

## PRECIS OF EVIDENCE OF MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK

before the Select Committee of the House of Commons appointed to consider the Rules of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales with regard to:—

- (1) The prescribed training for nurses, and
- (2) The reservation of seats on the Council for Matrons.

### I.

I desire to thank the Minister of Health for consenting to, and recommending the appointment of this Select Committee, thus giving Registered Nurses the opportunity of expressing their opinions on their professional education and discipline.

In November, 1887, I founded the British Nurses Association in order to unite British Nurses for their mutual help and protection, and to obtain for them a system of uniform education and registration by Act of Parliament. The Association was opposed from the outset by hospital authorities, but in 1891 it was granted the title of Royal by Queen Victoria, and in 1893 was incorporated by Royal Charter, after a lengthy investigation into the whole case for and against its work by the Privy Council.

Thereafter, I founded the National Council of Trained Nurses of Great Britain and Ireland to unite representatives of all the Societies of Nurses in the country, and also the International Council of Nurses to unite the Nurses National Associations in every country, which Federation now includes the National organisations of Nurses throughout the world.

As Hon. Secretary of the Society for the State Registration of Nurses, I drafted the first Nurses Registration Bill introduced into the House of Commons in 1904. I have, as Editor of the BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING, advocated for upwards of thirty years, Parliamentary Action for the organisation of Nursing Education and Registration of Nurses until the Acts for the purpose were passed in 1919. I served as a member of the first General Nursing Council for England and Wales set up by the Act on the nomination of the then Minister of Health, the Right Hon. Christopher Addison, M.P., P.C., when I helped to draft the Rules, and to compile a Syllabus of Training which I claimed should be compulsory.

I only mention these facts to prove I have some justification for speaking in the name of independent nurses throughout England, and to point out that the thirty-two years of opposition to the standardisation of Nursing Education by the State came mainly from the hospital authorities in England, and from the Matrons of those hospitals, who feared, perhaps with some reason, "State interference" with their prerogatives.

With reference to the matters to be considered by this Select Committee, namely:—

#### 1.—The Prescribed Training of Future Nurses.

I would refer to the Act of 1919, which, under Clause 3 (2) (a) 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; and (b) requires that the prescribed training *shall* be carried out either in an Institution approved by the Council in that behalf or in the service of the Admiralty the Army Council or the Air Council.

I submit that these provisions of the Act are obligatory on the General Nursing Council, and are in no sense permissive. I submit, therefore, that the clear meaning of those Clauses is that the "prescribed training" shall be compulsory on, and must be carried out by, the Institutions referred to. I would venture to remind the Committee that until the Act was passed, and even to-day—after 5½ years, the training of Nurses given by any Hospital

was, and is, mainly at the discretion of the authorities, they have up to date provided for their nurses what standard of education they choose. From this state of irresponsible independence has naturally arisen the unsatisfactory condition of Nursing Education which the Nursing Acts were designed to remedy.

I submit that the clear intention of Parliament as defined in Clause 3 (2) (a) and (b) was to rectify this lack of uniformity, and to secure by the means of the Nursing Acts of 1919, a definite and compulsory uniformity in the training of nurses in Hospitals throughout the United Kingdom, so that all nurses in the future shall be properly qualified to attend, under medical direction, upon the sick, and in my opinion it reflects no credit upon the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, or upon those responsible at the Ministry of Health, that the clear intentions and directions of Parliament have been delayed in their execution for five and a half years.

I understand that it is admitted by the General Nursing Council and by the Ministry of Health that the Rules now framed by the Council for the future training of Nurses are merely permissive and optional, and are not, therefore, compulsory on the various Hospitals to carry out—that "training" as defined at the end of Rule 7 means "training in subjects prescribed by the Council as subjects for the examination which the applicant is required to pass." In other words that the intention of the Act so far as it is concerned with "prescribed" training is being evaded, and its usefulness stultified. I assume that it will be admitted that the Act requires, from this year, that all Nurses must pass an Examination under the authority of the Council, before they can be registered. Yet without a definite compulsory system of education in every Hospital approved by the Council, it is impossible to understand how the nurses can be adequately prepared to pass a compulsory uniform examination. If every Hospital may teach as it chooses, how can their nurses be expected to gain, and display on examination, any uniformity of knowledge or experience?

To ordain that a nurse *may* be educated for an examination which she *must* pass, is illogical in the extreme. May I point out the injustice to a nurse who, after three years or more of very arduous work in a hospital under this optional system, may not be adequately educated to pass the Council's Examination. She would then fail to obtain registration, her years of work would have been wasted, and her hope of a successful life work lost. It is imperative that a nurse's education should be definite, compulsory and uniform, where hundreds of training schools are concerned, and where there is only one Examining Board for them all. If a nurse is rejected by the General Nursing Council's Examiners—perhaps entirely from the lack of proper teaching at her training school, she has no other portal to the Register open to her (as medical students have) and may, therefore, be professionally ruined by her failure.

In support of this contention I would quote the official Report presented by the Education Committee to the General Nursing Council at its meeting on May 15th, 1925, on the result of the Preliminary Examinations of candidates 1924-25.

The Report states:—The total number of candidates who entered for the four Preliminary Examinations, held in July and October, 1924, and January and April, 1925, was 6,038. Of these 245 were absent, 4,905 passed, and 888 failed. The percentage of failures was 15.2.

As the Examinations were of a very simple and elementary standard, the large number of failures proves the inefficiency of the teaching.

Moreover, from the Annual Report of the College of Nursing Ltd., 1925, under the heading "Tutorial Courses," it is stated:—

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