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EDITORIAL.

NURSES AND THE NATIONAL INSURANCE ACT.

The decision of Judge Woodfall in a case heard in the Westminster County Court on February 24th, when Miss Bryant, a member of the Nurses Co-operation, 22, Langham Street, London, W., appealed against the decision of the National Insurance Commissioners, requiring nurses on the staff of the Co-operation to insure, under the National Insurance Act, is likely to have a far reaching effect upon all nurses earning two guineas a week and upwards, and receiving their own fees.

We understand that the Commissioners, as well as the nurse, were anxious for an authoritative ruling on the question.

Mr. J. J. Murphy, counsel for Miss Bryant, explained that his client was a member of the Nurses Co-operation, a body formed to secure to nurses adequate remuneration for their work. Professional nurses, of the status of the appellant, attending on patients in private houses, received a minimum remuneration of two guineas a week, with 2s. 6d. for laundry expenses, and board and lodging of a superior kind.

Miss Bryant supported her counsel's statement, and, after hearing the evidence the Judge said that he was decidedly of opinion that the appellant should succeed. He considered that the remuneration received was equal to £160 per annum. That ended the case as far as he was concerned, but he had been invited to express an opinion on other points. The Nurses' Co-operation was not run for profit, and he considered that in this case the contract was a contract for service, not of service. His Honour was careful to explain that he expressed that opinion simply in regard to

the case before him, in which the nurses were members of a special society. He had arrived at the decision that he must differ from the decision come to by the National Insurance Commissioners.

The question of costs was adjourned in order to ascertain the responsibility of the Treasury.

The result of this decision is that every nurse on the Nurses' Co-operation will, for the future, be outside the scope of the National Insurance Act, and it is reasonable to assume that other nurses, working under similar conditions, are, in consequence, outside it also. A question which is immediately raised, if this decision is sustained, is whether the National Insurance Commissioners will have to refund to Insurance Societies any payments for sick benefit made to nurses who should never have come under the Act.

The question of most importance to nurses is whether they wish to be outside a scheme of National Insurance or not. There is no doubt, whatever, that the present Act was not designed to meet their needs, that it is prejudicial to their interests, that its provisions are irritating and annoying to them, and the benefits received of little use, while the additional work placed upon their Societies has been abnormal. At the same time, National Insurance has come to stay, and the principle that every worker, man or woman, should insure against sickness and disablement is a right one. With the experience gained of the working and defects of the present Act, as it affects nurses, it would be possible to organise a scheme which would be really helpful to them, if, through the societies to which they belong, nurses were taken into consultation and not ignored as they were when the present Act, which was largely designed to meet the needs of male industrial workers, was before Parliament.

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