

MISS ISABEL MACDONALD PROPOSES
RESOLUTION II.

Miss Isabel Macdonald, Secretary of the Royal British Nurses' Association, in moving the second resolution, said:—

Fellow nurses, when it was suggested to me that I should move the Resolution I have the honour to propose, I felt the inevitable inclination to shelve it on to the shoulders of someone more competent, someone with a better reputation as an orator, some leader in the State Registration movement; but unpleasant experiences leave behind them a certain burden of responsibility, and I know, in my official capacity as Secretary of the Royal British Nurses' Association, how insidious in the past were some of the sins of omission and commission of the College of Nursing, Ltd., when in, I now think, a spirit of exaggerated altruism, the members of the Association (I was one of them) decided to amalgamate the College of Nursing and to trust the future destinies of the Association, indeed of the whole profession, to a Council heavily weighted with representatives of that body. In the omission of the Clause referred to in the Resolution which I am to move, there appears again one of those sinister, insidious, disingenuous manœuvres calculated to land the profession completely under the heel of the institutions. Let us look back for a moment on the history of the State Registration movement and what do we find—that those institutions have opposed almost without exception the long, hard fight of the independent nurses for the protection of the public, for the protection of their beloved profession, for the protection of their fellow workers from the mistakes and indiscretions of the unqualified, and from the altogether unfair competition with such. Over and over again, when we asked for facilities for the Nurses' Registration Bill, they were refused, because, as we were told, the hospitals were not in favour of it, the Matrons of the great hospitals did not approve of State Registration. Then there came the war. To-day, at a time full of crisis to you, a time when, therefore, we have to speak the whole truth, for you have to choose your leaders and your policy, we find ourselves face to face with the tragedy that, owing to the opposition of the schools, owing to the opposition of the matrons—and the word matron means a mother—State Registration is too late to save the nurses. So much for the opposition and its results! During the war, any nurses who formerly adopted an attitude of easy indifference, had it brought home to them that there were potentialities in the V.A.D. movement for introducing an extraordinarily increased amount of competition from the unqualified workers; so the College, which at first meditated establishing a voluntary Register, found that the rank and file of the nurses were so far roused as to realize the necessity for Statutory Registration of Nurses.

TRIMMING SAILS TO THE BREEZE.

Then those responsible for the College, trimmed

their sails to the breeze and declared themselves in favour of State Registration—nay, more, it was made a most excellent stalking horse, especially when, coupled with the pledge that nurses who joined the College Register would, automatically and without further fee, have their names placed on the State Register when the Nurses' Registration Bill was passed. Well, when the declaration of this policy of State Registration on the part of the former leaders of the opposition to the measure was made, members of the Royal British Nurses' Association and many other nurses besides, believed that the millennium was at hand for the nursing profession; they saw at last a chance for unity on the subject of State Registration; but, alas, the Bills of the College of Nursing and its actions in regard to them, brought us all reluctantly to the conviction that it is only prepared to support State Registration on condition that the nurses should continue in a state of serfdom. That the men who gain kudos, and sometimes social prestige, as governors of hospitals, should be able to control the profession, to maintain the supply of cheap nursing labour for the hospitals, should continue to drain the energy, the liberty of mind, often all the chances of happiness or health for young lives (it amounts to nothing else, however complacently the governors and matrons may shut out the vision), should claim such sacrifice in order that their hospital reports may show the public—the kindly, well-meaning British public—with what virtuous economy their charitable doles are administered. But there is no audit of all the foot aches, the backaches, the headaches and the heartaches, which are the toll of those plausible reports. No; it is expedient just to keep the matrons standing behind evolution a little longer still, to get their influence and support for the passage into a law of a Bill to make possible and quite probable the lay government, not only of the hospitals and their servants there, but of the whole rank and file of the nurses outside these hospitals. I use the word servants advisedly, because if, by adopting the College Bill, the State decides that nurses are not to be self-governing, you can no longer claim that nursing is a profession at all.

A VITAL ALTERATION.

The College has made great capital out of the Clause now eliminated from its Bill; we have heard much of those five-sixths of two-thirds of the seats on the Council which were to be secured to the nurses, and it concerns the honour of the College that, before eliminating the Clause, it did not intimate to every one of its members its intention to alter the Bill in so vital a particular. But the Clause had served its purpose as a stalking horse for the College, and quietly, at the eleventh hour, at the crucial moment when the Bill is introduced into the House of Lords, it is dropped overboard. Mr. Chairman, is it surprising that nurses do not trust the College of Nursing, Ltd.?

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