

CONTRIBUTED ARTICLES.

"THIS AND THAT." *

BY COL. COCHRANE, I.M.S.

THE "This" of the title to my address is This Association of yours, an Association composed of women with nursing as their profession. A profession involves at least two things, one is skill and knowledge acquired not alone by mere mechanical skill, but also by the exercise of the intellectual faculties. The second or other attribute of a profession and which distinguishes it from an occupation, is self-government. Has your profession any claim to this last qualification? Are you an organised profession here in India? The answer, as far as I know it, is to a very great extent in the negative. Without organisation and self-government a profession is without status. With a secured status much can be done to improve its own position—material questions of hours and pay are to be considered, the standard of education for entrants to the profession and the relationship with the Universities and schools of social science—these are a few of the desiderata.

In England already a good deal has been done. There have been years of struggle over the question of State registration until in 1919 a Nurses' Registration Act became law. Previous to this, *viz.*, in 1916, a College of Nursing was established with the object of forming a centre of all nursing activities and directing nursing education. Under the Act there is a General Nursing Council for England and Wales and another for Scotland, the majority of whose members must be nurses. The nursing profession in England has thus secured a status, although much still remains to be done. It is recognised fully that the calling of the modern nurse is a high one. It has been realised how immensely important is their work in dealing with disease. Treatment is dependent more and more on the minutest and most constant observation of symptoms. The medical man must rely on the reports he receives and the nurse must know which symptoms are important. Diet, too, is a great part in treatment and a knowledge of the constituents of food is of great value. Accuracy in measurement is essential, and this requires both technical skill and care. The surgical nurse besides has to have a wide knowledge in regard to instruments and their preparation, the avoidance of sepsis, and generally how best to help the surgeon. Nurses, indeed, have in these days to be carefully educated, they cannot be regarded as mere heaven-born beings. The nurse on her side has to realise her responsibilities and live up to them, and with this in view she has got to regulate her standard of training, to see that she does not go out from her training school

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unequipped for the work she proposes to do. This will mean that the various types of hospitals should unite in the work of training, so that nurses may get special instruction in fevers, in chronic cases, in maternity work, in the nursing of children, etc., in mental work, and have a record of their special work while taking their complete certificate. It must be determined what standard of education will be required of entrants to the profession—a good standard, the higher the better, is necessary for this profession as in others. In all this organisation is a primary necessity. We are all too apt here in India to await Government intervention. This is not wise or politic. Government officials are for the most part mere men, and though man is always ready to seek woman's advice he does not *always* follow this when out of her influence in the privacy of his office or when in safe majority in the Committee room. You women alone best know what you want, and it is up to you to let the public know you as a combined self-governing body with a definite and high status and so be able to direct; not to be led along paths possibly ill-marked out and difficult to alter. The self-organisation of your profession in this province* literally does not exist. You have been legislated for to a certain extent. The State Board of Medical Examinations has laid down rules for an examination for nurses and midwives. It has established what may well be considered by your association a measure inimical to your profession. For besides the certificate for nursing after a course of study lasting for three years, it also gives a certificate in elementary general nursing after a two years' course. The holder of this last certificate may easily delude the careless, and they exist everywhere, and bring discredit on the fully trained and certificated members. Again, the Board has determined in which hospitals training is to be allowed and has laid down the course of training and the standard of education of entrants. Advice has of course been sought for in framing the rules from especially distinguished members of your profession, but there are many points on which a recognised association might well offer criticisms and carry reforms. On certain important points, *e.g.*, on the proper method of wearing caps, the colour and style of uniform or the wearing of uniform off-duty, the Board has not ventured to step in. There is no standard set in our hospitals to provide uniform hours of duty throughout the province, nor are the allowances granted for food the same. No attempt has been made to secure uniformity with other provinces. An attempt was recently made to establish a purely advisory Board to be called a Nursing Board to consist of seven members the majority of whom should be members of the nursing profession. Owing to financial considerations the matter has for the present been laid aside. A conference of Surgeon Generals and Inspector General of Civil Hospitals in Calcutta last year gave it as their opinion that in each province a provincial nursing association should be established with the object of maintaining a provincial register of nurses copies of which should be circulated to other provinces, to the Lady Minto Nursing Association and to any other central association

* United Provinces.

which may come into being. Beyond the establishing of this register the conference do not appear to have made any suggestions as to the functions of the recommended association. After consulting with the leading members of your profession in these provinces, I wrote on the 14th September of this year as follows:—

“The object stated in the resolution of the conference held in Calcutta as to the function of a Provincial Nursing Association is already partially realised by the action of the State Board of Medical Examinations, United Provinces, which maintains a register of nurses who have obtained the diploma in nursing of the Board. It is a matter for the Board to consider as regards circulating a copy of the register, and this it will be advised to do.

However, in the United Provinces there are many nurses carrying on their profession who are not registered by the Board, both those with ample qualifications obtained elsewhere and those with certificates of nursing granted them by heads of recognised institutions where nurses are trained. Others also, with less right than the least of these, find employment as nurses.

It is to the advantage of the trained nurses themselves and for the protection of the public that the *raison d'être* lies in the formation of a nursing association, the objects of which would be, briefly stated, to uphold in every way the honour and dignity of the profession, to promote a spirit of *esprit de corps* and to take council among themselves in matters regarding pay, conduct, hours of service, dress, etc. The association would lay down rules as to who should be admitted into membership and keep them in a register which could be circulated to other interested bodies. Such an association should be absolutely unofficial but when well established and working on approved lines would doubtless be the better for Government recognition.

I have discussed the matter with several of the leading members of the profession who have agreed as to the advantages of such an association and will doubtless make a move towards its formation.”

I have spoken thus before you in ignorance of your deliberations at this conference—my previous knowledge of your association and its functions is limited to the statement sent me saying that your association has no rules or regulations for the training of nurses or midwives, but that it merely admitted as members and associates those who have had a full training in any recognised training school. I have now had the temerity to outline my views on the value and place of such an association of yours, to indicate the power you could and should wield and the effect possible in the general raising of the status of your profession and the value which would accrue to individuals. Organisation means strength—strength brings pride—just pride in oneself leads to respect by others—to be respected leads to ambition to keep that respect and add to it—this in turn leads to a determination to do one's best. The consequence is that the ultimate gainer is he or she who we of the medical or nursing profession wish to benefit most, namely the patient.