

Conference on State Registration of Nurses.

THE Conference between Representatives of various Nursing bodies and the Parliamentary Bills Committee of the British Medical Association, took place on Tuesday, the 14th, at 3 p.m., in the Council Room, at the offices of the British Medical Association. The Conference was held as a preliminary to the Parliamentary Bills Committee meeting, which took place at 5 p.m., and the various Nursing bodies were invited to send Representatives, so that the Committee should have an opportunity of hearing the views of these bodies, as to the desirability of State Registration.

Amongst the gentlemen who form the Committee were Sir Walter Foster, Dr. Shuttleworth, Dr. Wallace, Mr. Ward Cousins, Dr. Barnes of Carlisle, Dr. Cleveland, and many others.

Mr. ERNEST HART took the chair, and in his opening remarks explained that the Conference had been called in consequence of a Resolution which was passed at the Annual Meeting of the British Medical Association, held in London in July last, 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 and education of medical, surgical, and obstetric Nurses; and the Council of this Association are therefore requested to consider this matter, and to take such measures as may seem to them advisable to obtain such legislation."

This Resolution was subsequently referred by the Council to the Parliamentary Bills Committee, who felt that the first step in the matter was to ascertain the views and wishes of the Nurses and the Nurse-training bodies. To this end, the present Conference with the Representatives of the Nursing profession and Institutions for the training of Nurses had been arranged. A circular letter was sent out with this object to Nursing bodies, so as to give them an opportunity of expressing their views on this important subject.

As the Resolution relating to Registration had been moved by Dr. Bedford Fenwick, Mr. HART said he would ask him to kindly explain the details of his proposition, and lay before the Conference any suggestions he thought fit.

Before calling on Dr. Fenwick, Mr. HART drew attention to some letters he had received from a certain number of Nursing bodies opposed to State Registration. He then read communications from the Westminster Hospital, the London Hospital, St. Marylebone Infirmary, King's College Hospital, Charing Cross Hospital, Middlesex Hospital, the Leeds Trained Nurses' Institution, and the Secretary of the Nightingale Fund.

The objections these Bodies raised were summed up at a meeting held at St. Thomas's Hospital on January 10th, at which were present Miss Lückes, Miss Gordon, Miss H. Gordon, Miss Monk, Miss E. Vincent, a representative from the Q.V.J.I.N., and Messrs. F. G. Wainwright, Bonham-Carter, Roberts and Burdett, Dr. Allchin, and Canon Troutbeck. It was resolved that "These representatives of Nurse Training Schools, having heard the Resolution of the British Medical Association, re-affirm the position they have hitherto taken, that the Registration of Nurses would be injurious and mischievous to the Nurses, and of doubtful public benefit. They decline to enter on any further consideration of the subject."

Dr. BEDFORD FENWICK was then asked by the Chairman to express his opinions upon the matter. In responding to this request, Dr. FENWICK first alluded to the Resolution passed at St. Thomas's Hospital. He said that those statements would have carried more conviction to his mind if they had been accompanied by one iota of argument or proof. He could not help remembering that those same statements, advanced before the Privy Council in 1892, had made not the slightest impression upon that august body. He recalled the fact that the Privy Council had, when granting the Royal Charter asked for by the Royal British Nurses' Association, despite the strenuous opposition of those very ladies and gentlemen who now again appeared in opposition, expressly stated that the maintenance and publication of a list of Trained Nurses was likely to prove of much public benefit. He had always felt convinced that most persons who opposed the Registration of Trained Nurses were actuated by the highest and most conscientious motives. But in view of the fact that the Registration of Nurses in this country was an accomplished fact, and that in one great English Colony it was already carried on by Act of Parliament, he ventured to think the day had passed for disputing about the principle of Registration. The Resolution passed unanimously at the great meeting in London last August, was simply an evolutionary step forward. The medical profession expressed the opinion that Registration of all classes of Nurses should be carried out on a complete and broad basis by Act of Parliament. The real question, then, to be solved was—should the control of Registration be confided by Parliament to the Royal British Nurses' Association, or should it be given to a body to be created for that purpose, and representative of all the many interests involved in this matter? The latter course appeared to him to be the more equitable and the more probably successful, and therefore, though no one was better aware of the importance and excellence of the work of the Nurses' Association, he strongly supported the view that Parliament should form an independent and national Nursing Council, to undertake and carry out all details relating to the Education, the Registration, and the Discipline of Trained Nurses. In response to the request of the Chairman, he had briefly sketched out the following principles upon which he considered that legislation might usefully be based:—

(1) That a General Nursing Council be formed by the aforesaid Act, to undertake and carry out the details of the Registration of Nurses.

(2) That the Council be composed of (a) Representatives appointed by all General Hospitals in the United Kingdom containing more than 100 beds; (b) Representatives of the Medical Profession; (c) Representatives of the Privy Council; (d) Fifteen Representatives elected directly by the Registered Nurses.

(3) That the General Nursing Council should meet, say, once a year, to determine all Rules and Regulations, to elect members of an Executive Committee or Registration Board—the Council, in brief, being the governing body of the Nursing profession.

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