

# THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED  
THE NURSING RECORD

EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

No. 1,227

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 7, 1911.

Vol. XLVII.

## EDITORIAL.

### A STATE DEPARTMENT OF NATIONAL HEALTH.

The Second Annual Conference of the British Hospitals Association, held last week in the Town Hall, Manchester, was an opportunity for hospital managers to give vent to their ripe opinions on the National Insurance Bill and its effect on the voluntary hospitals. They discussed it at length, and passed unanimously the following resolution:

"That this association of hospital managers and administrators is convinced that the National Insurance Bill, if passed in its present form, will seriously prejudice voluntary hospitals all over the country, not only financially, but in their relation to the medical profession, and unites in calling on the Government so to amend the Bill that the continued existence of voluntary hospitals may be safeguarded financially, and their efficiency as curative institutions and schools of medicine may be maintained."

One opinion expressed, that if the Bill passed as stands, it means "death" to the voluntary hospitals, is quite true, but the Bill would be merely the *coup de grace*; it is the evolution of our social conditions which will, in the future, make it impossible to conduct the care of the sick poor with the support of voluntary charity alone. It is significant that, although those present did not appear to realise this fact, the remedies proposed by the members of the British Hospitals Association all tend towards dissolution.

Sir William Cobbett, Chairman of the Royal Infirmary, Manchester, suggested that voluntary hospitals should receive payment in respect of each insured in-patient treated within its walls! This in effect would be to accept a State subsidy—a blow to the voluntary system, to be followed inevitably by State supervision and control.

Mr. Howard Collins, House Governor of the General Hospital, Birmingham, expressed the opinion that hospital treatment should

be a "benefit" under the Act. If so, the patient would soon claim, as a right for which he had paid, what is now offered as a gift. An inevitable step towards State control.

No one advocated a really bold policy in dealing with the Bill. Legislation calculated to undermine the principle, that the management of voluntary hospitals for the sick poor should be uncontrolled, should be opposed by those who profess to believe in it. The voluntary hospitals cannot accept State aid in any form, and remain, for long, institutions independent of State supervision and control. Hospital managers must realise this, and, at the same time, let them grasp the fact that the time has passed when the mass of the people who need care in sickness are content to leave this vast responsibility in the hands of irresponsible bodies of persons, however altruistic their intentions. Patients admitted to voluntary hospitals are no longer of the pauper class—these are already in the care of the State. Hospitals cater for the acutely sick and suffering of the self-respecting poor, whose sickness, sad to say, is an invaluable *quid pro quo* to the community. These patients are the experimental material in the evolution of medical science, and the claim has been slowly advanced that the State should maintain the balance of power and be the ultimate authority in all that concerns the national health. Why not?

Let us have a State Department for National Health, with a responsible Minister in charge, and let it be the duty of this department to evolve order out of the present chaotic and extravagant conduct of relief in sickness. A broad constructive policy is a matter of urgent necessity in this connection. Let us hope public spirited managers of voluntary hospitals will take part in support of it.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)