

THE NURSES' ORGANISATIONS.

THE REGISTERED NURSES' PARLIAMENTARY COUNCIL.

A Public Meeting, convened by the Registered Nurses' Parliamentary Council, was held at the Rooms of the Medical Society of London, on Wednesday, February 16th, at 5 p.m., Councillor Beatrice Kent, S.R.N., President of the Council, in the Chair.

The object of the Meeting was to demand:—

1. That the Syllabus of Training for Probationary Nurses be signed without further delay.
2. That the election of Registered Nurses on to the General Nursing Council be on a free and democratic basis.

THE CHAIRMAN'S OPENING ADDRESS.

THE CHAIRMAN, in opening the Meeting, reminded the Council (formerly the Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses) that its members had met in that historic hall often to protest against some wrong, but on one notable occasion to celebrate a victory over which they had good cause to rejoice, namely, the passing of the Nurses' Registration Acts.

They owed this victory to Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, the founder of the movement for the State Registration of Trained Nurses, without whom the Nurses' Registration Acts would never have been placed on the Statute Book, and when they met at the meeting to which she had referred they thought they had a clear field for good, constructive work. The Acts were on the Statute Book, and everything depended upon their administration.

The first principles of good administration were that the administrators should be inspired by honour, integrity, fidelity, the essential ingredients of truth. Without these there could be no real authority.

It would be remembered that the first sixteen Nurse-Members of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales were appointed by the Minister of Health, as there was no electorate of Registered Nurses until the Register was formed, and the six loyal, faithful, disinterested Nurse-Members of that Council, who stood for the rights of the nurses, would always be remembered with gratitude. Their guiding principle was the standard of the Act of Parliament, which was a solemn thing, and should be inviolable.

Acts of Parliament were of two kinds: (1) permissive, (2) imperative.

The Nurses' Act, which Councillor Kent urged her hearers not only to read once, but to study at intervals, was an imperative Act, which, in dealing with the principle of admission to the Register, requires, as a condition of the admission of any person to the Register, "that that person shall have undergone the prescribed training, and shall possess the prescribed experience in the nursing of the sick" carried out "in an institution approved by the Council."

Thus it is laid down that the prescribed Syllabus of Training *shall* (not *may*) be enforced. Thus the Law has been broken, not for the only time, by the General Nursing Council, whereas to administer the Act means to keep the Law. If an Act of Parliament could be broken in one case it could in others, thus there was no sense of security.

The Chairman submitted that this was a condition of things which Registered Nurses should not endure. They had worked, and paid for their Act, and it was not fair to submit to its being broken by those whose duty it was to uphold it. To break the Law was a punishable offence, and persons had been punished for far slighter offences. Yet in this instance nothing was done. She recommended

Registered Nurses to let the General Nursing Council know that they did not intend to submit to being deprived of their prescribed Syllabus of Training.

She called upon Mrs. Bedford Fenwick to move the first Resolution.

Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, who based her speech on the words, "What I have I hold," proposed the following Resolution:—

[RESOLUTION.—I.]

"That the Minister of Health be earnestly petitioned to sign the prescribed Syllabus of Training for Probationary Nurses, prepared and passed on two occasions (in 1921 and 1922) by the first General Nursing Council for England and Wales, and to have it put into force at the earliest possible date.

"The members of the Registered Nurses' Parliamentary Council are of opinion that it is illogical and unjust that Probationary Nurses should be required to submit themselves for examination, under a prescribed Syllabus of Examination, as required by the General Nursing Council, without an equal obligation being placed upon Hospitals, approved by the Council, to provide the training necessary, under a prescribed Syllabus of Training, as required by the Nurses' Registration Act, but which has been withheld by the present reactionary Council, with the consent of a late Minister of Health."

Mrs. Fenwick said that after 35 years of strenuous labour, and the expenditure of £30,000, the nurses, opposed by the Nurse Training Schools and their officials, had succeeded in having the Nurses' Registration Acts passed. These Acts well administered provided for progressive organization of the Nursing Profession, but so far, with the exception of the publication of the Register, few of the rights and privileges granted to the nurses in the Act were in force. Moreover, the present General Nursing Council were not only not administering the Act, but violating it, and they were there to protest against the inefficiency of the General Nursing Council in the conduct of their business and to demand immediate reform. She hoped the aggrieved nurses would appeal direct to the new Minister of Health, who, having suffered social disabilities himself, would, perhaps, sympathise with the rank-and-file of the nursing profession, whose rights granted to them by Parliament were being withheld by an ignorant autocracy.

When the first organization of nurses—the British Nurses' Association—set out to obtain State Registration, it was not the mere placing of names on a list they were after, but a sufficient scheme of teaching and training tested by a State Examination before a nurse would be qualified for Registration. From the start nurses claimed the organization of the Syllabus of Nursing Education by the State, and it was in opposition to this principle—the right of the Probationer to prescribed teaching—that united the managers of several hospitals in their bitter opposition to what they termed "State interference."

The organized nurses were ardently convinced of the righteousness of their claim. Many in the room would remember, how in the days of their training, they suffered terrible anxiety of mind through uninstructed responsibility. It was not the long hours of work (many enjoyed them) or personal discomfort of which they complained, but the terrible risks incurred through ignorance in attendance on the sick; the giving of dangerous narcotics of which they knew nothing, was a nightmare, and the denial of instruction to qualify for responsibility a crime.

Mrs. Fenwick alluded to the thirst for knowledge of past generations of nurses, and the devious methods by which they obtained it. She referred to probationer days at the Royal Infirmary, Manchester—when having been a "whole week" in a ward—she disturbed an old Head Nurse at her afternoon nap, and when asked what she wanted, replied: "I have been here a whole week and you have not taught me anything." The amazement of the old lady, and how she retailed this "joke" to a member

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