Reading in the House of Commons, but was talked out by the representatives of the College of Nursing, Ltd., at its Third Reading, whereupon Dr. Christopher Addison (now Viscount Addison), Minister of Health, announced at the Table that the Government would promote and bring in a Bill for the State Registration of Nurses, which was promptly done, and three Acts of Parliament for this reform became law in December, 1919, for England and Wales, for Scotland and for Ireland, and the General Nursing Councils became organised, which have been operative without serious interference up to 1943.

1943.—The Nurses' Act drafted by Mr. Ernest Brown, M.P., and Mr. Ernest Bevin, M.P., was passed, which I venture to say has de-graded the status of the Registered Nurse, and am convinced that there can be no improvement in the organised education and status of the nursing profession until this disastrous legislation has been amended, or rescinded.

In 1920 the General Nursing Council was formed by the Government and directed to compile and keep a register of Nurses and hold two examinations, which would qualify for admission to it.

Still the conditions of service of Probationers continued to be very unsatisfactory, as they were employed to do not only routine nursing in the Wards, but in addition a large amount of domestic work of a physically exhausting kind, and were doing, in instances known to me, 72 and even 84 hours a week. The extraordinary fact to record here is that there was much less complaining and discontent than in more recent times when the hours were reduced to 56 and then to 48 hours a week, plus a considerable reduction in the amount of domestic work and that much less exhausting on account of the introduction of mechanical devices.

The explanation of this anomaly I think is that in the "bad old days" the Probationers were so hard worked and exhausted and tired to have any spirit left to complain and no means of making their complaints generally known.

Then a stage was reached when Probationers were to be called "Student Nurses," largely due to the efforts of the College of Nursing, this however was only a sop to Probationers and really meant nothing, actual instruction was still carried out during the Probationer's "off duty" hours.

The result of the formation of the G.N.C. in 1920 and a one portal examination was that teaching has gradually become more standardised, better and more systematic, but even this is not an altogether unmixed blessing for much teaching is done out of duty hours and lectures given to nurses after a hard day's work when they have become irresponsible, inattentive and sleepy; then, too, systematic lectures, especially where a definite number is prescribed as requisite for signing up, I consider most undesirable; in fact most lectures as such are usually so much waste of time, as it is in the case of Medical Students and the time could be much better employed.

In 1938 a pre-nursing scheme was adopted in Leicester with the co-operation of the Director of Education, the Headmistresses of the Secondary Schools and the Principal of the Technical College, which on account of the tardiness of the G.N.C. for England and Wales in deciding to allow the Preliminary Examination to be taken in two parts was impeded in its early years, but later became very useful as it enabled girls to get instruction in fundamental

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