

IS A GENERAL REGISTER FOR NURSES DESIRABLE?

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JUDGING by the public and private discussions which have taken place among members of the Nursing profession and the expression of opinion of some medical men, it would seem to be a foregone conclusion on their part that this question can only be answered in the affirmative, the matter for discussion and any differences of opinion having apparently had relation only to the method and machinery to be adopted in establishing a Register.

I propose to submit for consideration some reasons on the negative side of the question, tending to the conclusion that the object which all who are interested in the promotion of good Nursing have at heart—namely, that of raising the standard of Nursing and the position of Nurses—may suffer instead of gaining by the establishment of a General Register. The advantages to be obtained by it have been stated from the Nurses' point of view in words to this effect: "That Nursing is a profession, as medicine and law are professions; but that it is not acknowledged as such; and that the legal Registration of Nurses is the only means by which Nursing can be established as an acknowledged and legally constituted profession; that to effect this a Royal Charter must be obtained, which will authorise the Registration of Nurses on terms satisfactory to Physicians and Surgeons as evidence of their having received systematic training."

From the Doctors' point of view it is stated that the medical profession require some definite means of knowing with certainty who is, and who is not, a Trained Nurse; that in the medical and other professions a legal Register provides that means; and that it is hardly necessary to point out that unless such a Register be authorised by the State it is of no value; that it is essential, moreover, that the Register should be controlled by the medical profession.

Both, therefore, the Nurses and the Doctors whose opinions have been quoted concur in the view that the case of Nurses is analogous to that of the medical profession, and while the Nurses consider that a legal Register is essential, in order to raise the position and vocation of a Nurse to that of a profession with all the supposed advantages attaching to that designation, the Doctors are of opinion that it affords the only safe means by which to provide themselves with a skilled Nurse. Now, I venture to think that, when we come to look more closely into the matter, we shall find

some patent reasons for concluding that the case of Nurses is not analogous to that of Doctors, that a General Register will not afford, and is not capable of affording, either to Doctors or to the public, the information which employers of Nurses ought to require, and, lastly, that it may tend rather to lower than to raise the position of Nurses.

In the case of the medical profession, the Register is merely a certificate of the candidate having passed certain examinations, after a certain period of technical training, and it is supposed to be required, partly on the ground that the public require protection by precluding unskilled persons, quacks and others, under penalties, from practising medicine at all, and partly on the ground that medical men having to perform certain public duties imposed upon them by law, a legal certificate of their qualifications is expedient.

The qualification for the Register is based mainly, if not solely, on the result of examination, and affords a guarantee only of a certain amount of professional knowledge and skill, coupled with some evidence of previous good conduct, or, rather, absence of bad conduct. The machinery of a General Register is not, and does not pretend to be, adapted for attaining any result of a more thorough or discriminating kind as far as character is concerned. No one can be removed from the Register except for gross negligence or misconduct, and the removal has to be effected by means partaking of the character of a legal process.

How far a legal Register is essential or advantageous in the case of Doctors I will not stop to inquire. Some of the highest authorities in the profession have expressed more than doubts on the subject. But let us consider what are the qualifications which are required of a good Nurse, and how far these can be satisfactorily ascertained after the manner in which a Medical Student's qualifications are tested. No one will, at this time of day, deny that moral, as well as professional, qualities are everything in a Nurse, that she has to be judged by her character and conduct, as well as by her technical skill, by the possession of such qualities as kindness, patience, trust-worthiness, self-control, discretion. How are these intangible things to be registered?

The whole history of the movement for the improvement of Nursing affords a protest against the assumption that the case of Nurses is, in this respect, analogous to that of Medical Students. The main efforts of those who have promoted or carried out the better organisation of Hospital Nursing, and have established and superintended Training Schools for Nurses, have been directed to the introduction of such a system as would protect and foster the moral qualities of the Nurse as being an essential accompaniment to the pro-

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)