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EDITORIAL.

THE DEGRADATION OF THE STATE REGISTER OF NURSES.

When the State Register of Nurses was established under the provisions of the Nurses Registration Act, and the Rules framed by the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, which have the force of law were defined, the following provision was incorporated under State Authority, in Part V 17 (1) of the Rules:—

“When it is brought to the notice of the Council that a nurse who is included in the Register (in this part of the Rules referred to as ‘the Respondent’) has been convicted of a felony or misdemeanour, or has been guilty of any misconduct, the Registrar, after making such further inquiries relative thereto as she thinks necessary, shall lay the matter before the Disciplinary and Penal Cases Committee of the Council, which shall report to the Council.”

The precise meaning of the word “felony” is that it is “crime of a kind legally graver than misdemeanour.” It “formerly involved the confiscation to the Crown of the lands and goods of the convicted prisoner.”

As will be seen from our report of the proceedings at the meeting of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, on page 308, the Council on October 25th had before it two Disciplinary Cases, the first being that of a nurse charged with stealing, who was removed by the Council from the Register, and the second that of Miss Margaret Ellen Owen, a Registered Nurse, concerning whom the Commissioner of the Police for the Metropolis reported to the Council, that she was “convicted at Marlborough Street Police Court on the 9th August, 1929, for felony,” further that she “pleaded ‘guilty’ and was fined £2 and £2 costs.”

The guilt of the respondent therefore admits of no doubt, and the case was a clear case of theft.

The respondent had the right to be heard in her own defence by a friend, or by Counsel, or Solicitor, but did not avail herself of it. It is difficult indeed to know what defence she could have offered, since she had already pleaded “guilty,” at the Marlborough Street Police Court, to the charge of stealing a hat, the property of Messrs. Bourne & Hollingsworth.

The duty of the General Nursing Council charged with the custody of the State Register of Nurses, as we understand it, is to maintain the purity of the Register (1) for the safety of the public, (2) for the benefit of the medical profession, (3) for the protection of the honour of the Nursing Profession. In the above instance it

has, in our opinion, failed to do so on all three counts. Thus the Register is degraded.

With the clear facts before it, its decision was “That judgment in the case of Miss Margaret Ellen Owen S.R.N. 48899, be deferred to the Meeting of this Council a year hence.”

In the meanwhile, presumably, this nurse, convicted of a theft to which she pleaded guilty, can continue to wear the State uniform and badge, and point to the entry of her name in the State Register as evidence that she is a responsible and trustworthy person to have charge of the sick in private houses and elsewhere.

What does the public think about it?

What do the Registered Nurses think about the names of nurses found guilty of theft appearing in their professional Register? We write in the plural because the name of another Registered Nurse proved guilty of theft was not removed by the Council and also appears upon the State Register.

We presume that the General Nursing Council allowed itself to be influenced by the hope of the reform of the delinquent, and the result to her of the removal of her name from the Register, but its members are placed in their honourable position in order to protect the public from untrustworthy persons, and to guard the honour of the Registered Nurses. The honourable standing of the Nursing Profession as a whole cannot fail to be lowered if the public are aware that the State Register of Nurses affords them no security that the names of nurses proved guilty of theft and other crimes are not excluded from it.

The General Nursing Council is composed of sixteen elected nurse-members and nine appointed by Government Departments. The nurse members are therefore in a majority of almost two-thirds, and can undoubtedly carry any thing they desire. But they are neither omnipotent nor permanent, they hold their seats by the will of the electorate—the Registered Nurses—whose responsibility as to the representatives they place upon the Council is a serious one.

At the election of the direct representatives of the Registered Nurses for the General Nursing Council for England and Wales in 1932, we hope that the electors will realise both their responsibility and their power, and will require pledges from candidates for office that they will vote against the retention on the Register of the name of any nurse proved guilty of theft in a public court before they give them their votes. If they cannot obtain this pledge then, in justice to the public, and in loyalty to their profession, they should support the candidatures of those who are willing to give such a pledge.

previous page

next page