

agitation has been so entirely a professional movement, and that, therefore—doubtless for fear of bringing irreparable harm to Hospital finances—so little of the real facts of the case have been made public, and that consequently until now so little popular excitement has been aroused upon the question.

But to supply a convincing argument in favour of the proposition we have above stated, as to the fundamental importance of Registration to the Nursing profession, let us recall what the system has done in two analogous cases—what improvements it has brought to pass in the education of Medical men, and in the position and education of Dentists. Speaking generally, we believe that it may be said that the system has introduced uniformity of instruction into both professions, has enormously raised the quality, and considerably enhanced the quantity, of the training necessary for both Doctors and Dentists. In 1858, when the General Medical Council was formed to control the Register of Medical men, it is not too much to say that Medical education was absolutely devoid of any pretence at uniformity. Each Hospital taught its students what it chose, and how, and when, it pleased. Each examining body had its own subjects, in which the candidates for its qualification to practise Medicine, or Surgery, or Obstetrics, were obliged to be proficient. But these subjects, and—what was still more important—the essential standard of knowledge in these subjects, differed widely at every place. It was, for example, of common occurrence, even until the last ten years, for a gentleman to be rejected in certain subjects at a Royal College in England, for him to take the next train, and present himself a few hours later for examination in the self-same subjects at a Royal College in Scotland, and to pass with flying colours, or *vice versa*, and change the scene of his experiences from north to south. Then, again, thirty years ago some bodies gave a great many subjects of examination, and others gave very few; but the fortunate candidate at each obtained precisely the same legal right to practise Medicine. Once more, some authorities required a much longer period of studentship than others; and so in many other ways, into which it is unnecessary to enter, a general system of instruction and examination was conspicuous only by its absence.

Now when the General Medical Council was established to supervise Registration, its first duty, of course, became to define the qualifications which it considered entitled the possessors thereof to be Registered. And this naturally brought up the whole question as to the course of study whereby these qualifications were obtainable.

The Council, it should be remembered, was, as it still is, composed of representatives of every university and diploma-granting body in the Kingdom, to which, within the last two years, have been added some direct representatives of the Medical profession.

Here we must, *en parenthèse*, point out the wisdom of the British Nurses' Association in modelling the Registration Council, which it will this week call into existence, upon precisely the same lines as those of the General Medical Council, but with the additional advantage to the new body that it is even more democratic and widely representative than its Medical anti-type. When, therefore, the Council decided, as it did in the very early days of its existence, that there should be at least a uniform scheme of instruction through which all Medical students should pass, and that this should extend over a uniform period of four years in all parts of the Kingdom, both these principles were accepted by all the examining bodies in turn, and therefore were of necessity adopted by all the Medical schools whose students sought the qualifications granted by these authorities. So order and uniformity rapidly began to be evolved out of chaos, simply, be it noted, by the elevating influence of Registration. After some time other advances were made. The Council, in full conclave assembled, came to the conclusions that Medical students should be instructed in this, then in that, then in some other, branch of science, and so, piece by piece, the area of knowledge necessary for examination, necessary for certification, necessary for Registration, deepened and widened.

Our correspondent, to whose criticism we last week replied, would doubtless say that this was "placing the cart before the horse." In strict theory doubtless he is right, but in practice the system has been proved by the actual experience of thirty years to work excellently well.

To crown our argument, within the last few months the Council has decided that it would be well if the period of Medical study necessary before a diploma can be obtained were extended from four to five years. When one thinks of the enormous extra labour this will entail upon the teachers at the Medical schools, and what the expense and loss of twelve months must be to students, although the increased period of study could doubtless be utilised to the great future advantage of the public, it is possible to glean some idea of the great moral power which must be inherent in a body which could gravely announce such a decision. And the extent of the influence of the expressed opinion of the Council may be gauged by the fact that already the examining bodies are considering how they can remodel

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)