

The Official Directory of the Central Hospital Council.

In order to understand the aim of the "Official Directory" for which the Central Hospital Council for London is seeking to obtain an Order in Council through a Bill introduced into the House of Lords by Lord Balfour of Burleigh on March 18th, it is necessary to draw attention to the attitude adopted by the majority of the hospitals represented on the Council in the past. It is one of frank hostility to what they call "State Interference" with the Nursing Departments of Hospitals. In 1892 the authorities of St. Thomas's Hospital, the London Hospital, Westminster Hospital, King's College Hospital, St. Mary's Hospital, Charing Cross Hospital, the Seamen's Hospital, Greenwich, Guy's Hospital, etc., presented a Petition to the Privy Council in opposition to the application of the Royal British Nurses' Association for a Charter of Incorporation, the first reason they alleged being

"That a General Register is not adapted to the calling of nurses for the sick, and that any possible Register of Nurses would be misleading to the public, and detrimental to the interests of nursing."

In 1896, at the Conference convened by the Parliamentary Bills Committee of the British Medical Association to consider the question of State Registration of Nurses, the majority of these hospitals "re-affirmed the position they had hitherto taken, and declined to enter on any further consideration of the subject."

In 1904 the Central Hospital Council for London presented a Memorandum to the Select Committee on Registration of the House of Commons containing the following words:

"We believe that any system of State Registration would be detrimental to the public and harmful to the nurses themselves."

AN ALTERNATIVE POLICY.

After the Select Committee had presented a unanimous Report in favour of Registration, the opponents were compelled to "give further consideration to the subject." They owned that after this verdict "circumstances had changed," and recognised that "it was no longer sufficient to state the objections of the Council to registration, but that they should be prepared with an alternative policy." The suggestion for the establishment of an Official Nursing Directory is the outcome of that decision. It is the proposition of the opponents of State Registration, and the Bill introduced into the House of Lords on March 18th "To provide for an Official Directory of Nurses" is an Anti-Registration Bill in practice—if not in principle.

THE SUGGESTION OF AN OFFICIAL DIRECTORY MADE TO THE SELECT COMMITTEE.

The suggestion for an Official Directory was made to the Select Committee on Registration of the House of Commons, who were told by Sir Victor Horsley that a Directory of Nurses, not

based upon a Register maintaining a minimum standard of education would be of no value whatever. Also when Sir Victor Horsley represented the British Medical Association at the Board of Trade in opposition to a Licence being granted to the "Incorporated Society for Promoting the Higher Education of Nurses," he stated that the Annual Representative Meeting was strongly of opinion that Medical Practitioners felt the need of a system of State Registration for Nurses. The medical profession would only, however, accept State Registration, not a pseudo-scheme. There was no representation of medical practitioners and nurses of any kind whatever on the proposed Council.

These arguments apply with equal force to the Official Nursing Directory proposed by Mr. Sydney Holland, Sir Henry Burdett, and the other members of the Central Hospital Council. Although they are well aware that nurses have for twenty years been working for Registration, and have at the present time a Bill before Parliament, introduced by Mr. R. C. Munro-Ferguson, no Association of Nurses have been afforded an opportunity of expressing an opinion on the Central Hospital Council's Directory Bill, nor have the Government Departments employing Nurses, such as Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service, The Navy, or Indian Nursing Services, the Colonial Nursing Association, or Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute for Nurses received any official intimation of the proposed legislation.

To attempt to make laws for any class of the community without consultation with those for whom it is proposed to legislate, is contrary to the best traditions of British justice. The Bill, furthermore, is dangerous because it makes no provision for a Governing Body upon which the class governed is represented, unlike the Bill of the Society for the Registration of Trained Nurses, upon which provision is made for representation of the Medical Profession, the Nursing Profession, and the Public, so far as possible by direct representation. And again, the proposed Official Directory would be useless for the protection of the public, as no minimum standard of nursing education is defined or required in connection with it.

SUMMARY.

The Directory would thus be useless to the community as affording a guarantee of efficient nursing education and the maintenance of discipline.

It would be misleading to the public, because they would naturally suppose that a nurse whose name was inserted in the Directory had received an efficient education, whereas no such guarantee is afforded.

It would be dangerous to nurses because it deprives them of all power of self-government, and proposes to place them personally, professionally, and economically under an autocracy.

We, therefore, venture to ask the House of Lords to reject this Bill, and to give their consent to no measure which is not calculated to effect useful and satisfactory legislation for the nurses, the medical profession, and the public.

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