

THE ELECTION ADDRESS OF MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK

To the Registered Nurses of England and Wales.

GENERAL NURSING COUNCIL ELECTION.

20, Upper Wimpole Street,
London, W.

DEAR MADAM,—

It is thirty-five years ago this week since I commenced in this house the movement for the State Registration of Nurses, which has resulted in the passing of some Sixty Acts of Parliament all over the world, and finally in the passing by the English Parliament of the Nurses' Registration Act of 1919, which entitles you to Vote next week, for the first time, for your representatives on the General Nursing Council. It is of the utmost importance to you personally to understand what this privilege and responsibility mean to your profession.

During the ten years I worked as Probationer, Sister, and Matron in hospitals I was deeply impressed with the serious disabilities under which hospital nurses were expected to perform their duties. The terribly long and exhausting hours of work, the comfortless conditions of living, the quite inadequate theoretical instruction given to them, and the poor pay; the heartrending physical and mental strain, resulting often in the crushing out of the spirit, without which a nurse degenerates into a mere machine. In the year 1887 the vocation of nursing was economically in bondage, and it was to try to remedy these conditions that I called together a Meeting of Hospital Matrons, and with their help initiated the British Nurses' Association to associate trained nurses for their mutual help and protection, and to obtain through State Registration a prescribed standard of Nursing Education, and a one-portal Examination, to qualify them for the responsible duties demanded by the uprising of medical and surgical science. The bitter opposition of the managers of the voluntary hospitals and their officials to these humane and just demands is now a matter of history. Suffice it to say that for upwards of thirty years I have been in the forefront of this economic struggle, supported by a far-sighted and courageous minority of matrons and nurses. Together we drafted the First Nurses' Registration Bill in 1904, and had it introduced into Parliament year after year, to be blocked by wealthy and

influential men acting for the Governors of our largest hospitals. Manifesto after Manifesto against the principle of State Registration of Nurses was, alas! signed by many of the Matrons and Hon. Medical Officers of these institutions, a solid phalanx in support of privilege.

For the sake of propaganda I bought and edited THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING, the policy of which has always been the demand of self-government, efficient professional education, just economic conditions, and duty to the community. For thirty years I have controlled this Journal, so that professional nurses should have a voice in the press, and that their aspirations and claims might be brought to the notice of our legislators. For fifteen years right on from 1904 I have spent many hours in the Lobbies of the Houses of Parliament, patiently picketing member after member, instructing, persuading, pleading with them to support legislation to better the general conditions of the nurses of the United Kingdom. Gradually ignorance and indifference gave way to interest, sympathy, and action.

In the year 1908 Lord Amphil carried our Bill through the House of Lords without a Division. Mr. Asquith held it up in the Commons. This was the psychological moment for the Nurses' Organisations to unite in support of an agreed Bill, and this they did in the Central Committee. In 1914 Dr. Chapple, under the ten minutes Rule, proved the conversion of the House, which voted by a majority of 228 in support of the principle of State Registration of Nurses.

The Battle was won. But was it? In 1915 the opponents made a flank movement. From the anti-registration strongholds came a counter-proposal for a voluntary system of Registration, to be promoted by the College of Nursing, Ltd. It was twenty years too late. The College then drafted a State Registration Bill, demanding that its Council should govern the Nursing Profession. The stars in their courses fought for the women who had promoted, worked for, and paid for the Registration Campaign. At the opening of Parliament in 1919 Major Barnett drew a first place in the Ballot, and gave the Nursing Profession its chance. He introduced our Bill, carried it

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