assistants; service in this capacity (either whole time or part time) is recognized by the various examining bodies as constituting the clinical experience required by the regulations for the Diploma. Applications and inquiries regarding these clinical facilities should be made to the Medical Superintendent of the Hospital.

National Hospital, Queen Square.—A Post-Graduate Course on Diseases of the Nervous System will be held at the above hospital from May 9 to July 15, 1927.

The general course will consist of Clinical Lectures and Demonstrations; teaching in the Out-Patient Department; and Pathological Lectures and Demonstrations. The Fees for this course will be £5 5*s*.

A course of Lectures on the Anatomy and Physiology of the Nervous System will be arranged if there are sufficient applicants. Fee £2 2*s*.

A course of Clinical Demonstrations chiefly on Methods of Examination of the Nervous System will be given. Fee £2 2*s*.

Tickets entitling to attend the Out-Patients' Clinic only (£2 2*s*. for 3 months) may be obtained from the Secretary.

Applications should be addressed to the Secretary, Medical School, National Hospital for the Paralysed and Epileptic, Queen Square, London, W.C. 1.

QUALIFYING EXAMINATIONS FOR NURSES.

THE qualities needed for looking after the sick are largely temperamental, and of numerous women it has been said that they were born nurses. This means that nursing must always be a vocation—that it is not a mere trade in which the most skilful are necessarily the most successful; and the distinction is especially important to remember now that State examinatons have to be passed before a nurse can enter her profession. It is not enough to be born, she must be registered as well; and though this is admittedly desirable, it introduces a principle which may easily be carried too far. A qualifying examination is always dangerous, because it lays emphasis on certain attributes in the candidate, and it is necessary to be careful that these attributes shall be those on which efficiency depends. There are special reasons, moreover, for care in choosing examinational standards for nurses. The first is that since registration was devised as a means of raising the status of the nursing profession, there is a risk of the standards being set too high by people who have in mind an ideal which is for the time being unattainable; any new mechanism of progress is liable at first to over-use. The second reason is that at the present time there is a shortage of candidates for the nursing profession, and it would be sad if either the qualifying examinations, the study required for them, or the conditions of training entailed, were regarded as a bar to the service by girls who were otherwise suitable. The third reason, which has been indicated already, is that knowledge is on the whole less important in nursing than are temperament, health, and the kind of practical ability which either is inborn or comes with experience. Training and book-learning are useful supplements, but the public should not be encouraged to think that an aptitude for acquiring theoretical knowledge is an essential part of the nurse's equipment.

These reflections arise from perusal of the examination papers recently set by the General Nursing Council for England and Wales. In the Preliminary Examination held on February 1 the candidates were probationers of one year's standing, and in their first paper they were invited to answer three of the following questions, including one from each section:

A. Anatomy.—(1) Give a short anatomical description of the knee-joint. (2) What parts of the body receive their blood-supply through the innominate artery? (3) Describe briefly the cavity of the pharynx, and the various openings which communicate with it.

B. Physiology.—(1) Describe the various kinds of blood-corpuscles. What do you know of their functions? (2) How does the body obtain its store of glycogen, and what are its uses? (3) What are the functions of the lymphatic vessels?

Most of these questions might be asked in examinations for the highest medical and surgical degrees, and it must be supposed that the Council's examiners are content to receive very simple and dogmatic answers. The candidates, however, have little assurance of this, and anxiety will not be diminished by turning to the

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"Answers by a Sister-Tutor," published in the *Nursing Times*. Dealing on February 19 with the examination paper we have quoted, the sister-tutor answers the third of the anatomical questions and begins as follows:

"The pharynx is a muscular tube suspended from the base of the skull and lying directly in front of the cervical vertebræ. Its upper portion, which lies behind the posterior nares, is called the naso-pharynx, and the lower portion behind the mouth and tongue is the oro-pharynx. It is lined throughout with mucous membrane, which is continuous with that of the nares and mouth above, and that of the larynx and œsophagus below. The muscles of the pharynx are largely arranged in circular and longitudinal fibres, which contract alternately, forming a wave-like movement during swallowing. At intervals throughout the pharynx are patches of lymphoid tissue, which are a great safeguard against the entry of disease germs, the chief being at the base of the naso-pharynx."

She continues in this strain for another 320 words, ending with the statement that "the cricoid cartilage below is the only complete ring of cartilage in the trachea and is narrow in front and broad behind." Her answer is a praiseworthy summary of the facts, but it does not suggest that candidates are intended to reply to the questions only so far as they bear on the practice of nursing, as might otherwise be presumed. Nor can this limited requirement be inferred from some of the papers set in the Final Examination for the General Register, which was held on February 2. The first paper begins thus:

Medicine.—(1) Give the symptoms and signs of rheumatic fever, pointing out the difference, as found in children and adults. (2) What is meant by "pleurisy"? What are the different forms? Give the symptoms of each. (3) What are the chief causes of irregular enlargements of the breast? What advice would you give to a patient with such condition if she applied to you?

The candidates had to answer at least one of these questions, whilst among the alternatives in the second section was, "What dietetic and local measures might be recommended for an adult patient with severe eczema?" This question is far from being beyond criticism, but even more controversial are two others, in which the nurse was asked to indicate the chief characteristics of the various kinds of ulceration of the cervix (stating what methods of treatment might be employed in each), and was expected to give some account of "the principles underlying the use of antitoxins and vaccines in infectious disease."

