

The Registration of Trained Nurses.

BY A CONSULTING SURGEON.

It affords me much pleasure to accede to the request of the Editor and express the views which I, and I believe a very large section of the medical profession, hold with regard to the question of the Registration of Nurses. I think the prevalent feeling is one of wonder that a few active spirits should have succeeded in doing so much for nurses in the last few years, in the face of great opposition and many difficulties, and even greater wonder that the great body of nurses who believe in the principle, do not take a more active part in bringing about a reform which must be of such incalculable advantage to themselves personally and individually. It is not too much to say that if medical men, sixty years ago, had been in the position which nurses hold to-day, they would as one man have demanded, and in the next Session of Parliament would have obtained, justice for the sick and for themselves. Because that, to my mind, is simply what Registration means. It means an Act of Parliament forming a Nursing Council, and giving that Council power to define what education a woman must have had, and what kind of examination she must pass, before she becomes recognised by the law of England as a trained nurse; giving that Council power to place the name of such a nurse on an alphabetical list, which shall be published each year, and be on public sale, so that anyone, at any moment, can ascertain whether any woman claiming to be a trained nurse is actually so or not; and giving that Council power, after a proper legal hearing, to suspend, or to remove altogether, from that list the name of any trained nurse who proves herself to be unworthy of professional trust. Registration means nothing more nor less than that; but what would its results be?

In the first place, every trained nurse would be protected against the women who now, without let or hindrance, can compete with her, on equal terms, in the labour market. For to-day, any woman, without any training whatsoever, can term herself a trained nurse, claim the same fees as a thoroughly trained woman, and thus take from trained nurses the fees which the latter have justly earned by their years of arduous work in hospital wards.

In the next place, Registration would prevent nurses from being classed any longer in the public mind with the women who have falsely assumed that title to public confidence and

from time to time appear in the dock, in nursing uniform, for various criminal offences. Registration, in short, would give the trained nurse, for the first time, a definite professional position, with professional privileges and professional protection.

It must be obvious, therefore, to the least thoughtful person, that Registration must mean enormous benefits to the public and to the nursing profession in the future, and to every individual nurse as soon as it is gained; and that is why every nurse should take an active interest in this great question.

Now, I have always found nurses wonderfully like other human beings, and it appears to me that their leaders have made a cardinal mistake in treating them as "angels with cast-iron backs," as one patient described them. For years, they have been told the advantages of Registration to the public, to doctors, and to the nursing profession. It is all quite true, it is all very lovely; but I should like to treat nurses as human beings, and point out to them just one simple and entirely satisfying reason why Registration would be good for every individual nurse. For example, some nurses have said to me, "I don't understand the question, and don't wish to take sides!" When I point out to such that one side—those working for Registration—must be working for the nurses' benefit, and the other side—those working against it—must be working directly against the nurses' interests, it is wonderful how quickly the question is understood. Of course, there are people who would lose large incomes if Registration were effected. Those who keep private nursing homes and take in young women to do the work, pretending to them that they will be trained as nurses, and paying them no wages, and in some instances requiring a premium of them, on that account; thus defrauding the sick rich who go into such homes expecting to be nursed by thoroughly trained women, and pay accordingly; and defrauding the woman who works for nothing, believing that she is being properly educated for her profession—such people would, in future, have to employ and pay trained nurses to the very obvious benefit of the trained nurses' pockets, but to the considerable depletion of the nursing home profits. Of course, such people oppose Registration. It is most natural that they should do so!

The many nursing institutions which farm out semi-trained, or altogether untrained, nurses, and make large profits from the transaction, of course oppose Registration, which would instantly tell the public that they were being defrauded of what they paid for.

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