

## A REPLY TO LORD KNUTSFORD.

The following letter appeared in *Time and Tide* last week:—

To the Editor of *Time and Tide*.

"I AM A BEATEN MAN."

DEAR SIR,—If you are interested in the psychology of those members of the Nursing Profession who for thirty years have steadfastly worked for its organisation through State Registration, against the forces of privilege, prejudice, prestige, and philanthropy, underline in the letter from Lord Knutsford which you printed in your issue of May 26th, the names he calls them, the motives he attributes to them, realise that he has been doing the same thing for thirty years, that he has used all the influence of his attractive personality, his social position, his eminence in the hospital world to "down" a body of women who dared to form and express an opinion adverse to his concerning their own profession, and you will then be able to estimate something of the courage, tenacity, conscience and life-blood woven into the texture of our Nurses' Registration Acts. In addition the opposition to legislation which has now been enacted, and by common consent is recognised as necessary for the welfare of the community, has cost trained nurses at least £30,000.

To appreciate the persistence and determination of the London Hospital opposition to the Nurses' plea for Registration by the State, the economic side of the question must be understood. The London Hospital certificated its probationers at the end of two years, but bound them for another two, during which time their services were utilised at the discretion of the Matron, and numbers were employed on the private nursing staff, bringing in a profit of thousands of pounds a year to the institution. It was good business for the hospital, but it was a matter in which the nurses had no choice. It was, in fact, indentured labour.

Lord Knutsford knew that on the passing of a Nurses' Registration Act the London Hospital Authorities would be compelled to give their probationers a complete training of three years, which is the minimum in the opinion of the Organisers of every Nurse-Training School of note in which a nurse can be efficiently trained for her very responsible duties, and that is, in fact, what happened when Nurses' Registration became inevitable. No Nursing School therefore owes more to the passing of the Acts than that attached to the London Hospital.

I do not think Lord Knutsford believes all the hard things he says. He is play-acting for his side; but I once heard him make open confession. The occasion was when he rose in his place in the gilded Chamber during the discussion on the Nurses' Registration Bill on December 19th, 1919, and proclaimed, "I am a beaten man." He was. *Magna est veritas et praevalabit.*

Consider the achievement of the nurses. The organisation of the hospitals, so far as their nursing staffs were concerned, was based, largely, upon the model of the Monastic Orders of the Middle Ages. The power of the managers over them was practically absolute. It must be understood that probationers are required to sign what is termed a "contract," but it is in reality a document drawn up by the hospital authorities for their own protection. If cases of hardship arose—and they did arise—there was no means of drawing public attention to them until the Ministry of Health was established, because there was no Government Department to which a question could be addressed on the subject in the House of Commons. And because nurses were overworked, and scandalously underpaid, there was no possibility of their submitting their cases to the Courts for a decision, so they were often broken on the wheel.

But the Nurses' Registration Acts are calculated to remedy this injustice. Nurses have now been constituted by Parliament a legally recognised profession with definite rights and privileges; we have a sure foundation on which to build. We hoped as we listened to the announcement of the Royal Assent to the Nurses' Registration Acts in the House of Lords, on December 23rd, 1919, that at last the struggle was over, and that those concerned—whether in the past they had been for or against the organisation of Trained Nursing by the State—would now work harmoniously together for the betterment of the community and the nurses.

But, alas! the majority of those who conceded, because they were compelled, the right of the nurses to their Registration Acts, have proved incapable, as members of the General Nursing Council, of helping to administer them in an intelligent and generous spirit, as proved by the monopolising of administrative power by the lay and medical members. It is true that only the minority are standing firm for the principle that, on the Nurses' Governing Body, the Executive work and the Chairmanship of Standing Committees should be mainly in the hands of the Registered Nurses, and they are, I am proud to know, those whom Lord Knutsford describes as "Mrs. Bedford Fenwick and her adherents."

Here I may point out that to be in the majority is by no means necessarily to be in the right. Daniel, John the Baptist, Joan of Arc, and Florence Nightingale at Scutari, are shining instances in proof of the contrary.

It is the fashion just now to claim that the present minority on the General Nursing Council must accept without protest the views of the majority, not, be it observed, because those views are founded on professional knowledge or sound economic principles, and are just and right, but simply because the lay and medical members, and the majority of the Matrons, are incapable of sympathising with the demand of the rank and file of the profession for the self-determination which men's professions enjoy.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)