

AN IMMINENT PERIL TO THE SICK AND TO REGISTERED NURSES.

REGISTERED NURSES THANK "THE SUNDAY EXPRESS."

I have read with keen interest and appreciation the admirable article in the last issue of the *Sunday Express* on "State Registered Nurse Number One," Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, appointed also a member of the first General Nursing Council for England and Wales when that Council was established by the authority of Parliament.

The Nurses' Registration Act, which Mrs. Fenwick worked unceasingly to promote for 30 years, and which received the Royal Assent on December 23rd, 1919, constituted Nursing a legalised profession, gave protection to the sick by requiring proof of the minimum standard of professional knowledge to be attained by a Nurse before she could acquire the right to place the coveted letters S.R.N. (State Registered Nurse) after her name, and, further, gave Registered Nurses a working majority in the management of their affairs by securing to them the right to elect 16 Registered Nurses out of 25 members on their Governing Body.

The present crisis has been sprung upon the Nursing Profession by the most dangerous recommendation of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Nursing Services under the Ministry of Health and the Board of Education in England and Wales that a lower grade of Nurse, "known as the 'Assistant Nurse' should be given a recognised status and placed on a Roll under the control of the General Nursing Council, and again that the name 'Assistant Nurse' should be protected by law."

The position at present is that the four Registered Nurses on the Inter-Departmental Committee on Nursing Services, composed of twenty-one members, made a "note of reservation" disagreeing with the perpetuation of the term "Assistant Nurse" for the grade of workers commonly known at present under that title, but expressed the opinion that "so long as such persons are working in an institution under Registered Nurses this title may describe their rank, but for the Nurses in private practice they advocate a more distinctive official designation, namely, 'Registered Invalid Attendants' this," they say, "need not prevent the use of the word 'Nurse' as the normal form of personal address for such attendants."

They do not dissociate themselves from the recommendation that these "Nurses" shall be placed on a Roll under the control of the General Nursing Council. Had the Royal British Nurses' Association and other self-governing Societies of Nurses which petitioned the then Minister of Health for representation on the Inter-Departmental Committee not been refused, no doubt a strong minority protest would have been recorded.

Nothing could be more suicidal to the true interests of the Nursing Profession, or do more to discourage highly educated women from entering a profession where they would be undersold, after training, in the open market by an inferior grade of worker. No men's statutory provision would permit such injustice for a moment.

Nothing could be more unjust than that these Assistant Nurses, or Invalid Attendants, should come under the control of the General Nursing Council in the house built and paid for from the fees paid by State Registered Nurses.

But the end is not yet.

As Miss (now Dame) Ellen Musscn, Chairman of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, told the Conference of the accredited Registered Nurses convened by her on November 26th, 1936, at 20, Portland Place, London, W., to consider the recognition of a second grade of Nurses to care for the Chronic Sick, "it usually happens

that when a definite status is conferred on any body or profession, persons without the requisite training endeavour to obtain recognition under the same auspices.

"This has certainly," she said, "been the case from time to time with the General Nursing Council. For some time past some Local Authorities have been agitating to have recognition given to a second grade of Nurse to care for the chronic sick. It was admitted that these Nurses would be chiefly those whose education and intelligence were not of a standard which would enable them to pass the Preliminary Examination of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales.

"The reasons for refusing to consider such second-grade Nurses on the part of the General Nursing Council have been as follows:—

"(1) That having been set up by Act of Parliament to lay down a basic standard of training for Nurses for the Sick, the Council could not recognise anything below that standard. It should be remembered that in drawing up the syllabus and in determining the standard of examinations, due regard had to be paid to things as they were at the passing of the Act, and the standard was therefore, and still is, very moderate.

"(2) The second reason was that the Council have no power under the Act to set up a 'Special' Register such as has been suggested."

These reasons, only intensified, are as valid now as they were then, when after an instructed delegate from each of the leading Nurses' Organisations represented at the meeting had spoken the following resolution proposed by Miss M. S. Cochrane, R.R.C., Matron of Charing Cross Hospital, and seconded by Mrs. Berens Dowdeswell, was carried unanimously:—

THAT NO SUPPLEMENTARY PART OF THE REGISTER SHOULD BE SET UP FOR NURSES FOR THE CHRONIC SICK.

The Inter-Departmental Committee proposes that a grade of Nurses shall be established, under the authority of the State, by placing on a Register or Roll those who do not (and cannot) attain the standard defined by the Governing Body as the minimum compatible with safety in the Nurses of the sick. If it is found that the powers bestowed upon it by Parliament by the *Nurses' Registration Act, 1919*, do not permit this degradation of the Register, then *these powers should be extended by suitable legislation.*

The conditions of service for Assistant Nurses should be such as to make the career as attractive as possible, and the Inter-Departmental Committee recommends that their rates of salaries should be regulated by the Salaries Committees and that they should be eligible for pension.

That the fee charged for establishing the Roll should be as reasonable as possible and publication every five years with annual supplements might be sufficient.

No wonder State Registered Nurses are bewildered, indignant. They realise the danger to their Register, to the sick public, to their economic status, but they realise too that in spite of all the powerful forces they have still a leader, Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, who in the last half-century of unstinted service has never failed them, and also Isabel Macdonald, a fine seconder, who will be remembered with all honour and gratitude for generations to come.

Clear-eyed, indomitable, courageous State Registered Nurse Number One will once more lead them to victory. The issue is so simple. Protect the sick, the public, and the State Registered Nurses. See what a quagmire you sink into if you are diverted to either side. Follow on to victory, but do not underestimate the forces against you. Come to the meeting Miss Macdonald is organising at Caxton Hall on March 21st. Do your duty and God defend the right."

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