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EDITORIAL.

REGISTERED NURSES RETURN THANKS.

For half a century this Journal has alone claimed justice for professional nurses in this country, and the policy of the Press as a whole, in ignoring the value of special education and status for women engaged in work of the highest value to the community, has been bitterly resented by those who have spent strenuous years in qualifying themselves as skilled attendants on the sick, and in the prevention of sickness, work without which the national health cannot attain the highest standard, nor the people joyous life.

The 30 years' struggle for standards of nursing education controlled by the State and for legal status, would never have been necessary had the Press done its duty to the public in this particular, instead of either failing to realise the value of skilled nursing, or from interested motives ignoring it, and had not a small minority of trained nurses, at the cost of at least £20,000, maintained an official organ in the press, through which it bombarded Lords, Commons, and the community for 30 years, we doubt if, even to this day, the General Nursing Council—the governing body of the profession—would have been established by Act of Parliament. Nursing labour was cheap, and to the discredit of many hospital managers they fought to keep it so, and to its discredit the Press realised that it was more profitable to support the employer than the woman worker, with the result that in its need this country finds itself short of invaluable nursing skill, and has to make shift with untrained women.

It will be realised, therefore, with what pleasure and relief we Registered Nurses recently read a sympathetic article in *The Times*, and in their name we offer sincere thanks to the Editor for the world-wide publicity given to our needs, and we beg that for the future he will help us to guard the rights we have already won, to attain the knowledge, skill, status, and reward which are national assets, and which he claims for us in the following article :—

NEEDS OF NURSES.

“The recent appeal of the Minister of Health for nurses for tuberculosis and the infectious fevers may be regarded as one symptom of a difficulty which existed

before the war but has become aggravated during the past year. The nursing profession has scarcely received from the authorities the consideration to which it is entitled. The nurses' lot, while greatly improved, remains hard. Her position has not been as firmly established as her work deserves. A year ago the treatment accorded by the Army to the V.A.D. was criticised in these columns. That is but one instance of a lack of imagination (and of memory) which has been widely prevalent. The time has come when all Government Departments must adopt the same attitude to the nursing profession, that it is a profession, a high calling, the members of which are deserving of all the considerations shown to doctors and of such standards of remuneration as will, once for all, mark them out as persons possessed of special and valuable knowledge and skill. An underpaid nurse cannot command the recognition which is her due. Her rank is also a matter of importance. Every nurse ought to enjoy a status comparable to that of a commissioned officer; a lower status is detrimental to her service and therefore a handicap upon her patients.

It need not be denied that in the application of a general principle of this kind difficulties are likely to arise. All nurses are not equally well trained; and the nurse must necessarily take her orders and directions from the doctor. This obligation is so generally accepted by nurses that little need be said about it; differences in training, however, are apt to impose differences in status and to become the occasion of resentment if they are overlooked. This is another way of saying that changes are necessary in the present system of education as well as in the present system of remuneration. There is, for example, no basis in reason for the idea that the work of a nurse in a fever hospital or in a hospital for the mentally sick is less important than work in one of the great teaching hospitals. Few, on the other hand, will dispute that “hospital training” confers great advantages, especially upon those who receive it in an institution which enjoys a world-wide repute. The same, however, is true of a doctor's education, and yet for the most part doctors who have been educated at less famous schools suffer none of the disabilities which too often hamper nurses in similar circumstances. They are protected by the high standing accorded to the medical profession as a whole and by the high standard of training imposed upon it. Nurses should enjoy the same benefits and by the same means.”

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)