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Editorial.

THE SELECT COMMITTEE.

Nothing has proved more distinctly the absolute helplessness of the thousands of women working as nurses in this country than the howl of opposition to their demand for organisation, on the part of those who fear that their vested interests will be prejudicially affected, initiated by the representatives of certain London hospitals, who are apparently determined that nurses shall have neither professional status nor personal liberty.

We have no wish to include amongst the opponents of Registration all hospital managers or doctors. On the contrary, we know that there are large numbers who desire reform in the interests of the patients, and of justice to trained nurses. But, whether they recognise it or not, the root of the opposition of the employers to organisation amongst nurses is that up to the present an enormous mass of women's labour has been at the disposal of hospital committees to manipulate absolutely as they choose, and they fear the passage by Parliament of any Bill defining the rights of the worker. On our Statute Book at the present time there are no laws dealing with nurses as a class. Nursing is the only large vocation in which the workers are absolutely helpless, and have no defined position.

The higher professions, including those to which women are admitted with men, are regulated by the State. Industrial workers, such as domestic servants and factory hands, have definite legal rights, but in relation to trained nurses there are so far no laws defining their position. It is contended that they have the right to expect, in common with other callings, the sympathy and protection of the State. Registration would bring the nurse into the arena of workers who are accorded this consideration, and it is to this justifiable demand that the employer is so bitterly antagonistic. We believe that many

of the opponents of Registration have not recognised that this fundamental instinct is at the root of their opposition. But there it is, and it is this with which we have to deal.

It is held to be essential to the public welfare that Parliament should acquaint itself with the educational and industrial conditions of large bodies of workers, and there is precedent for the conclusion that the best method of ascertaining such conditions, for the subsequent information of Parliament, is by the appointment of a Select Committee of one or other House to inquire into the whole matter.

This is what nurses are asking for at the present time, and the method is one which must surely commend itself to all who are concerned in nursing questions, whether they support or disapprove of State Registration.

If the conditions under which nurses work at present are as perfect as the opposition desire us to believe, then an inquiry by a Select Committee will make the fact plain. Therefore they can have nothing to fear, and would surely welcome such an inquiry.

If, on the other hand, the supporters of Registration are right in their belief that the lack of any educational standard for nurses is unsatisfactory and prejudicial to the welfare of the public, then nothing but good can come from the direction of public attention to the matter. Here, then, is a common meeting-ground for opponents and supporters of Registration. First let us have an authoritative statement, after due inquiry, as to the present conditions under which 80,000 persons are engaged in attendance on the sick, then Parliament will be in the best position to deal with the important question of nursing organisation when it comes before it.

It is inconceivable that 80,000 persons will indefinitely be allowed to undertake the most responsible duties now entrusted to trained nurses without affording any adequate guarantee to the public that they possess the knowledge which makes them safe attendants on the sick.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)