

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD
EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

No. 823.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 9, 1904.

Vol. XXXII.

Editorial.

THE FOUNDATION STONE OF NURSING.

We have been asked by readers interested in the question of legislation for nurses to define the significance of the Bill drafted by a sub-committee of the Royal British Nurses' Association. Its significance cannot be overrated: it means that the principles for which the Association was founded have triumphed, that the anti-professional policy inspired by Sir Henry Burdett, and so unworthily supported by his friends within the Association, has signally failed; that they have at last realised that the demand of trained nurses for Registration cannot be withstood, and that this hurriedly-prepared Bill, endeavouring still to retain the control of the nursing profession, is an open acknowledgment of defeat and surrender. For the two Bills for the Registration of Trained Nurses to be introduced into the House of Commons next Session—the one drawn up by nurses themselves, as members of the Society for the Registration of Trained Nurses, and the one inspired by the hon. officers of the Royal British Nurses' Association—BOTH EMBODY AS A FOUNDATION PRINCIPLE THE RIGHT OF QUALIFIED NURSES TO LEGAL STATUS.

This demand for legal status means that we ask for a special Act of Parliament granting to us, as to other professions, the right to organise our members, to enforce an adequate educational curriculum, to register such trained nurses as give proof of possession of due qualifications, so that as a body nurses may be responsible only for the professional efficiency and conduct of those who have conformed to the necessary regulations.

When we come to the provisions of the two Bills we find the essential difference is that the one drafted by the nurses—while providing for the due representation of the medical profession and of hospital committees as nursing educational authorities—places a just measure of control on the Governing Body in the hands

of the Matrons and nurses themselves, selected and elected by the thousands of registered nurses whose life and work will be affected by the Act.

On the other hand, the Bill of the Executive Committee of the Royal British Nurses' Association, while nominally giving the larger number of votes to nurses, in reality places the balance of power in medical and lay hands, as the nine Matrons whom it suggests shall be placed on the Board take their seats, not as the elect of their colleagues or of the Registered Nurses, but as the nominees of the lay Committees of Training-schools, thereby ranging them at once as representing the interests of the employers of nurses, not necessarily those of the members of their own profession.

The fact that there will be two Bills before the House is not to be deplored, for it will prove the widespread need for legislation. The promoters of both Bills will arouse interest in the fundamental principle involved in a wide circle, and the duty of all nurses at the present time is by loyal service and energy to secure as good terms of government as possible when once the principle is conceded. Even supposing that the ungenerous demand of the Executive Committee of the R.B.N.A. for legislation on restrictive lines should be successful, those who see well ahead know that such success would be only temporary.

The demand of male workers for reasonable independence in the management of their own affairs, for just conditions of work and life, is now realised in most civilised countries, and by all the laws of evolution the same right will be conceded to women workers sooner or later.

Readers of history will not need reminding that in all professional reform the rights of the many have been wrung from those in authority by the few, who, possessed of the courage inspired by conscientious conviction, have, step by step, overcome the forces of ignorance and prejudice. Therefore, however much the present managers of the R.B.N.A. may strive to curtail

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)