

proficiency in Nursing. We are well aware that, during the next few weeks, we shall receive many protestations that such an Act is quite unnecessary, and would be very harmful to smaller Hospitals; and to save time, therefore, we would ask our readers to look back in history, and observe that this is precisely the course which has hitherto always been adopted; that in Medicine, Law, and the Church, testimonials of a fitness to practise in these several professions were first self-granted, then by every practitioner to his several pupils, then by private and manifold bodies, then under legal powers granted by the State to certain special authorities. In Nursing, the evolution of the profession has now advanced to a point at which the next step must be the historical culmination which we have traced. It may also be pointed out that Nurses, and even Hospitals, exist for the benefit of the public, and not, as sometimes seems to be imagined, that the sick are made so, for the advantage of Hospitals. Nursing is too important a factor now in medical treatment for the present slipshod, haphazard system of educating its followers, to be permitted to continue much longer. All the signs of the times show that the institution of Registration of Nurses by the Royal British Nurses' Association marks an epoch in the profession which it is vain, and, indeed, impossible, to ignore. There seems to be little doubt in professional circles, that the Royal Charter, for which that Association is applying, will, by the disclosures which will doubtless be made at the forthcoming inquiry, before the Privy Council, compel the Government to deal with the whole Nursing question as a matter of national importance. If this view be correct, the Nursing profession is on the verge of greater changes than it expects, and the few Hospitals who are opposing the Royal British Nurses' Association obtaining the simple rights of incorporation, are forging chains of Parliamentary control for themselves and their kindred Institutions, which will be of incalculable benefit both for Nurses and for the public at large, and which will be a curious modern example of the process known as "being hoist with their own petard."

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We have information, upon which we can fully rely, that, in the event of a Bill being brought before Parliament, with the object of improving the present conditions under which Nurses work and learn, considerable support would be given in both Houses to a proposal that the control of the Nursing profession should be confided to a special professional body, to be constituted under the Act, with well defined and considerable powers. We have always expressed the opinion that such a State Council would, in due time, be appointed, in accordance with the analogous system in other professions. But we may frankly own that we are surprised to learn how general a feeling exists that the time is now ripe for Parliamentary action in this direction.

The appointment of such a body by the State would cause an immediate settlement of the question as to which Hospitals are to be empowered to grant Certificates, supposing—which is quite possible—that it was not at once determined to form one central examining body for Nurses, by whose independent inquiry their efficiency should be judged, leaving to Hospitals only the duties, which they now fulfil in the case of medical students, of certifying that certain courses of study have been satisfactorily completed by the pupil within their walls, and of furnishing a field for the carrying out of practical examinations into the student's clinical knowledge. For Nurses, there would necessarily be some modifications of the rules observed in the case of medical students, because the work is so much more practical and so much less theoretical in the former than in the latter case. It is, in fact, certain that Nursing examinations would be held more in the Hospital wards and less in the class rooms than medical tests are. This one-portal system for the Nursing profession would, of course, be ideally the best, and in case of the institution of a Nursing Council by Parliament, this is the plan which we should feel inclined to support. But, in any case, we now look confidently forward to seeing, at no very distant date, a considerable restriction in the number of Hospitals which give Nursing Certificates, and a very marked improvement in the value and character of those documents.

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[previous page](#)

[next page](#)