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Editorial.

THE ELECTION AND NATIONAL HEALTH.

With the beginning of the New Year the country is on the eve of a general election, and soon the struggle will begin at the polls. At such a time every member of the community, enfranchised and unenfranchised, has a duty to perform, a duty which takes the voters to the poll, the rest of the nation being restricted to using an undefined "influence," a limitation which places it at a very unfair disadvantage.

The trained nurses of the country, unfortunately, belong to the latter class; it behoves them, therefore, to see how best they can use their influence so that the members returned to Parliament may be those who realise the importance of supporting legislation for the benefit of the national health.

Most especially they are concerned in legislation in regard to the organisation of nursing. It is not in the public interest, and it is prejudicial to the public health and safety, that there should be no law on the statute book controlling a body of workers so essential to the community as the trained nurses of this country, estimated as numbering at least 50,000 workers.

The medical practitioner, the chemist, the midwife, all have to show that they have attained a definite standard of professional knowledge before they can lay claim to these respective titles. But while this is enjoined on the doctor who directs the treatment of the patient, and the chemist who compounds the medicine which he prescribes, there is no such obligation on the nurse who carries out such treatment and administers the medicine ordered; who is in sole charge of the patient between the visits of the medical attendant, and on whose skill and devotion, or lack of them, the balance of life and death often turns. In the case of

the nurse, the public admit freely to their houses, in the most confidential relations, women whose claim to the title of trained nurse will not bear investigation, and whose probity not unfrequently rests on a basis as flimsy. They further pay this unskilled person the fees asked by a skilled worker. We hope that in every constituency trained nurses will make a point of bringing before the candidates for election, both personally and through any other channels which may be open to them—husbands, brothers, friends and patients—the need for legislation by which nursing education may be systematised, and powers be granted to the nursing profession to differentiate between those who have and have not attained a definite standard of proficiency, and to exercise the same discipline within its ranks as has been found necessary for the good government and honour of other professions.

We hope that no member who is returned to Parliament will be able to say that the important question of the Registration of Nurses has not been brought to his notice during the coming elections. In every constituency it should be prominently brought forward by nurses, medical practitioners, and members of the public, for it vitally concerns them all.

In years to come, when they have the power of the vote, nurses who come so intimately into contact with the evils of overcrowding, and of defective sanitation, whose duty it is, under medical officers, to look after the health and cleanliness of school children, and many other matters affecting the public health, will no doubt use it as an effective lever in obtaining the reform of unhygienic conditions which their work discloses to them. They should thus become a powerful factor in drawing attention to conditions which need remedying, and so in raising the standard of the national health.

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