

Royal British Nurses' Association.

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Royal Charter.

THIS SUPPLEMENT BEING THE OFFICIAL ORGAN OF THE CORPORATION.

MEETING OF PROTEST AGAINST THE PROPOSED DEGRADATION OF THE NURSES' REGISTRATION ACT.

We had a full and most enthusiastic Meeting at the Caxton Hall on Tuesday, March 21st, over five hundred nurses being present.

Miss M. S. Cochrane, R.R.C., S.R.N., was in the Chair and, in her opening remarks, stressed the seriousness of the situation in that such a dangerous proposal as the amendment of the Nurses' Registration Act to provide for a Roll of untrained Assistant Nurses should have been put forward by the Inter-Departmental Committee on Nursing Services. Many of the Recommendations in the Report were excellent, and she hoped that they would be put into operation before long, but the Recommendation which had brought about the decision to call this meeting was fraught with the greatest danger to the sick, the public and the nurses. Miss Cochrane hoped that there would be discussion from the floor, but this discussion must be limited to three, or at most five, minutes and she would not allow any matters irrelevant to the Resolutions to be brought forward as time was short. She read from the Chair a number of telegrams with good wishes for the success of the meeting and condemnation of the Recommendation under discussion. Miss Cochrane called upon Miss Isabel Macdonald, S.R.N., to move a Resolution and to speak to it. The latter then read and moved the adoption of the following Resolution:—

RESOLUTION 1.

"That this meeting desires to offer the strongest protest against the Recommendations of the Inter-Departmental Committee on Nursing Services to establish, under the aegis of the Nurses' Registration Act for England and Wales, a Roll to include the names of women who have failed to attain to the minimum standard of qualification demanded by the State for admission to the State Register, and who (to quote from the Report) 'vary greatly in age, skill and experience.'

"To introduce such a Roll under powers, which it is suggested be obtained by amendment of the Nurses' Registration Act, would in the first place, be a *breach of contract* with the Registered Nurses who have had their names placed on the Register on the understanding that their hard won qualifications would be protected by the State. Secondly, the establishment of such a Roll under the Nurses' Registration Act would prove inimical to the interests of the sick and confusing to the public. Thirdly, it would lead to undermining of the professional status of the Nurses' Registration Act and competition and undercutting for Registered Nurses, on the part of unqualified persons, from whom the Act was designed to protect them.

"Further, this meeting notes with satisfaction that the Departmental Committee in Scotland recommended against the recognition by the State of a second grade of Nurses."

On commencing to speak on the Resolution, Miss Macdonald drew attention to the fact that, on that evening, we were midway between two very important anniversaries. Twenty years ago (on March 11th, 1919) the late Sir Richard Barnett drew a place in the ballot and introduced the Nurses' Registration Bill. On the 28th of the same month the Bill received its Second Reading in the House of Commons. Those who can look into the impulses in the history of the Registration movement in England must regard the latter event as probably the most vital in the whole progress of the struggle for Registration, for, on that day, Sir Richard gave to the Parliament of that time a most liberal education on the matter. He convinced Parliament of the need for the Measure. In the perspective of time we can see that all the other episodes in the progress of State Registration were the consequential results of Sir Richard's speech and the subsequent debate in the House of Commons. The speaker said that she would commence with one bald and unqualified statement—*This recommendation to give State Recognition to the half qualified is purely economic in its ultimate purpose, purely a means to maintain cheap nursing by introducing competition and undercutting by unqualified persons. Supply and demand must, as always, influence salaries and wages and well the supporters of this Recommendation know it.*

Who are these people who, it is suggested, shall receive this State recognition and protection under our Act? The speaker quoted the following descriptions of them from the Report: "A large body of women, varying greatly in age, skill and experience," people "without the intellectual equipment to pass all the examinations for State Registration," people who "might have great difficulty in passing a written examination of a uniform national standard." "Evidence should be required that they have practised (Note—not trained for) nursing of the sick for at least two years" . . . "This work would attract older women, who may find their present occupation lacking in interest, or who have been detained by home duties until too late to enter any other profession"—a pretty heterogeneous set of descriptions, this! Definitions they are, indeed, that could be taken to mean anything or nothing according to expediency.

The speaker read the paragraph in the Report advocating that a Roll of these women be kept by the General Nursing Council, and said that this was the crux of the whole opposition. Next she read part of the paragraph in the Report of the Scottish Departmental Committee on Nursing Services wherein a similar Recommendation to that we are opposing is turned down as dangerous to the nurses, and then was read the statement in the Report of the English Committee that, when this opinion was put forward by witnesses the latter Committee was "unable to accept this view." In the same paragraph it is stated that the position of the assistant nurses "in the nursing profession should be regularised"—but surely *there would be no nursing profession then.* Whoever heard of a pro-

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