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Editorial.

NURSING AGENCIES COME UNDER THE LAW.

It has fallen once more to the lot of this Journal—as it has fallen on many occasions during the last twenty years—to be the first to call the attention of the nursing profession to a matter which may be, hereafter, of the utmost importance to the interests of nurses. On August 3rd, the Royal Assent was given to an Act of Parliament with the simple title of “The London County Council (General Powers) Act, 1910.” Amongst sections referring to various street works, purchase of lands, control of smoke nuisances, and special powers to the Camberwell Council, there are included clauses relating to Employment Agencies carried on in the County or City of London. Some five years ago, the County Council obtained powers to regulate certain agencies or registries in which it was believed “fraud or immorality” might be carried on. Those powers the present Act repeals, on the ground that they have proved to be insufficient for the purposes desired. The present Act provides, in short, that “from and after the first day of January, One thousand Nine hundred and Eleven, no person shall carry on an employment agency without a license from the Licensing Authorities authorising him so to do.” We propose to describe in detail, hereafter, the methods by which the new licenses will be carried on. For the moment, however, the principles of the new legislation demand the careful consideration of the nursing profession.

In the first place, every agency for employment of any kind or description, conducted within the County of London, is brought within the provisions of this Act. When the Bill was in Committee in the House of Commons, efforts were made by

the Central Hospital Council for London to exclude institutions connected with or engaged in charitable work, on the ground that hospitals might be included. The Committee would not listen to any suggestions for limiting the scope of the measure, and thus all charitable institutions, including hospitals, must be considered as coming within the scope of the Act. In other words, those hospitals which now combine business with philanthropy, by sending out nurses to the public, and therefore acting as agencies for nurses, will, from the end of this year, be compelled to carry on that business under the licence and regulations of the London County Council, or of the City Corporation, as the case may be. In like manner, every Nursing Home or Institution which supplies nurses to the public will require a similar licence. In the next place, the licensed agent will be compelled under the Act to conform to regulations drawn up by the Licensing Authority, to keep books or forms showing the manner in which the business is conducted, which are subject to inspection by officials appointed for that purpose. Moreover, very heavy penalties are provided in the Act for any infraction of the regulations, or for any attempt to carry on an employment business without the proper licence, which must be renewed at the commencement of every year. It is obvious, therefore, that Parliament has made a new departure with regard to nursing matters, which may be fraught with the most important consequences not only to nursing institutions but also to all private nurses. We foresee, indeed, some results which will be little less than revolutionary; but, on the whole, we believe that the consequences will be entirely for the benefit of trained nurses, and we, therefore, cordially welcome the new legislation.

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