

The Lords' Debate on the Nurses' Registration Bill.

Nearly every available seat in the space allotted to ladies in the House of Lords below the Bar was occupied by a member of the nursing profession on Monday, July 6th, when the second reading of the Nurses' Registration Bill was moved by Lord Ampthill, G.C.I.E.

Lord AMPHILL said that the object of the Bill was to ensure that the community should have a guarantee that the trained nurses they employ are skilled in their professional duties, such a guarantee being non-existent at the present time. He referred to a recent speech by the King, in which his Majesty stated that "it is in the interests of the community that measures should be taken to obtain skilled and efficient nurses in increased numbers." The noble lord said that he did not presume to interpret what was in his Majesty's mind when he made that statement, but of this he was confident—that nothing would conduce more greatly to the attainment of those ends which his Majesty desired than the passage of the Bill before the House. He submitted that in these days of the feminist movement their lordships would do well to pay careful attention to a demand which was put forward with steady persistence, and with perfect propriety by a body of women whose services to the community were unquestioned and indispensable.

He would state to the House what Nurses asked for, for the protection of the public, as well as of themselves in their own words. They ask "that the term 'Trained Nurse' shall have a definite meaning; that anyone using it shall submit to an independent examination; satisfy a Nursing Council appointed under the authority of the State that he or she possesses the qualifications necessary to render him or her a safe attendant on the sick; and that the names of all those who attain the prescribed standard shall be entered on a Nursing Register so that the public may be enabled to distinguish qualified from unqualified nurses."

Lord Ampthill then showed what a great variation exists at present in standards of training and certification, and that owing to the lack of a governing body a certificate cannot be withdrawn even if the holder is convicted of crime. Further, that Nursing Homes are at present under no supervision, and that there is no guarantee that the patients receive the skilled nursing for which they pay.

Lord Ampthill gave the total number of nurses organised in Leagues or Associations

which had expressed themselves in favour of the policy of registration; and said that the suggestion of a "Stage Army," made on a former occasion in that House, was highly improper, and should never have been brought forward. He referred to the support of the British Medical Association, and to the unanimous recommendation of a Select Committee of the House of Commons in favour of Registration, and pointed out that there was under the provisions of the Bill no possibility of any interference with the liberty of contract between the sick and any persons attending them for hire, but the Bill would protect the title of "Registered Nurse."

Lord KINNAIRD asked how the proposed legislation would affect district nurses.

The Earl of CREWE said that the question of Registration had been before the country for a considerable time, and they ought to bear the fact in mind that the principle had been approved by a Select Committee. The noble Earl then explained what appeared to him to be the difficulties connected with legislation. He had, he said, no hostility to the principle of the Bill, which he would like to see carried into effect. He would not desire to move the rejection, but doubted whether at this period of the Session it was worth while to read the Bill a second time.

The Marquis of LANSDOWNE said that if their Lordships agreed to the second reading they were entitled to say that in doing so they were not committed to an acceptance of the full scheme embodied in the Bill. He was in full sympathy with the main object of his noble friend, which was a reasonable one both from the point of view of the nurses, and of the public. The alternatives before the House were these—(1) They might leave things as they were at present, which would be unsatisfactory. (2) There was the proposal embodied in the Directory of Nurses' Bill, which the House had rejected for the reasons stated at the time. (3) There remained a system of registration which had received a great deal of encouragement from the medical profession and from nurses themselves. He thought the proper course would be for the House to give the Bill a second reading on the assumption that by doing so their Lordships were only committing themselves to the principle of the measure. There would be another opportunity for discussing the Bill on the motion to go into Committee, in addition to opportunity to consider its details in Committee.

Lord STANLEY of ALDERLEY suggested that the debate should be adjourned, but this was not seconded, and the Bill was read a second time without a division.

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