

knowledge behind her for the responsibility entailed after only a year's training: In regard to registration, it was doing an injustice to fully trained nurses to protect the interests of the partially trained at their expense.

Mrs. Spencer asked how the trained nurse was to be supported in rural districts, and Mrs. Fenwick thought that the State which provides a parish doctor for the necessitous should also provide a parish nurse. Help must be given to lying-in women after 1910. Mrs. Spencer deprecated any pauperisation of the rural poor.

Miss Stewart said she thought those present would agree with her that the standard of a nurse for the poor should equal that for the rich. The audience approved this statement by applause.

THE ORGANISATION OF A NURSES' DEFENCE UNION.

Miss H. L. PEARSE, Superintendent of School Nurses under the London County Council, pointed out that one of the first instincts of the human race is that of self-preservation, and that therefore it is natural that all sections of the community should take steps to safeguard their own interests. It was obvious that there must be many occasions when questions affecting a great body of professional workers such as nurses require to be dealt with by an expert committee of their own members, and that there are other occasions when legal advice and assistance are needed. She showed that defence takes two principal forms—collective and individual—that nurses have as yet no Defence Union, that midwives are now taking steps to form one, while the medical profession has two flourishing societies for defence purposes.

The value of the Medical Defence Union was proved by the decrease in the number of cases when the Union's policy and tactics came to be fully appreciated. "Each succeeding year," its solicitor states, "brings with it more conclusive testimony to the respectful regard and wholesome fear in which the Union is held." He regards its reputation for a policy of "no compromise" as "one of its principal assets."

Miss Pearse explained the objects of the London and Counties Medical Protection Society:—(a) To protect, support, and safeguard the character and interests of legally qualified medical and dental practitioners. (b) To advise and defend members of the Society when attacked.

Those proposed by the Midwives' Defence Association are much the same, and a Nurses' Defence Union would have similar objects.

She then gave as an instance of a case in which membership of a Defence Union would have been useful to a nurse, the well-known one of a member who was threatened by the Hon. Officers of the Royal British Nurses' Association with removal from the Register of Trained Nurses, and consequently with professional ruin, because she addressed a justifiable letter to a professional paper concerning a point of mismanagement at the office of that Association. The nurse appealed to the High Courts for protection and won the day, but was involved in heavy legal

expenses. Miss Pearse pointed out that had she been a member of a strong Defence Union it is in the highest degree improbable that she would have been threatened.

As instances in which collective defence had been needed, she enumerated the proposal of the Local Government Board to give the title of "Qualified Nurse" to women with a year's training in a Poor Law Infirmary, the scheme for the control of the nursing profession by seven City financiers, and the proposal of the Metropolitan Asylums' Board to deprive the Matrons in its hospitals and asylums of the rank of principal officer, which schemes, with the exception of the last which was still under consideration, had fallen through on account of the opposition offered.

Miss Pearse suggested for discussion the point whether the Matrons' Council should continue to undertake defence work of a collective nature, or whether a Nurses' Defence Union should be formed.

DISCUSSION.

Miss Stewart said that the best peace in the world was a well-armed peace. It was quite within the objects of the Matrons' Council to undertake the work of defence. She would like to hear if the meeting thought this should be done, or if there should be a Defence Union organised by nurses for nurses.

Miss Kent thought delay a pity, the sooner a Union was organised the better. Nurses were helpless in regard to defence, but she was constantly meeting private nurses who had need of such a Society. She also referred to nurses who were turned out of hospitals at a moment's notice without any reason being assigned, and inquired if this were legal.

Miss Stewart said it depended upon their contracts. Many nurses never read these when they signed them, and then found it hard when they were enforced.

Mrs. Fenwick said that there was no law on the Statute Book which touched on the industrial conditions of trained nurses. In reply to a question from Miss Kent, she said that they might rank as domestic servants after they had obtained their certificates, but as probationers in training they had no legal protection. Their contracts were drawn up for the advantage of the hospitals, and in many instances needed revision. She could not believe there were many cases in which it was really necessary to dismiss a nurse at a moment's notice.

Miss Marquardt said that women teachers have a Defence Union, and thought some information might be gained by it.

It was agreed *nem con.* that it was desirable some steps should be taken to organise Nurses' Defence, and it was left to the Matrons' Council to consider the best methods and to report to a future meeting.

Mrs. Bedford Fenwick's paper on "The Place of Trained Nursing in Prisons" will be reported next week.

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