

THE STATUS OF NURSES.

The following letter appeared in the *Times* on December 29th last from the Honble. Sir Arthur Stanley, Chairman of the College of Nursing, Ltd., referring to a paragraph which had previously appeared:—

STATUS OF NURSES.

SIR,—My attention has been called to a paragraph in your issue of the 26th inst. in which it is implied that the provisions of the Supplemental Charter which the Royal British Nursing Association had approved as a basis of amalgamation with the College of Nursing were so altered by the Privy Council as no longer to secure the three years' training for nurses "which the Association considers essential to its members' interests." To show how devoid of substance is this contention I venture to quote the relevant clauses as they stand in the Supplemental Charter side by side with the changes proposed by the Privy Council:—

The purposes of the Corporation should be extended so as to include the following:—

(b) The improvement of the training, education, and professional status of nurses and the promotion of a uniform curriculum and standard of qualification.

The Privy Council substitutes:—

... and the promotion of equivalent curricula and standards of qualification for all classes of nurses.

(d) The making and maintaining of an official register of persons qualified to act as nurses.

The Privy Council substitutes:—

The making and maintaining of a register of persons qualified, in the opinion of the Corporation, to act as nurses.

These parallel quotations place your readers in a position to judge for themselves how far the action of the Privy Council diminished the safeguards as to training which satisfied the Royal British Nursing Association a year ago. I fear that the true reasons for repudiating their agreement to amalgamate with the College of Nursing must be sought elsewhere.

Yours, &c.,

ARTHUR STANLEY, Chairman,
Council of College of Nursing.

Mr. Herbert J. Paterson, medical honorary secretary of the Royal British Nurses' Association, replied in the following terms, but his letter has not yet appeared. We have therefore pleasure in publishing it *in extenso*, so that the truth in this controversy, which is of the utmost importance to thoroughly trained nurses, may be made public, and put on record.

SIR,—I venture to think that your readers will not experience much difficulty in discerning the vital difference in the clauses of the Supplemental Charter as amended by the Privy Council—differences which the Hon. Sir Arthur Stanley considers devoid of substance.

It is not apparent by what force of logic Sir Arthur can argue that the substituted clause "equivalent curricula and standards of qualification for all classes of nurses," does not differ very substantially from the original clause "a uniform curriculum and standard qualification." The clause in its altered form would undoubtedly sanction the placing of the partially-trained nurse on an equality with the fully-trained nurse. It implies that there are different classes of nurses, and that these different classes require different curricula, and different, although equivalent, standards of qualification. If this clause were accepted it follows obviously that all nurses who underwent these different varieties of training and passed these different but equivalent examinations would be entitled to be placed on the Register on an equality with the fully-trained nurse. In other words, the nurse who had passed all her period of training in a children's hospital or in a fever hospital, and whose professional experience was limited to the diseases met with in such special hospitals, would, as regards professional status, be on an equality with the nurse who had passed examinations in all branches of nursing after a period of three years' training in a general hospital. Such a condition of affairs would be contrary to the public interest. The Royal British Nurses' Association recognises only one class of nurse—the nurse who has been trained in nursing all varieties of disease in a general hospital. As in the medical profession, so in the nursing profession, specialisation should come after and not before qualification.

With regard to the omission of the word "official" from the clause "the making and maintaining of an official register of persons qualified to act as nurses," Sir Arthur is on the horns of a dilemma. The omission of the word "official" is either a substantial amendment or it is not. If it is a substantial amendment, the Council of the R.B.N.A. are entitled to refuse to agree to it; if it be not a substantial amendment, why did the Privy Council, supported by the Local Government Board, firmly refuse to allow the word to remain? There can be only one answer to this question, and the answer puts Sir Arthur Stanley's contention out of court. A register and an official register are not equivalent definitions.

May I remind Sir Arthur that at a meeting in February, 1916, he stated the objects of the College of Nursing to be (1) State Registration; (2) a *uniform* curriculum; (3) a minimum period of three years' training, and (4) a *one portal* examination. With these ideals, the R.B.N.A. was and is in cordial agreement, and it was to safeguard these principles that the Supplemental Charter (after agreement, be it noted, with the College of Nursing) was drafted in the form submitted to the Privy Council. The Council of the R.B.N.A. were advised that the proposed amendments did not provide the safeguards regarded as vital by the Association, and endorsed

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