

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

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

No. 1,632.

SATURDAY, JULY 12, 1919.

Vol. LXIII

EDITORIAL.

EQUALITY FOR WOMEN.

Those nurses who listened to the Debate on the third reading of the Women's Emancipation Bill in the House of Commons on July 4th, which preceded that on the Report Stage of their own Bill, are to be congratulated on hearing a most memorable and historic discussion on the question of removing "all existing inequalities of the law as between men and women," a course to which the Government is committed by its election pledges. The Bill introduced by the Labour Party—which proposed to enfranchise all women over twenty-one—was not, however, acceptable to the Government, and it therefore sent out a whip to its supporters, requesting their attendance, "as the Government will oppose the Women's Emancipation Bill on the ground that it alters the franchise."

The right of exercising the Parliamentary franchise is conferred not only as a matter of justice to individuals, but in order that they, on their side, may bring to the State something of value in dealing with politics. Do young men and women of 21 as a whole possess that informed knowledge of politics which will enable them to give an enlightened vote at Parliamentary elections? We are not arguing in opposition, but we think that there is need to study and to know. We are inclined to agree with the member who held that it would be preferable, in the future, to fix the age of both men and women entitled to a vote at 25, rather than to lower the age for women to 21.

No one who has gone through the campaign for the State Registration of Trained Nurses in the House of Commons this year can have failed to realise the extreme danger arising from ill-considered political action on the part of

hordes of young women ignorant of its effect. Following the ukase of the Council of the College of Nursing, Ltd., its members have taken action of which the effect will be to deprive themselves of legal status, self-government, the protected title of Registered Nurse, and a protected uniform, in the immediate future. All these advantages were incorporated in the Bill introduced by Major Barnett on behalf of the Central Committee, and the House of Commons gave unmistakable evidence that it was prepared to grant them forthwith.

The old anti-registration policy of sowing dissension in the nursing ranks, and using ill-informed nurses as pawns in the game, was employed to defeat a broad and enlightened measure for their emancipation. Probably not one in five hundred of the members of the College of Nursing, Ltd., who obediently responded to the urgent whip from headquarters, which instructed them to earnestly beg Members of Parliament not to support the Bill promoted by the Central Committee, had even seen a copy of that Bill, and certainly could not give an intelligent summary of its provisions. Now there is only the slightest chance of the Bill reaching the House of Lords this Session, and Registration will therefore be again postponed until the exigencies of a very full Session permit the Government to carry through a Bill.

Such a situation gives one pause for thought, and for forming the opinion that political power should be conferred on instructed persons. It should, of course, not be a class privilege, but people who have the vote may justly be expected to exercise it with knowledge and discretion, and to bring to the service of the State, and to bear upon legislation, as Mr. Spencer claimed in the House of Commons, their "women's experience, intelli-

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)