

profession, was similar to an attempt to build a castle on a quicksand. In the next place, we argued that (some seven or eight years ago) it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to obtain an Act of Parliament. The necessity for legislation had not been realised by the Nursing profession itself, and even medical men then were not agreed upon the advantages of educated women becoming Nurses. The public did not understand the dangers to which they were exposed at the hands of women destitute often of character, and still more destitute of knowledge, who professed and called themselves Nurses. And thirdly, but by no means the least of these reasons, to our mind, analogous legislation had only been obtained in order to introduce more or less compulsory measures after the possibility and necessity of reforms had been proved by voluntary organisations. For these reasons, therefore, we advocated the formation of the Royal British Nurses' Association, practically in order that it might educate the profession and the public as to the necessity for reform, that it might form a bond of union in the scattered body of Nurses, that it might create a moral force in the promotion of improvements in the Nursing world, and finally, by obtaining a Royal Charter, that it might incorporate Nurses as members of a profession recognised by the State.

Through good, and especially through evil, report, the way of Nursing reform has steadily and even rapidly moved forward during the past seven years, and there is now a general feeling throughout the United Kingdom as to the necessity for the three years' standard of training for Nurses. In the great majority of leading hospitals, the curriculum of Nursing education has assumed a definite form and shape. The *élite* of the Nursing profession have enrolled their names on the list of Registered Nurses; the principle of Registration and its value have become widely recognised, both by the profession and the public. The voluntary system of Registration, as was originally hoped, has effectually laid the foundations on which a more elaborate organisation can in future be raised. So the time, we consider, has arrived when the first and great work which the Royal British Nurses' Association was expected to do, may be regarded as accomplished, and it is, perhaps time now, in accordance with our English custom, for the State to step in and complete the national work which has been so successfully inaugurated.

In short, we are in agreement with those who desire to see the education and registration of Nurses placed upon a broad, legal, and national basis, and carried on under the authority of an Act of Parliament. The question, therefore

arises as to the details which should be considered in the drafting of a Nursing Act, and before considering this matter, we venture to moderate the anticipations which have been expressed by some ardent enthusiasts. We do not, ourselves, expect that an Act of Parliament will be passed until the closing months of this century, but we believe that by the year 1900 such legislation will have been brought into effect.

When the Royal British Nurses' Association was started, we ventured to express a similar anticipation of delay before its Royal Charter could be gained, and then estimated that it would require seven years' work before that consummation could be obtained. Thanks, however, in no small measure, to the powerful opposition which was made to the Association, the value of its work was advertised so successfully to the public that the Royal Charter was gained in less than five years. With regard to the proposed Act of Parliament, it is possible that its opponents will afford equal assistance in drawing the attention of the public to the measure, but even supposing that there is no opposition, we estimate that it will not be necessary to introduce the Bill more than four times into Parliament before its enactment is secured. We shall proceed next week, and in subsequent issues, to consider various proposals which have been made, concerning the principles to be applied in the drafting of the Nursing Act, and upon these matters we shall welcome the suggestions of our readers; for it is important that the views of trained Nurses should be clearly expressed upon matters so closely affecting the future status of their profession.

#### THE BRITISH MEDICAL ASSOCIATION.

THIS body, which consists of more than 16,000 medical men, and is rightly described as the most powerful professional organisation in the world, held its annual meeting this week in London. The greater part of its first general meeting, which was attended by many hundred members, was occupied in a discussion of the question of registration of Midwives and Nurses. By an overwhelming majority, the Association decided that the legal registration of midwives would be fraught with great dangers to the public, and it protested against any such legislation. Then by a unanimous vote the Association expressed its opinion that the time had arrived when an Act of Parliament should be obtained to legalise the registration of medical, surgical and obstetric Nurses. This powerful pronouncement forces this question forward into the region of practical politics, and it exhibits once more the sincere sympathy which the great body of medical men feel with thoroughly trained Nurses, while at the same time it conclusively proves the libellous character of the assertions made by the midwives' advocates as to the motives for the opposition of medical men to the registration of the modern Sairey Gamp.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)