

## THE STATUS OF THE NURSING PROFESSION.

### DEPRECIATION OF NURSING STANDARDS.

We have to thank *The Times* for allocating valuable space to expressions of opinion on the question of the status of Nurses, provoked by the recommendations of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Nursing Services, largely composed of men, lay and medical, and in which the free nursing opinion of registered nurses was ruthlessly excluded by the Minister of Health, a monstrous injustice not only to Registered Nurses but to professional women in every department of the community.

Thus the recommendation that a Roll of second-grade nurses should be compiled, organised by the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, the Governing Body of the Nursing Profession under the Act of 1919, is calculated to degrade the standard of Nursing Education, to the inevitable suffering of the community, and to deprive the Registered Nurse of economic security.

The following opinions have been expressed in *The Times* :—

#### LADY NOVAR.

Lady Novar (wife of the late Sir Ronald Munro-Ferguson, who for several sessions had charge of the Nurses' Registration Bill in the House of Commons, and a brilliant advocate of legal status for nurses) takes exception to the absurdities and anomalies of the Test by Examination as at present conducted. She points out that "Proficiency in arithmetic or a knowledge of who wrote 'Hiawatha' or 'Silas Marner' and in what part of the British Isles 'buttons' and 'mustard' are made, is scarcely proof that a candidate possesses those vocational qualities so necessary in a nurse." "It is, therefore, to be hoped," she writes, "that this impediment to recruiting for the nursing profession will speedily be done away with."

#### LADY ROBERTSON, CHAIRMAN, THE ELIZABETH GARRETT ANDERSON HOSPITAL.

Lady Robertson, a lady with the obstructive instincts of King Canute, would apparently wish to revert to type, and prefers two grades of State Registered Nurses to a Roll of "Assistant" nurses. The final examination for which all student nurses would sit should be of the standard ruling some years back in anatomy and physiology. "None of the many excellent nurses we all know round about 45 years of age had to pass quite such a severe test as all candidates are called upon to meet now." We must remind Lady Robertson that medical science has progressed with time and that the knowledge of the attendant nurse cannot be permitted to stagnate and become obsolete. We must also take exception to Lady Robertson's statement—"That these Grade II. nurses would be as competent to become staff nurses, district nurses, and private nurses as those passing the same standard of examination were 15 or 20 years ago."

Grade I. nurses would, it is argued, be permitted to quaff the elixir of efficiency up to date, and thus be capable of prolonging life indefinitely, the while monopolising all the fleshpots of power and sufficiency!

We wonder where the amenable Grade II nurses will be recruited. Lady Robertson has apparently omitted to observe that *the People are here* and that snobbish class distinctions are no longer to be tolerated in the Nurse Training Schools. "Hightum, Titum and Scrub" went out with the last century, so far as the Nursing Profession is concerned, and it is unthinkable that any such obsolete system should be reinstated.

#### MISS ISABEL MACDONALD, S.R.N.

Miss Macdonald's contribution to the controversy, pointing out with her usual lucidity the injustice of the

recommendation to institute a Grade II. nurse, to act "as staff nurses, district nurses and private nurses," is an anachronism. She emphasises the skill and experience demanded from both private and district nurses when assuming personal responsibility—as they have to do—and claims that confusion and misunderstanding would inevitably arise in a dual portal to registration such as that suggested by the Inter-Departmental Committee, and to extend the operations of the Act for the State Registration of Nurses to cover a "Roll" of untested "Assistant Nurses" "would inevitably lead to under-cutting for those highly qualified women who have gone through the long and comprehensive training demanded by the State, and so earned the recognition and, it is to be presumed, the protection of the State for their hard-won qualifications."

#### MISS FRANCES G. GOODALL, S.R.N.

Miss Goodall, S.R.N., Secretary of the College of Nursing, with a lack of perspicacity, advocates the well-known policy of the College, to support the proposal of what she terms the "Athlone Committee," to institute a Roll of "Assistant Nurses" with a simple two years' training (a standard obsolete in the last century), who are to be judged, not by examinations but in practical competence, these trainees to qualify for a Roll under the same General Nursing Council that controls the State Registered Nurse," a grossly unjust proposition which it is to be hoped the "Registered Nurse" will oppose by every means in her power. It is a pity that Miss Goodall took no part in the monumental struggle for legal status of the State Registrars, which cost them thirty years' intensive devoted service for the benefit of the community and £20,000 in hard cash! Had she been privileged to do so, she, presumably, would not have agreed to promote the College of Nursing policy of flinging away our hard-won status in the body politic.

#### DR. H. S. SOUTTAR.

Dr. H. S. Souttar, of the London Hospital, and Deputy Chairman, Inter-Departmental Committee, in supporting its disastrous recommendation *vs* an inferior grade of Nurse, is far from lucid in his arguments. He is of opinion that to institute the shortly trained, untested "assistant nurse" protected by the State would "assist in evolving order out of chaos, and would give to the position of the State Registered Nurse a security which can in no other way be obtained."

Quite frankly, we Registered Nurses disagree that to commit hari-kari is the only method by which we can securely exist!

#### MR. HERBERT J. PATERSON.

Mr. Herbert J. Paterson is surprised that a prominent surgeon gives his support to a proposal that a second grade of Nurses should be recognised, and pertinently asks, "Would Dr. Souttar approve of the legislation of second-grade doctors, or the recognition of osteopaths? The recognition of a second grade of nurses, so far from giving the State Registered Nurse security, would undermine her status under the Nurses' Registration Act—an act of justice won after years of struggle—would lead to under-cutting, and, as regards the interests of the public weal, would be a most retrograde step. The born Nurse has yet to be born."

Mr. Paterson makes two constructive recommendations:

(1) A thorough revision of the syllabus for the State examination, not with a view to lowering the standard, but to curtail the scope of some of the subjects.

(2) Raising the salaries of the nursing profession. No trained nurse should ever receive less than a minimum of £100 per annum.

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