

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD

EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

No. 877.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 21, 1905.

Vol. XXXIV.

Editorial.

A CENTRAL EXAMINATION SCHEME FOR NURSES.

We learn that steps are being taken to establish a central examination in London for nurses, the promoter of the scheme being Sir E. Cooper Perry, Medical Superintendent of Guy's Hospital. We are glad that any official connected with one of the large London Hospitals, many of which have for the past seventeen years obstructed progress in this respect, should appreciate the necessity for some form of central examination. At the same time, it is inevitable that any scheme of voluntary examination, launched thus late in the day, by a self-elected body, is doomed to fail. What prestige can it have sufficiently strong to induce nurses to present themselves in any numbers for examination under its authority? The body which could have undertaken the work successfully in the past, and which has the force of a Royal Charter at its back, is the Royal British Nurses' Association. But at the present day anyone who hopes to obtain the general support necessary to make a voluntary scheme of any practical use, at once shows himself out of touch with the feeling of the times. Nothing less than examination and registration under the authority of the State will content the nurses of this country, and the trend of nursing thought wherever organisation of nurses is taking place is in the same direction. In the United States the work of nurses is concentrated upon securing their legal status in those States which have not yet attained it. In Cape Colony and Natal, systems of examination and registration by the State are in force. In Australia organisation, with the ultimate goal of legal registration, is rapidly proceeding. German nurses are asking for the same system, and nothing less can bring system and order into the disorganised ranks of British nurses, and establish their craft in the honourable position which is its due.

A fatal mistake in relation to the scheme which it is hoped may meet the needs of the day, and presumably stave off the demand for Registration, is that none of the self-governing societies of nurses have been consulted in respect to it.

This is an error of policy for two reasons. In the first place, the views of trained nurses as to their own affairs can no longer be ignored; they cannot be treated as children, with no opinions and no rights regarding the regulation of matters of vital concern to them; and, in the second place, from the point of view of policy, it would have been wise of the well-wishers of this scheme to have secured the interest of nurses in it, for we think it may safely be predicted that the majority of training-schools will, as usual, stand aloof, and if it has no power to enforce the support of either the training-schools or the nurses, it will only still further confuse the quite distinct issue at present before the public.

The fact is that the interests involved in the establishment of any comprehensive scheme for the examination of nurses are too large for it to be undertaken as a voluntary measure. A central examination conducted by a board which comes before the public as having State authority, after passing which successful candidates will be entitled to the legal status which their work has earned, can alone meet the necessity of the times.

State Registration of trained nurses is no untried measure. When nearly twenty years ago it was first proposed in this country we had no precedent which could be quoted. But though the suggestion for Registration was first made in England, we cannot claim the honour of being the first to inaugurate it. While we have been arguing, others have been acting, and while Europe remains in the rear, Registration Acts are in working order in countries in each of the three other continents of the globe, and the verdict as to the results of such Acts is that they are beneficial to nurses, the medical profession, and the public.

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