

Dangerous Legislation for Nurses

THE OFFICIAL DIRECTORY OF NURSES BILL.

The Bill to provide for the establishment of an Official Directory of Nurses, introduced into the House of Lords by Lord Balfour of Burleigh, is down for its second reading on Wednesday, May 6th. It is, therefore, incumbent on all nurses to understand what the Bill involves and why it should be strenuously opposed.

THE REGISTRATION MOVEMENT.

It is now over 20 years (in 1887) since the first steps were taken to found an Association of Nurses, the British Nurses' Association, of which H.R.H. Princess Christian accepted the position of President, "in order to unite all qualified British Nurses in membership of a recognised profession, to provide for their registration, and to associate them for their mutual help and protection, and for the advancement in every way of their professional work." Such justifiable aims immediately aroused the bitterest opposition from the Editor of the *Hospital* newspaper, Sir Henry (then Mr.) Burdett. That this opposition was not founded on any objection to the principle of registration is proved by the fact that when the National Pension Fund for Nurses, of which Sir Henry Burdett was founder, was established in 1888, power was taken in the Articles of Association: "At the instigation of the representatives of the Nurse Training Schools, or otherwise, to provide and keep a Register for trained and certificated nurses wherein may be entered the qualifications and the other particulars of all Matrons, Sisters, and Nurses, and other persons engaged or desirous of being engaged in hospital or other similar work; to make rules, institute examinations, charge fees, provide offices, badges, books, and all other things which may be found necessary or desirable for the purpose of opening and keeping of any such Register."

The opposition of Sir Henry Burdett to the Registration of Trained Nurses is thus only to such form as will give nurses that degree of self-government which will enable them to consolidate their own profession to enforce discipline and good professional laws, and to expel their own black sheep.

"HOME RULE FOR NURSES."

If we are asked for proof of the above assertion it is to be found in an editorial article in the *Hospital* newspaper, published on December 31st, 1887, in which it is stated that—

"The whole welfare of the nursing profession is threatened with a calamity which may prove

dangerous to the best interests of every member of their body. . . . Evidence accumulates that the new year will see a determined effort made to induce nurses of all grades to band themselves together, or, as the phrase is, to free themselves from the trammels which association with generous laymen and hospital managers has imposed upon them—that is, to assert their right to a position of absolute independence in all respects. Certain ardent spirits, for reasons best known to themselves, are possessed with a burning desire to establish 'Home Rule for Nurses' in their relations to institutions and the public. It is therefore our duty to warn every sensible woman who is connected with the nursing profession to have a care before she allows herself to be persuaded to follow any such dangerous counsels or proposals, which must break up nurses into two distinct classes: First, those who desire to do their work efficiently in the interests of the suffering poor by working in harmony with the constituted authorities who have stood by them to the present time; and secondly, those who prefer to take the opposite course. . . . Should this Home Rule movement be forced to the front, the managers of hospitals and nursing institutions throughout the country may be compelled in self defence to enact that no member of their staff shall become a member of the new Association."

Sir Henry Burdett thus denied to trained nurses the right accorded to all classes of workers, professional and industrial, to associate themselves together for the advancement of their professional work.

A HUGE NURSE FARM.

The other quarter from which opposition to nursing organisation chiefly emanated was the London Hospital, and in the spring of 1889 the Matron, Miss Lückes, issued a pamphlet on the subject. A paragraph in this pamphlet is worthy of note. "It is true that some difficulty exists in distinguishing well-trained nurses from inefficient nurses. The idea that the public cannot protect itself from incompetent nurses cannot be seriously entertained when nearly all the Metropolitan Hospitals and very many large Provincial Hospitals keep highly trained Private Nursing Staffs."

It is almost incredible that when this paragraph was penned partially trained probationers were being advertised and constantly sent out from the London Hospital into private houses as "thoroughly trained" nurses, the current fee being charged for their unskilled services.*

The contention that a nurse should always be kept under the tutelage of her training school is one which emanates to the present day from the London Hospital. There the

* *Vide* the Minutes of Evidence taken before the Select Committee of the House of Lords on Metropolitan Hospitals, 1890.

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