

Matrons in Council.

THE REASONS FOR THE STATE REGISTRATION OF TRAINED NURSES.*

By MISS HENRIETTA POOLE,

Matron of the Blackburn and East Lancashire Infirmary.

MATRONS from many different Hospitals have met here for the purpose of considering how best to meet the difficulties which lie in our path of progress, and to take counsel together to remove them.



The subject I propose to discuss is the thorny one of Registration; I wish that such an important one had found an abler exponent than myself.

The events of the past few months have brought prominently before the public in a practical form, the anomalous position in which we, at the present time, find ourselves.

A sudden call has come for nurses to take charge of our wounded soldiers and sailors; the ordinary staff has proved wholly insufficient and a small reserve became exhausted almost immediately. Then came a call for more; there was no dearth of replies, they poured in from north, south, east, and west. Nurses offered readily, and they were taken without too much enquiry as to their qualifications, either physical or professional. (I have been told by a South African resident, herself a trained nurse, that six months' training had enabled one at least to go out as a paid nurse.) I call attention only in passing to these circumstances, they are merely sign-posts pointing to a goal which we would fain see reached before, like horses worn out by our endeavours to drag our coach up the hill, our harness is taken from us and put on fresher and stronger steeds.

I propose to consider our subject under four heads—(1) What is Registration in reality? (2) Why is it necessary? (3) How is it to be obtained? (4) Who can aid in obtaining it.

We constantly speak of ourselves and our fellow-workers as *members of the Nursing Profession*. But have we any reasonable ground on which to base our claim to be such? I have to confess sadly enough that we have no right to any such title; in fact, we have no rights at all as matters are at present; but we have a

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goodly show of wrongs, for which we seek redress.

What gives dignity to those who rank as members of a Profession? Surely it is the possession of a legally recognised certificate, of acquired knowledge and skill, which gives to the holder the right to practise under certain conditions. Let us see how membership is obtained in that Profession towards which we stand in the position of helpmates. When a young man wishes to qualify for becoming a physician or surgeon, he goes through a course of training under men who are already physicians or surgeons, the law requires him to spend a certain time in training, and also to pass examinations held by persons who must, as I said before, be themselves members of the Medical Profession. When he has satisfied his examiners of his knowledge and skill, then, and not till then, does the law of England give him the right to practise. The would-be doctor has to expend money and time in qualifying for this right, and not until he has done so is he entitled to practise medicine. But this is not all, he may have skill and knowledge, but if he act in a manner to disgrace his Profession, the right is retained by the Governing Body to erase his name from the roll or register, and so to deprive him legally of the right to practise. Thus, admission to the Profession and membership of it rests on the judgment of previous members, supported by the law of England.

Thus very briefly I have tried to put the position of the medical profession before you, and I ask you, "Have we any existence as a Profession?"

This brings me to my second subject for consideration, "Is Registration necessary?" There is an old and very homely proverb which implies that what has been found good for the man will be found good for the woman too, therefore the first argument which comes to my mind is, that men have found it necessary to protect themselves and the public by a legal register of qualified persons.

You will observe that I put the public in the second place, because the public, that "man in the street" of whom we hear so much, often prefers the unqualified quack; but the doctor, who has spent money and time in qualifying, objects to have the money he should earn, diverted into any such channel, and he has persuaded the Government of this land to protect him by passing a law that prevents the unqualified man competing with him. In other words, the registered medical practitioner has acquired certain rights, and he demands that they be respected. England is spending not only millions

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