

# THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

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

No. 897.

SATURDAY, JUNE 10, 1905.

Vol. XXXIV.

## Editorial.

### VOLUNTARY OR COMPULSORY REGISTRATION.

An important question which has been raised by the Select Committee of the House of Commons, and which has evidently puzzled more than one witness, is whether the Registration of Nurses should be a voluntary or compulsory matter. It is, therefore, well that we should explain exactly the meanings of these two terms. Everyone knows that a voluntary act is something which one does of one's own free will, whilst a compulsory deed is something which one is compelled to do. So voluntary registration implies that a nurse need not register unless she chooses to do so, whilst compulsory registration means that unless she is registered she will not be allowed to practise as a nurse.

But the case is not quite so simple as this definition would seem to make it, because the law in England has always shown a remarkable tenderness for individual freedom, and Parliament has a rooted dislike to imposing new penalties—that is to say, making British citizens do something which they have never done before, under penalty of fine or imprisonment in case of their disobedience. So, when the first Medical Act was passed, although everyone recognised that it was of immense importance to the public that no one should term himself, or practise as, a doctor unless he were a fully-qualified medical practitioner, Parliament did not make it penal, that is to say, punishable, if any quack practised as a medical man so long as he made it perfectly clear that he did not possess a medical qualification. In other countries, of course, heavy penalties attach to anyone practising an art for which he is not duly qualified by law, but the State in this country always acts upon the great principle that individual freedom is the first essential, and that it is much better to let quackery flourish than to interfere with the

freedom of the subject to do anything he pleases, so long as it is not distinctly illegal.

It is, therefore, certain that Parliament will never pass a compulsory Registration Act for nurses; that is to say, it will never enact that no person shall practise nursing the sick unless he or she is duly registered, making disobedience to this provision illegal, and punishable by fine or imprisonment. We and those who have for so many years been working with us to obtain State Registration for Nurses have always recognised this fact, and have invariably pointed out, that registration of nurses must be made a voluntary matter on the part of the nurse. At the same time, we are well aware that, although she need not register unless she chose, there would be such moral compulsion on every trained nurse to register herself, immediately the Act was passed, that she would find herself outside the pale of trained nurses and classed as a quack unless she did so. Moreover, in the Nurses' Bill now before Parliament, a very great additional inducement is held out to every nurse to register herself by the provision that no one can claim fees for nursing services in a court of law unless she has been duly registered under the Act. This is the provision in the Medical Acts which is the only real inducement to medical men to register; but it has proved to be so efficacious in their case that there are probably not twenty men in the United Kingdom who have not registered. The essential difference in the case of a nurse is this—that, whereas every medical man practises on the strength of a medical degree or qualification which he has obtained from some British University or Medical Corporation formed by the State, Nurses, if the Act were passed, would have no other qualification to practise than the State Certificate, granted after the State examination, which alone would entitle them to be enrolled on the Register of Trained Nurses.

Perhaps some of the confusion—to which we have alluded as to the meanings of the terms,

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