It may be that in practice the Council does not reject candidates for their ignorance on the questions we have quoted; it may be that its bark is worse than its bite. At the moment, however, the bark is likely to have unfortunate results. The recent examination papers deal with too many subjects of which knowledge is not essential to every nurse. The fact that the questions have alternatives will not prevent the conscientious student from trying to cover the whole ground surveyed, and the scope of the examinations makes it necessary for the schools of nursing to cram their pupils with facts which cannot be digested. Much of the theoretical teaching nowadays given does not arise naturally from work in the wards, but rather out of the demands of the examining body. Everyone will agree that an elementary knowledge of physiology and anatomy is all to the good, but a nurse must seldom find it necessary to remember morphological details; nor is it desirable that probationers should be taught to think in this peculiar way. And here, indeed, is the crux of the matter. There is no time to teach a nurse to think like a medical man, even if there were inclination; and if she is taught a great number of facts, without being instructed in the use of them, it is quite possible that she will end by getting a dangerously false impression of her powers. In diagnosis, with which some of the questions incidentally deal, there is nothing more risky than the half-knowledge which comes from reading elementary handbooks, and the nurse who relates her patient's every symptom to the medical adviser is a far safer assistant than she who fancies herself an amateur doctor. Frequent reference to a medical man is, of course, a counsel of perfection, for many nurses carry on their work in places where help is not available for weeks at a time. In such situations they have to use their discretion, which is often admirable; but these posts should only be entrusted to experienced women or those with special training. Admission to the State Register is surely not meant to imply that the newly qualified nurse is fitted to assume diagnostic responsibility. It ought merely to show that a candidate has the knowledge essential for efficient nursing—that she can keep a patient clean and comfortable, dress his wounds,

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prepare his food, administer the remedies prescribed, observe and report on his condition, and cope with emergencies which are likely to arise. These are no easy tasks, but they do not require knowledge of the innominate artery, the kinds of blood-corpuscle, the metabolism of glycogen, or the functions of lymphatic vessels. Such information will doubtless increase a student's interest in the human body, and within limits it is valuable; but it is seldom, if ever, of immediate practical importance in nursing; it is an extra, and should be regarded as such. To know about the varieties of ulceration of the cervix and the dietetic treatment of eczema is only necessary for those whose work is done under special conditions of isolation or responsibility. The present examination seems to demand knowledge which it is hard to gain without either long experience or a special training which cannot be given to every probationer. The result is a tendency towards widespread cramming. The immediate need, alike from the point of view of the public, the medical profession, and the nurses themselves, is for a more copious supply of women who wish to take up nursing. Good material is almost certainly available, and it would be a pity if the enthusiasm of suitable people were inhibited by too ambitious a scheme of education. Excess of book-work means a heavy strain on the minds and spirits of probationers. Any loss of good recruits from this cause seems especially regrettable when it is realized that theoretical knowledge is at best an unsatisfactory criterion for the selection of nurses.

[This is reprinted from the *Lancet*, March 5, 1927, by kind permission of the Editor, not as a gesture of disapproval of the State Nursing Examinations, but as apropos of the remarks made by the Royal Commission on Lunacy and Mental Disorders on the severity of the Nursing Examinations of the Association which we criticized in a recent "Occasional Note."—EDS.]

THE MENTAL AFTER-CARE ASSOCIATION.

THE PRINCE OF WALES'S APPEAL.

At the meeting on March 31, 1927, at the Mansion House, of the After-Care Association, presided over by H.R.H. the Prince of Wales (whose speech is reported on p. 285), Dr. R. Percy Smith, chairman of the Council of the Association, announced the result of the above appeal. He said that by the courtesy of the British Broadcasting Corporation, their President, Sir Charles Wakefield, was enabled to make an appeal from Daventry last Sunday, the latest result of which was £1,125 7*s.* 7*d.*, which brought the aggregate result of the Prince of Wales's special appeal to date up to £8,409 10*s.* (Cheers.).

The LORD MAYOR (Sir Rowland Blades, M.P.) expressed the Association's thanks to the Prince, and referred to the many causes which his Royal Highness had advocated at the Mansion House. It was only a month ago that the Prince delivered an important speech in that hall on the subject of British industry. He doubted, however, if among all the charities which had had the advantage of the Prince's advocacy and support, there had ever been one so pathetic and touching as that which they had been dealing with that day. (Cheers.) The after-care of poor patients discharged from mental hospitals was an object deserving of their greatest commiseration and pity. The hurrying of such patients into work and the worry of family anxieties before they were fully restored to mental and physical health contributed to a recurrence of their maladies. The objects of the Association in preventing such results had his warmest approval and his deepest sympathy. (Cheers.).

Sir CHARLES WAKEFIELD also expressed the Association's gratitude for the Princes' espousing what was comparatively an unknown cause. Through the Princes' championship their work had secured many hundreds of new friends.

Among those present on the platform were:

The Lady Mayoress, Mr. Sheriff Shepherd and Mr. Sheriff Vincent, Lord Sandhurst, Sir Robert Armstrong-Jones, Sir Marriott Cooke, Sir Lionel Phillips, Sir George Wyatt Truscott, Sir Frederick Milner, Sir Frederick Willis, Dr. C. Hubert Bond, Dr. Nathan Raw, Sir Lisle Webb, Lt.-Col. J. R. Lord, Dr. C. Hamilton Marr, the Rev. F. A. H. Hawkins (son of the Founder of the Association), Mrs. Dunn Gardner, Dr. David Ogilvy, Dr. R. Worth, Dr. J. Porter-Phillips and Mr. H. F. Keene.

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