

State Registration.*

By LADY HELEN MUNRO FERGUSON.

The promise of the Prime Minister to grant a Select Committee of the House of Commons to inquire into the whole subject of nursing brings the question of Registration prominently forward, and it is confidently expected by its supporters that the evidence to be laid before the Committee will end in a verdict in favour of Registration, and its final adoption. The immediate result may be disappointing to ardent Registrationists—there will be no transformation scene: every possible precaution will be taken to safeguard the position of those nurses who, though disqualified for registration, can give satisfactory proof that they have been engaged for a definite time in *bonâ-fide* nursing. This alone guarantees that the changes effected by Registration will be gradual. But this consideration apart, it is impossible for anyone to devote time, energy, and nervous strength to a cause without unconsciously exaggerating its beneficial results, and without getting to believe that success means not merely one step forward, but the attainment of absolute perfection. Cobden is constantly being attacked just now because in some of his oratorical flights he somewhat overestimated the grand results of Free Trade. Temperance reformers, to take the most typical of protagonists, will probably be disappointed of some of the results they confidently predict for their legislative proposals.

And so with Registration, it will neither work miracles of improvement, nor will it entail one percentage of the evils anticipated by the anti-Registrationists. Matrons will find themselves reigning as supremely as before, the leading hospitals will still lead, the great ignorant, stingy public will for a long time be content with insufficiently-trained, private nurses, and as unwilling to pay liberally for highly-skilled services. But, on the other hand, the good that will gradually emerge will be a very solid contribution to progress, whether regarded from the nurses' point of view or from that of the public.

Nursing will for the first time become a real profession instead of a disorganised collection of individuals whose skill ranges from that of the highly-trained hospital Sister or Matron to that of the so-called nurse who has spent three months in some kind of nursing institution, and has been engaged to work partly as a charwoman and partly as nurse.

Registration entails immediate organisation and the formation of a governing body. This will mean that expert persons will devote time and thought to the whole question of training, and that the broad outlines of a minimum standard of training

will be laid down, anything less than which will be considered insufficient to constitute a properly-qualified nurse.

Thus a very clear line will finally be drawn between the trained and untrained, and the status of the former will, consequently, be considerably improved. Of course there will still be good registered nurses and indifferent registered nurses—just as there are good lawyers and bad lawyers—for the enforced standard will be but a minimum one, and, whatever the standard, the personal element must always be reckoned with. But the wholly ignorant and unfit will be excluded from the ranks of registered nurses, and those who have given time, money, and strength to acquiring a thorough training will no longer have to compete on exactly the same terms with those who have expended neither capital nor effort in acquiring knowledge and experience.

The total number of so-called nurses is now over 80,000. It is estimated that half that number would account for all the trained and registerable nurses. Probably more than half the work distributed between these 80,000 women consists of cases requiring highly-skilled nurses. Once make it possible for the employing public to distinguish clearly between the trained and untrained, and this work will gradually get restricted to those who can legitimately undertake it, and this must react favourably on the position and remuneration of registered nurses.

Nor need we anticipate any shortage of good nurses. Organisation will lead to better adaptation of the worker to the work, and this should result not in any diminution of employment, but in a readjustment of work between the qualified and the unqualified, so that the more difficult—and, one may hope, the better-paid—posts would fall into the hands of the trained nurses; while all lighter cases, needing constant attention, perhaps, rather than skill, would offer suitable employment to the unregistered nurse. We may expect that the terms of remuneration will come to correspond with the character of the nursing required, and that instead of the minimum two guineas fee which the patient now pays for every kind of nurse and nursing, the fees paid to the unregistered nurse will fall, and this cannot but increase the demand, and open up a larger field of employment for a new type of visiting or resident nurse, who, having invested next to nothing in training, can afford to work for lower pay. Thus all would benefit. Those who need the highest nursing skill will be certain of obtaining it, which they are not at present; while an increasing number of sufferers from slight ailments, senile decay, or chronic affections will find it possible to obtain the services of partially-trained nurses, who, being no longer able to compete for the better class of work, will be available for the cases for which they are suited. The very fact, too, that Registration will improve the status and prospects of the

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