

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD

EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

No. 1,103.

SATURDAY, MAY 22, 1909.

LII.

Editorial.

NURSING ECONOMICS.

"He owns my life who owns the means whereby I live."

The reception of a Deputation from the Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses by the Prime Minister last week is a matter of immense importance to the Nursing Profession, because by this means the nurses' case was brought directly to his notice.

Mr. Asquith informed the Deputation that he had not "much previous, or at any rate first hand familiarity" with the subject, and it is not surprising that the Prime Minister of this Empire, considering his innumerable duties, had to make the confession that he is not acquainted with the somewhat intricate question of Nursing Reform. Nursing, in the opinion of many legislators, is merely a woman's question; this is an erroneous idea, and we would plead with those who are responsible for the health of the nation to realise that nursing is a great factor in the physical and moral efficacy of the people.

As Lord Ampthill stated, a Nurses' Registration Act must undoubtedly be classified as a social reform measure, and Miss Isla Stewart further emphasised its importance from the point of view of the State by showing that nurses are not only entrusted with the care of the sick in private houses, and in public hospitals, but that their work is indispensable to the complete organisation of many Government Departments, which are therefore directly concerned in the question of nursing efficiency.

The claim for the registration of trained nurses is primarily an educational one, and it is just here, at the very beginning, that we come to the reason for the protracted and intolerant opposition to the movement by certain London hospital managers, a point on which we should have laid great stress had it been our duty to address the Prime Minister last week.

The rapid evolution of scientific medicine and surgery demands an ever-rising standard of nursing education. In all the skilled pro-

fessions in which men are occupied, their course of education is prescribed, and they are taught, by experts. But, when we consider nursing education, we find that the absolute government of the General Hospitals to which Training Schools for Nurses are attached, is vested in financiers and philanthropists, nor can we point to one Executive Body of a Training School for Nurses on which an expert trained nurse has a voice, or on which educationalists take part, to any extent, in defining the curriculum.

This lack of expert knowledge upon the part of the managers of the Nurse Training Schools has been most prejudicial to nursing education. A further result is a natural tendency on the part of those responsible for the financial management of a charitable institution to pay as little to, and to secure as much from, the defenceless woman worker as possible. It may not be generally known that there is no law securing just educational or economic conditions for Trained Nurses on our Statute Book. Practically the nurse is the domestic servant of the Hospital Committee, but before she is admitted for training she usually signs a document which deprives her of all protection under the laws which define the relative positions of master and servant.

These contracts place the committees of charitable institutions in the position of absolutely irresponsible employers of labour. We claim that in no civilised State should thousands of working women, depending on their labour for their bread, be ignored by the Government of that State, and means of self-protection denied to them.

The Premier promised the Deputation, who appealed to him for justice to the trained nurses of this country, that he and his colleagues would carefully and sympathetically consider the cogent arguments advanced by them. We ask him, as the Prime Minister of a Liberal Administration, to make searching enquiry into the economic conditions of the trained nurses in this country, whose labour, devotion, and professional knowledge are a national asset of the highest significance in the struggle for national efficiency.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)