

SELECT COMMITTEE ON GENERAL NURSING COUNCIL.

We publish below the Minutes of Evidence given by Mrs. Bedford Fenwick on July 23rd, before the Select Committee of the House of Commons on the General Nursing Council and reprinted from the Committee's Report. In our next issue we hope to give a résumé of the evidence of the other witnesses.

MINUTES OF EVIDENCE.

Mrs. Bedford Fenwick called; and examined.

CHAIRMAN.

188. Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, you are good enough to come before us to represent the Royal British Nurses Association?—No, Sir. I am not representing any Society of Nurses, although I belong to a good many. The Royal British Nurses Association delegates, I think, are coming later.

189. And you are coming, so to speak, in your own right?—I hope so, yes, after nearly 50 years' work.

190. And you have sent us in a précis of evidence dealing with two points: First of all, the prescribed training for nurses, and, secondly, the reservation of seats on the Council for matrons?—Yes. With your permission, Sir, might I, before we begin, hand in to the Committee these documents?

191. Certainly. They are additional documents, are they?—They are official documents. The Report of the Select Committee on Registration of Nurses, 1905, because our arguments are just the same as they were then, when the report was in our favour. The rules made by the General Nursing Council for Scotland in terms of paragraph 4 of the Schedule annexed to the Nurses Registration Act, Scotland; that is, Rules for free election, and the same election scheme under the Joint Nursing and Midwives Council (Northern Ireland) Act, 1922—that is also a free election.

192. You founded the British Nurses Association, did you not?—I did, with the help of the leading doctors and matrons of that time.

193. And your object was to obtain a system of uniform education and registration by Act of Parliament?—Yes, from the very beginning; that was in 1887.

194. Now with reference to the first point, the prescribed training of future nurses, you express a strong view on pages 2 and 3 of your Memorandum that the provisions of Clause 3 of the Act of 1919 are obligatory on the General Nursing Council and in no sense permissive, and you submit 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"?—That is how I read the Act.

195. You go on to say 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 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." Do you think that the object of Parliament was to obtain uniformity in the training of nurses?—I think so.

196. Might it not be urged that the object of Parliament was to obtain an efficient scheme of education for nurses?—Yes, a prescribed scheme.

197. You do not think that the Act would be satisfied by arrangements under which the examination was prescribed?—No.

198. The time of study was prescribed and the place of study was prescribed?—No, not altogether.

199. Not even if those requirements are supplemented by a requirement that the nurse under training should give evidence of having attended certain courses?—I think that

a syllabus of training should precede a syllabus of examination. I cannot think that to put the examination syllabus before a training syllabus can be satisfactory.

200. Are you satisfied with the syllabus of training in the Yellow Book?—I do not think it is bad; I think it is as good as we could have for the time. There are a few things left out of that, but that is necessary no doubt; but it is not bad.

201. You would be prepared to accept it, would you?—Yes.

202. But you realise that it might have to be modified in course of time?—I do not know in what particular.

203. Of course, it has been stated to us that we are at the beginning of a new experiment in the education of nurses, and that, at any rate for the present, it is desirable to retain a certain amount of elasticity. Do you think there is any thing in that?—That is the argument that you will find over and over again put forward by the anti-registration party before the Select Committee on Registration, it is exactly the same argument that was used 20 years ago. We feel very strongly that nurses have a right to a prescribed scheme or syllabus of training, a minimum one if you choose, but that they should have a right under the Act to a prescribed scheme of training.

204. Do you think that the education at present given in the Nursing Schools is inadequate?—In some of them.

205. Would you say that in a large proportion of the schools it was inadequate?—No, but in some, and in some of the largest. It is by no means only the small hospitals that are to blame for bad training. In some of the large hospitals the training at the present time, even after the Act has been passed for five years, is very inefficient.

206. And that means, of course, that a considerable number of the pupils fail in examination?—I presume it does. I think that it would be a very useful piece of information for this Committee to procure from the General Nursing Council a report of the examinations, and from what institutions the failures took place, because that information is not given to the public.

207. You are aware that there are many cases of State examinations which are not preceded by compulsory and uniform schemes of training?—Yes.

208. For instance, take the examination for the Civil Service: The examination is uniform, and the examination, of course, has to be passed by young men trained for that examination in various schools, and they are not subjected to any particular course of training?—No.

209. So that the Nursing Council in adopting the policy which it has adopted (whether that policy be statutory or not, legal or not) is following a precedent which exists in other professions, in other parts of the public life of this country?—Yes, that may be so, but the one portal to the register, and the uniform training was the one thing we asked for, and we thought when we got our Act that these two clauses provided for it.

COLONEL FREMANTLE.

210. May I ask who Mrs. Fenwick means by "We," because she said she was coming in a personal capacity?—By "We" in referring to the Nurses Act, I meant the Central Committee for the State Registration of Nurses which drafted the Bill, which was supported by the Scottish and Irish and English Nurses Organisations to the number of eight, and the British Medical Association.

CHAIRMAN.

211. Now you say on page 4 of your Memorandum: "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

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