

The Story of Nursing.

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A Reply to the Manifesto; from the Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses (1904)

THE SIGNATORIES OF THE manifesto against the State Registration of Nurses have failed to grasp the aim and purpose of the Bill introduced into the House by the Association for promoting the State Registration of Nurses.

The central purpose of this Bill is the organisation of the profession by the establishment of a representative Nursing Council, to whom all questions of training, discipline, and other professional matters will be referred, and by whom a Register of Trained Nurses will be kept.

The first duty of the Council (on which the public, the medical profession, Matrons, and nurses must be represented) will be to determine what is the minimum training and experience necessary to constitute a fully-trained nurse. Once such a standard is established, nurses who have received this minimum training in hospitals or groups of hospitals approved by the Nursing Council will be entitled to register, and will receive a certificate, which will be recoverable by the Council in cases of moral or professional misconduct. It is not suggested that Registration should depend upon an "examination," or that the methods of training should differ materially from those now in force in our leading hospitals. Matrons of hospitals in which nurses undergo training will have precisely the same opportunities of judging of the moral qualities of their nurses as they have under the present system; and it is not apparent why that side of a nurse's equipment should receive less consideration under a system of Registration than it does at present. State Registration will in no way prevent employers from making further inquiries into the personal qualifications of a nurse, but in the innumerable cases where, owing to death or changes in Matronships, no such references are possible, the employer will have an assurance that the registered nurse has gone satisfactorily through a recognised training-school, and has been considered eligible for registration by her Matron. It would be needless to anticipate that hospitals will keep in their employ and recommend as candidates for registration women of unsuitable character and disposition. Nurses will, therefore, not be registered on their technical qualifications alone, inasmuch as the training-schools will certainly in every instance be required to testify that candidates possess the necessary personal qualities.

The public are in a position to judge for themselves whether or not a woman is a desirable member of their households; they have not the expert knowledge to enable them to estimate her professional qualifications.

It must also be borne in mind that many nurses do not work in connection with either hospital or agency, and that the public has no guarantee of the efficiency and impartiality of particular agencies. Some maintain an adequate standard of professional efficiency; others are run purely as commercial speculations in the interests of the proprietors.

Under a system of Registration the public would obtain their nurses from institutions which guaranteed only to supply registered nurses, and they would then not pay full fees for hospital probationers still in training, or for half-trained, inefficient women farmed out as a commercial speculation for the pecuniary advantage of a middleman.

The advocates of Registration deny that the present want of organisation, and the absence of any definite test of professional efficiency, is a guarantee of the possession by nurses of superior moral qualities, and they also contend that—however valuable personal qualities may be—it is through technical skill alone that a nurse is rendered valuable in cases of serious illness. The possession of the highest character and the best intentions would not enable an ignorant woman to arrest the haemorrhage of a wounded artery or adjust a bandage carefully and skilfully. On the other hand, education and

technical training tend to cultivate "observation, sympathy, cheerfulness, and self-control," and the highly-skilled usually acquire that professional zeal or devotion to a patient's interests which is likely to be better directed and more effective than any amount of native, but unskilled, kindness and sympathy.

It is not suggested that there should be a "uniform training," but that a certain minimum standard of training should be laid down, anything less than which cannot be regarded as complete or sufficient.

Non-registered nurses will be free to work for hire, but will be forbidden to claim the title of "Registered Nurse," and it is maintained that Registration, by giving a definite status to the fully-trained nurse, and by enabling the public to discriminate between the quality of the services offered, will attract a good class of women into the profession, and will lead to a better sub-division of labour and to greater economy of nursing effort.

The State Register would in no way "lower the status of the best nurses," for, although every nurse on the Register would have reached a certain minimum standard of efficiency, those who undertook further courses of study, or obtained experience in different departments of nursing, would have these facts duly notified in the Register, and this would result in the creation of a higher order of nurses, to whom higher fees might be paid, and by whom the prizes of the profession would naturally tend to be filled.

The opposition to Registration comes from certain Hospital Committees—the employers of nurses—and from some Matrons in the service of these Committees, who have ranged themselves on the side of their employers. It is unnecessary to point out that the interests of employers and employed are not always identical, and both need safeguarding. There is also considerable prejudice in the minds of Hospital Committees against any proposals which would establish a Central Board, and thus diminish the independence of their nurse-training schools.

At present the training schools have absolute power to regulate the hours of work and the conditions of labour of their employees. In some hospitals the position of the probationer is inferior to that of the domestic servant, who at any rate is entitled to a month's notice. Neither have women who enter the training-schools any guarantee at present that they will receive a thorough training in return for the three years' service to which in most cases they bind themselves on the understanding that they will receive an efficient training.

These training schools are at the present time a law to themselves. There is no minimum standard to which they must conform before they are entitled to rank as training schools, and, while some give due consideration to the interests of their pupils, others—as is only natural—consider their own convenience first.

As an efficient nursing service is a valuable "national asset," it is imperative that nurse training schools should give proof of their qualifications before their recognition as educational authorities. This is imperative in the interests of the nurses and of the public.

Louisa Stevenson, President of the Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses, Member of the Board of Management of the Edinburgh Royal Infirmary; Ethel Gordon Fenwick, President International Council of Nurses, Member of Distinguished Order of the Greek Red Cross; Isla Stewart, Matron and Superintendent of Nursing, St. Bartholomew's Hospital, President Matrons' Council of Great Britain and Ireland, President League of St. Bartholomew's Hospital Nurses; Margaret Huxley, President Irish Nurses Association; Mildred Heather-Bigg, Matron Charing Cross Hospital; Eleanor C. Barton, Matron Chelsea Infirmary, President Chelsea Infirmary Nurses' League; G. A. Rogers, Matron Infirmary, Leicester, President League of Leicester Infirmary Nurses; M. Mollett, Matron

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