

have behind you also the moral, political and if necessary financial support of the whole organised trade unions of the country. Do let us in the first place treat for what it is worth—that is less than nothing—the sort of Victorian respectability which we used to set up as a bogey to prevent us from doing things which as ordinary common truth we know we ought to do. As part of the community, let us do our share; and let us demand from the community at least terms which will enable us to do a first-class service to them. There can be nothing but first-class goods sold by nurses, and it is your duty (if I may be allowed to say so) to see that they are in the position to give first-class goods whenever their services are called upon.

Those are the only points which I think I am able to put before you. My knowledge of your profession has always come to me when I was in a state in which I was only able to appreciate its general service, but such as it was I knew it was beautiful and good. You can make it even more so if you make yourselves into one body and form yourselves into one body, and form yourselves into an association to work together for the benefit of the profession. (Prolonged applause.)

ORGANISATION OF WORKERS ESSENTIAL.

Miss Christian H. McAra, Hon. Organiser of the Professional Union of Trained Nurses for Scotland, said that with a country which was rapidly coming to a sense of the supreme importance of health as a necessity to national well being and prosperity, we must bear in mind that if the greatest good were to be got out of any work or workers, their labour must be properly controlled, properly organised, and their interests fully and thoroughly protected. This could only be done by the workers themselves.

She pointed out that even though nurses had now secured State Registration and its resulting benefits, it still remained for members of the nursing profession to see that their interests were thoroughly safeguarded.

It was to the interests of the public and the nursing profession alike that the people who enter it should be women of broad education, alive to their civic duties.

One of the chief reasons why nursing education had hitherto been retarded was that the training schools were not controlled by educationists, but by committees of management—philanthropists and financiers—elected because of their ability to raise and administer the funds for the maintenance of the hospital. The average member considered expediency and convenience before the education of the nurse-pupil. In some institutions the main interest in establishing a training school was to get cheap labour for the patients, with the result that the students were very indifferently equipped.

Dealing with the question of a Nurses' Trade Union, Miss McAra said that the necessity for its formation had already been proved; for that

to insure justice many public health nurses had been driven by circumstances to join the Municipal Employees' Trade Union. Others were members of the English Health Visitors and Sanitary Inspectors' Association which had lately become a trade union. She urged that action should be taken immediately, and invited any who did not approve the proposal to take the opportunity afforded by the meeting of stating their objections to a Nurses' Trade Union.

She expressed the opinion that until nurses themselves shook off the apathy which enshrouded their profession, and joined the ranks of activity, every opportunity for emancipation and achievement must be lost. She urged that there could be no problem of greater importance to the common weal than the efficient education of women who enter the Public Health Service, and asked whether their education was to be as little as the nation could be bluffed into accepting, or a thorough professional training during which, in addition to her technical skill, and dexterity and practice in observing and interpreting physical symptoms, the student had time and opportunity provided to acquire a skill in observing and interpreting social symptoms. Most of the American States had already made this choice. Should Britain be content with less? Were her citizens not worthy of the best that can be obtained? The awful catastrophe of war had taught us that the nation's best defence lies in the health of the people. Was it true economy to stint the education of her workers? If the present necessity was to be brought forward as an excuse for shorter training it was a very shortsighted counsel—one that provided for the present without thought of the future. Was it morally right to ignore the future?

How many members of the Nursing Profession were appointed on to the Consultative Committees of the Ministry of Health? *Not one.* On the Board of Health for Scotland only two. Apparently nurses were not to be credited with brains. They were to be regarded merely as machinery to be set in action when all arrangements are completed. (Loud applause.) It was in connection with these matters that workers should unite and insist on having a voice in their own legislation. It was they who must set the pace, and contend for the highest. If they said that the woman who knows what it is to cope with all kinds of diseases, and the ravages they cause, was best fitted for the work of prevention, then they themselves must put their views before the People, and keep on doing so until satisfaction was guaranteed.

Various societies which had been formed by nurses had worked long and strenuously in their cause, and had achieved much for the profession, but faced as it was at present, with their employers on the one hand wanting cheap labour, and by an army of V.A.D.s and semi-trained workers on the other, all willing to undersell standards, nurses had realised the necessity of having a Union recognised by law—a union which by constant and

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)