

THE NURSING PROFESSION AND THE BOARD OF TRADE.

As one of the few persons in the United Kingdom who have from the start in 1887 to the present day taken an active personal part in the demand for the organisation of the Nursing Profession, with some degree of self-government, the present appears an opportune moment for us to place briefly before the Nursing Profession, and the public, its relations with the Board of Trade. We say an opportune moment because, for the third time, in a quarter of a century, a group of persons propose to apply to the Board of Trade for incorporation without the word "Limited," so that they may have power to organise the Nursing Profession.

The first application was made by the Royal British Nurses Association in the year 1891, the second in 1905 by seven wealthy financiers, terming themselves "The Society for promoting the Higher Education and Training of Nurses." On both occasions the application was opposed, and refused by the then Presidents of the Board of Trade, so that it may be advisable to review briefly the printed records of these two applications for incorporation, especially when, in the case of the Royal British Nurses Association we find, after a quarter of a century its opponents now demanding the privileges they so strenuously opposed when asked for by the nurses themselves.

It may be explained that any seven persons can, under the Companies Act—by signing certain documents and depositing these, together with the payment of certain fees at Somerset House—form themselves into a corporate body and obtain all the rights and privileges of incorporation formerly bestowed by separate Acts of Parliament, or by Royal Charters. But the condition binding upon such companies is, that they shall add the word "Limited" to their name, so that all may know that the liability of their individual members is strictly limited in amount. A special clause of one of the Acts, however, provides that, in the case of societies formed for purposes other than trading, and which do not divide profits or dividends amongst their members, the Board of Trade may, by license, permit the omission of this word "Limited."

Personally, we never desired to see the Nursing Profession acquire legal powers by this humble measure of incorporation. We approved its organization under a Royal Charter, which bestowed greater prestige, until such time as it was sufficiently strong to be entrusted with a full measure of legal status through Act of Parliament, and we claim that legal status is long overdue.

THE APPLICATION OF THE ROYAL BRITISH NURSES' ASSOCIATION.

It will be remembered that the British Nurses' Association was formed upon our proposal in December, 1887 (1) to unite all qualified British Nurses in membership of a recognised profession, (2) to provide for their registration, and (3) to

associate them for their mutual help and protection, and for the advancement in every way of their professional work.

It would have been thought that objects so justifiable would have received the generous support of the governors and Matrons of all Nurse-Training Schools. History however has proved such an anticipation to be entirely fallacious, and from the day that trained nurses attempted to associate themselves together in a professional association in this country, the most determined opposition was evinced by the lay governors of certain large London Hospitals, notably St. Thomas's, Westminster, and the London Hospitals.

We have not space to report this fight between the employers and the workers in detail. For those who have the time to study it, the whole history appears in the reports in *The Nurses' Journal* of the Royal British Nurses' Association, *The Nursing Record*, and, for the opposers, in *The Hospital*, controlled by Sir Henry Burdett.

This opposition on the part of the lay managers of Training Schools has now resounded throughout the world, and we have no hesitation in saying that wherever self-respecting nurses are organised it has been condemned as one of the most cruel examples of intolerance upon the part of men towards a conscientious endeavour of working women to organise their educational and economic conditions, not only for their own benefit, but for the protection of the public.

The nurses in our Dominions beyond the Seas, in the United States of America, and elsewhere throughout the world where they have already attained legal status by Act of Parliament, have watched the struggle of trained nurses in the United Kingdom for similar privileges, not only with intense sympathy but with expressions of indignation. But to return to the Board of Trade.

We propose this week to review the application of the Royal British Nurses' Association. Founded in 1887 this Association was joined by nearly 3,000 nurses in a very short time, by 1891 it had given evidence of great usefulness, and in order to receive and administer Trust Funds it applied to the Board of Trade to be incorporated without the word "Limited."

To quote from *The Nurses' Journal*, from the proceedings of a special Council Meeting, held on Thursday, April 16th, 1891, Sir William Savory in the chair, at the request of H.R.H. Princess Christian. Dr. Bedford Fenwick is there reported to have said that it had been thought well that a brief statement should be made as to the position of affairs which had caused the meeting to be convened. From the first days of its existence, the Association had been strongly opposed. In print its members had been termed "the scum of the nursing profession"; they had been described as "women who took refuge in the Association to obtain pseudo-respectability, because they could not obtain it elsewhere" (*The Hospital*).

In private, nurses who desired to join the Association had been intimidated from doing so, while others who had joined had been compelled to

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