

The Story of Nursing.

(Continued from page 116).

Having in two previous issues repeated some of the history concerning the fight of the Society for the State Registration of Nurses, lead by the late Ethel Gordon Fenwick, we go on a step further from 1904.

The Deputation to the Public Health Committee.

IT WILL BE REMEMBERED that a Deputation from the Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses was recently received by the Public Health Committee of the House of Commons, when the reasons for Registration were advanced from various standpoints. We print below the Memorandum presented by Miss Isla Stewart on behalf of the Society, and in a future issue we hope to publish that of Lady Helen Munro Ferguson dealing with the question from the point of view of a member of the public:—

MEMORANDUM.

1. It will be admitted that the nursing of the sick is a matter which closely affects every class of the community, and that it is, therefore, of extreme importance to the public that those who undertake the responsible duties of sick-nursing should be not only thoroughly trustworthy, but also skilled in their technical duties; it follows that it is the duty of the State to provide public safeguards in this matter.

2. The Census of 1901 showed that there were approximately 80,000 persons engaged in nursing the sick in the United Kingdom. Yet there is no organised method, and no minimum standard, of nursing education. There is no uniform test of efficiency, but hundreds of hospitals grant certificates. There is no controlling authority either over nursing education or over trained nurses. Moreover, it is a well-known fact that there are large numbers of women who have either never been trained at all, or who have been dismissed from hospitals after a short period of training as unsuitable or untrustworthy, who now term themselves trained nurses and obtain work in that capacity.

3. Every hospital is a self-constituted training-school, which decides, according to its own ideas and convenience, a term and standard of training, and confers its own certificate. This training may be good, bad, or indifferent. Such a system is often unfair to the pupil who binds herself to the service of an institution in the belief that she will receive instruction which will qualify her as a thoroughly-trained nurse. It is also unfair to medical men and the public, because they have no criterion as to the knowledge and capacity of the nurses they employ.

For the last 16 years efforts have been made by medical men and nurses to organise this chaotic system of nursing education; and this Session two Bills have been introduced into Parliament with the object of regulating the qualifications of nurses and providing for their legal Registration.

4. In brief, it is suggested that Parliament should pass an Act forming

A GENERAL NURSING COUNCIL—

a body empowered to deal with all educational matters affecting nurses, that is to say, to define the precise curriculum through which every woman must pass before she can be certificated as a trained nurse. It must define the period of her training, and the subjects of her education; and no nurse would then be permitted to offer herself for examination until she produced a schedule duly signed by the Matron of her training-school testifying as to her general good conduct and practical proficiency, and by the lecturers upon the different subjects in the curriculum, testifying that she had attended the regulation number of lectures and demonstrations on each subject. It would be the duty of the General Nursing Council to appoint examiners, and hold examinations, and to grant to candidates who passed those

examinations a State Certificate in Nursing. The first result, therefore, of the appointment of such a Council would be that a uniform system of nursing education, and a minimum standard of qualification, would be established throughout the United Kingdom. It would be the duty of the General Nursing Council to compile and publish annually a Register of Trained Nurses and to remove from the same the name of any registered nurse who proved herself to be unworthy of trust and professional confidence. So the public would, for the first time, have some measure of protection against ignorant and inefficient persons who can term themselves trained nurses, and can obtain responsible work in that capacity. The nursing profession would be protected against those members of the calling who bring discredit upon it.

In the constitution of the Council proposed in the Bill drafted by the Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses much care has been taken to make it representative of all the interests involved; that is to say, the Government of the country, the Medical Profession, the Training-Schools for Nurses, and the Registered Nurses themselves.

SOME OF THE EVILS OF THE EXISTING SYSTEM.

At present, private nursing is largely exploited by untrained and unsuitable persons, and the public frequently pay the fees, which fully-trained nurses charge, to women who are either half-trained or wholly ignorant of the responsible duties they undertake to perform. Considering the importance of those duties, and that in some cases the very life of the patient may depend on their efficient and scrupulous fulfilment of medical directions, the public should certainly be able to obtain some official guarantee that the nurses they employ are proficient in their technical work, and they should have some means of protection against those who assume the dress and title of a trained nurse without any justification for such assumption.

The movement for nursing reform has received consideration and support from the medical profession. In November, 1889, the General Medical Council unanimously resolved:—

“That in the opinion of the Council it would be much to the advantage of the public, and particularly would be of much convenience to the practitioners of medicine and surgery, that facilities, usable under proper guarantees in all parts of the United Kingdom, should be given, by Act of Parliament or otherwise, for the authoritative certification of competent trained nurses, who, when certified, should be subject to common rules of discipline.”

In August, 1895, at its annual meeting, the British Medical Association unanimously resolved:—

“That in the opinion of this meeting it is expedient that an Act of Parliament should, as soon as possible, be passed providing for the registration of medical, surgical, and obstetric nurses.”

At a meeting of the International Congress of Nurses held in Buffalo, U.S.A., in 1901, at which some 500 trained nurses of various nationalities were present, many of them delegates from important societies of nurses, the following resolution in favour of State Registration was moved from the Chair by the President of the Congress, Miss Isabel McIsaac, seconded by Miss Isla Stewart (Great Britain), supported by Miss Snively (Canada), Miss McCahey (Australia), Mrs. Hampton Robb (United States), and unanimously agreed to:—

“Whereas, The nursing of the sick is a matter closely affecting all classes of the community in every land;

“Whereas, To be efficient workers, nurses should be carefully educated in the important duties which are now allotted to them;

“Whereas, At the present time there is no generally accepted term or standard of training, nor system of education, nor examination for nurses in any country;

“Whereas, There is no method, except in South Africa, of enabling the public to discriminate easily between trained

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