

MISS ISABEL MACDONALD.

Miss Isabel Macdonald spoke on the economic side of the question under discussion as it affects the nurses, and said she was encouraged to do so by the sympathetic remarks of the President of the Local Government Board in a speech which she had had the privilege of hearing in the course of the week. Dr. Addison, apparently, quite realised that the remuneration of nurses at the present time was far from being in line with the magnificent services which they render so unostentatiously to the Nation and to the State.

Miss Macdonald stated, from a very wide acquaintanceship with nurses, that thousands of nurses were driven out of the different hospitals and institutions simply because they found it impossible to provide for old age and sickness from the salaries allowed to them, and to afford the recreation, holidays, &c., which their friends in other professions regarded as among the ordinary necessities of life.

At the present time a well trained children's nurse could command a salary of from £50 to £100 a year, while a Sister in a hospital ward received from £35 to £50. The first had charge probably, of three or four healthy children; the latter had hundreds of people, suffering in more or less acute stages of illness, entrusted to her care throughout the course of a year. Added to this, there was the responsibility of training probationers, and the immense mental and physical strain involved in any branch of nursing work.

It was because of the economic conditions in hospitals that the nurses viewed with such grave concern the proposal to incorporate the College of Nursing, Ltd., in an Act for State Registration. They claimed, in accordance with the principles they had pledged their societies to support, that they should have over them a perfectly independent governing Council, which had no bias towards any one Company or Association. They argued that to give to any such Company or Association such preferential treatment would inevitably undermine their economic independence, and further that nursing was a profession, and therefore the nurses should not be governed by any body of persons who were over them, but by themselves.

It was to be hoped that the new Ministry of Health would not have any share in perpetuating those conditions, but that it would promote a scale of salaries equivalent to the high qualifications which it would demand.

The importance of such standards could not be overestimated, for if the Ministry was to justify its establishment its foundations must be well and truly laid. Those sent out into its wide ramifications in connection with child life, the conditions of women in factories, the hygiene of school life, and in the home, must, if she might so express it, be builders who were masters of their craft, otherwise we should read into the future a record of failure in high infant mortality statistics, and the impaired physique of the race, due to a lack of standardisation in the qualifications of those who have to deal with the matter

as individuals, to combat individual tendencies to disease and mal-development, and to educate the people as individuals in the laws of health. This was why the members of the Royal British Nurses' Association were so anxious that the conditions of service for nurses should be such as to attract women of high profession, and the only way to accomplish it was to be prepared to pay the price for the highest.

DR. FOORD CAIGER.

Dr. Foord Caiger said he would like to emphasise very strongly what had been said by previous speakers. He had for many years been interested in the welfare and status of nurses. It was most important that their efficiency should be guaranteed by the State. Two Bills were being promoted at the present time, one by the Central Committee for the State Registration of Nurses, the other by the College of Nursing, Ltd. He hoped that before any Bill received Government support the whole question would be carefully and critically examined.

DISCUSSION.

Major Astor then asked some very pertinent questions, which were answered by the various delegates.

IN CONCLUSION.

Replying to the Deputation, Major Astor pointed out that, as the President has told them, he was fully alive to the needs of the situation. The Bill for the establishment of a Ministry of Health was chiefly a co-ordinating measure, but it was proposed in the Bill to give the Ministry power to deal with the questions of training.

After thanking Major Astor for the courteous hearing accorded to them, the Deputation withdrew.

OPENING OF PARLIAMENT.

The King opened Parliament in person on Tuesday, and accompanied by the Queen received a great ovation. The Speech from the Throne foreshadowed beneficent legislation.

Said the King:—

"The aspirations for a better social order, which have been quickened in the hearts of My People by the experience of the war, must be encouraged by prompt and comprehensive action. Before the war, poverty, unemployment, inadequate housing, and many remediable ills existed in our land, and these ills were aggravated by disunion. But since the outbreak of war every class have worked and fought together for a great ideal. In the pursuit of this common aim they have shown a spirit of unity and self-sacrifice which has exalted the nation and has enabled it to play its full part in the winning of victory. . . . We must stop at no sacrifice of interest or prejudice to stamp out unmerited poverty, to diminish unemployment, and mitigate its sufferings, to provide decent homes, to improve the nation's health, and to raise the standard of well-being throughout the community.

"We look to the new Parliament to do its duty nobly."

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