

with the liberty of the man in the street. He knows, as we know, that the sturdy dockside labourers and fisherfolk of Leith Burghs, N.B., who sent him to Parliament, will be calling "a spade a spade" long after this unjust makeshift Nurses Bill has been discredited and decently interred!

LOOKING BACK.

Demoralisation is seldom of rapid growth. Thus we must take a retrospective glance to realise the cause which has inspired the present *débâcle* in the nursing world.

The instinct which has inspired it springs undoubtedly from the fear of competition in the relative positions of doctor and nurse; thus we find a medical Peer using his great influence to enforce a system to which he would strongly object if applied to the medical profession, *the registration of quacks*; and the determination of the employer to control the financial relations with the employed—a human instinct—specially objectionable when existing between the sexes. But this is a controversial subject of wide dimensions on which lack of space for the moment prohibits free discussion.

In December, 1930, our Registration Act had been in force for 11 years, and owing to lack of organisation upon the part of public bodies employing nurses a shortage of workers was already apparent.

The Editor of the *Lancet* set up a Commission to inquire into, and report on the matter, consisting of 12 persons, with a Peer in the chair, of which two were hospital matrons, three medical men, one medical woman, and six members of the laity. This Commission made its first Report in 1931, of which some suggestions for the increase of probationers were useful; but a recommendation to prove fatal to future efficiency was that which touched on professional education and recommended that the Preliminary State examination of the General Nursing Council should be divided into two parts—Part I dealing with anatomy, physiology and hygiene to be taken before the nurse entered the hospital wards. This recommendation in effect divorced anatomy, physiology and hygiene from the clinical training of the nurse, and aroused danger of other bodies depriving the General Nursing Council for England and Wales of the right of examination.

This question, more important than apparent when referred to the G.N.C., aroused a strong division of opinion, the proposal being vetoed for several years on various occasions; but owing to the influence of the late Mrs. M. H. Kettle, M.R.C.S., Assistant Editor of the *Lancet*, a representative of the Ministry of Health on the G.N.C., this recommendation was ultimately agreed, upon the proposal of Miss Helen Dey, S.R.N.

The significance of this innovation, carried by the lay element of the Council, was *the removal of the one portal to the Register*, and subsequent lack of effective organisation of the teaching of theory in its clinical application. From the fatal day, when the floodgates were opened, may be dated the apotheosis of the Assistant Nurse. These untrained and disorganised women became more and more indispensable in public hospitals, and as a source of profit to unscrupulous Co-operations until at the present date some 16,000 are earning their living as nurses of the sick.

Lord Horder's Reconstruction Committee of the Royal

College of Nursing, together with the Minister of Health and the General Nursing Council, have promoted a Bill to give legal status to unqualified nurses, the inefficiency of whom is, in our opinion, not only a public danger, but a breach of contract with every qualified nurse on the State Register. It remains to be proved that educated girls are going to contract for three or four years' ward service, intensive study, to pass stiff examinations for registration, when a course of two years' practical work in hospital, without theoretical pressure, with State protection in the offing, and freedom to nurse the public, is open to them. We doubt it.

THE ATHLONE COMMITTEE.

In 1937, what is known as the Athlone Committee was set up to consider nursing affairs. As usual, the Committee was largely composed of interested persons, mostly men who knew little of professional nursing. Only four amenable nurses were placed upon it, and the request of the *intelligentsia* for representation was as usual refused, government without representation being the principle enforced where the nursing profession is concerned.

In an Interim Report presented in 1939, the Committee recommended the fatal policy of recognising Assistant Nurses (practically untrained women) to be organised by the General Nursing Council for England and Wales.

To consider this vitally important question, the G.N.C. promptly went *in camera*, where it has remained from that day till this when discussing it, never once having considered the matter in open Council or consulted its constituency as to its opinion.

The four nurses on the Athlone Committee apparently agreed to organise the unqualified Assistant Nurses, but proposed they should be covered by a less obnoxious title. To this the Athlone Committee refused to agree. The war intervened—hope told a flattering tale—we were under the impression that Parliament had agreed not to discuss controversial legislation during the war—alas! this modicum of justice need not apparently be extended to the hundred thousand Registered Nurses whose training has apparently largely deprived them of articulate expression concerning their own affairs.

Now the blow has fallen, and nursing as a profession for educated women may cease to exist. We await events.

Moreover, do not let us forget that the day of privilege is drawing to a close. The assistant is of the people—it will be beyond the power of Medical Peers and Nursing Potentates to segregate her in a compound. There is to be no closed profession of nursing.

"WHERE DO WE GO NOW?"

Straight ahead, of course. As No. 1 on the State Register of Nurses, we fling down the gauntlet to the ignorant promoters of this unconstitutional and unjust legislation.

The Nurses Bill violates the basis of British justice with contempt. It abstracts our property without our consent, for the purpose of degrading our standard of nursing efficiency, and thus imperils the health of the people. The Nurses' Registration Act of 1919 is the Magna Charta of the Nursing Profession in England. We shall fight to retain its power to protect the community from the dangerous inefficiency of unqualified nurses covered by interested politicians.

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