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EDITORIAL.

THE RISE AND DECLINE OF THE PROFESSION OF NURSING IN ENGLAND AND WALES.

Facing us as we write are the 90 bound volumes of the *BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING*, 1888-1942 (formerly the *Nursing Record*), which contain the history in detail of the inauguration of and steady rise of the Profession of Nursing in England from 1888 to 1942, together with the History of the International Council of Nurses, and the six volumes of "The History of Nursing, 1912-1942," compiled, recorded and edited by Registered Nurses in Great Britain and in the United States of America; records free from any trade influence whatever, and therefore to be relied upon. These historic records are gifts of inestimable value to the Nursing Profession and the public, evidence as they are of the inspiration of devoted service to the sick from the earliest ages and of the continuous uprising of nursing standards of efficiency throughout the world. We claim that it is a record of work well done for humanity, of which any profession of women may well be proud. We have been privileged to help to compile these records, and realise that in so doing a great responsibility has been ours whereby the truth in the present controversy on the Nurses Bill is made manifest and will stand for all time.

So much for the rise, and now how can we, without sincere grief, proceed to record the decline for the time being of the honourable standard of the Nursing Profession in England? Such a disaster as that with which Registered Nurses are faced would have been impossible had not those in high places, let us hope in ignorance, betrayed their trust; but the fact that the Association of Hospital Matrons, which practically controls the Royal College of Nursing, and the General Nursing Council for England and Wales petitioned Mr. Ernest Brown, Minister of Health, to present a Bill to Parliament providing for the enrolment (registration) of semi-trained women, known as Assistant Nurses, and of the recognition of thousands of women with nebulous, untested qualifications, who, during the past 20 years, have failed to qualify themselves by examination for State Registration, thus breaking faith with the hundred thousand Registered Nurses who, through conscientious work, have conformed to the law and proved their right to be entrusted with the care of the sick, is not to be denied, and future generations of nurses will suffer from the disastrous legislation thus inaugurated. The Minister of Health's Bill now before Parliament, drafted in confidence without the knowledge of, or consultation with, the free nurses' incorporated organisations, should be carefully studied by intelligent Registered Nurses, when they cannot fail to realise its

dangerous character and provisions, calculated to depreciate the power and authority of their governing body, the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, and to increase the powers of the Minister of Health, in relation to their lives and liberty. Inevitable internecine friction must result, through the Assistant Nurses' Committee, which, largely nominated by the Minister, is to be set up to compile the Roll of the semi-trained and attempt to maintain discipline. That the work of de-grading nursing standards, which to attain has cost the Registered Nurses a million pounds, must be realised as a terrible breach of faith by the Government and the General Nursing Council with the constituent Registered Nurses, and they have to thank the Council of the British College of Nurses, Ltd., for issuing at this crisis the pamphlet, "A Demand for Justice for the State Registered Nurse," in which irrefutable evidence is advanced of the inevitable damage to educational and economic standards which must result through the policy of the Nurses Bill when enforced. In our opinion, the most unjust provision in the Bill is the commandeering, with the consent of the Council, of the Headquarters at 23, Portland Place, W.1, financed by Registered Nurses for the administration of their professional business, to be used for the benefit of persons in economic competition with them, and it is incredible that such an outrage proposed by the Association of Hospital Matrons and the Royal College of Nursing can be perpetrated by a British Parliament at a few days' notice, especially at this crisis, when the nation is fighting to the death for liberty of body and soul.

It would appear that the Nursing Profession in England at this epoch is suffering from lack of intellectual direction. Where are the prototypes of valiant Isla Stewart, saintly Margaret Breay, and undaunted Margaret Huxley, through whose conscientious convictions the Nursing Profession largely exists? It is incredible that if such inspired leaders were with us to-day that all that we have worked for and won in the past half-century would be cast into the melting-pot. The present demoralisation of the Nursing Profession would never have arisen—the class known as the Assistant Nurse would never have materialised, and instead of becoming a public danger, would-be nurses would have been guided along the path they should go for their own benefit and for that of others.

The Association of Hospital Matrons and the Royal College of Nursing have proved their incapacity for organisation.

As for their clamour to make Nursing a closed profession, they should realise that Mr. Ernest Brown is far too canny a politician to come into direct collision

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