

V.A.D. COMMANDANTS.

DISCUSSION IN THE "COMMONS."

Captain Peter Macdonald (Con., I.-o-W.) asked the Secretary for War in Parliament, on June 29th, if he had considered the apprehension aroused among members of the V.A.D. at the proposal in the recent White Paper that the office of commandant should be abolished.

This, said Captain Macdonald, would mean that members of the V.A.D. would have no superior officers of their own to whom to appeal for help or advice.

Major Henderson, Financial Secretary, War Office, said he fully sympathised with the concern expressed. This question was carefully considered by the committee. The V.A.D. usually worked with the matron and sisters of the Queen Alexandra Imperial Military Nursing Service who, under the supervision of the commanding officers of the unit concerned, would carry out the duties which used to be performed by the V.A.D. commandants.

Miss Rathbone (Ind., English Universities) said these recommendations were agreed to by the committee, on which the V.A.D. were represented, and she added: "Is it not a pity there should be all this socially inspired pressure?"

If Problems Arise.

Major Henderson said: "I am quite sure when the scheme comes into operation that the matrons and sisters of the Queen Alexandra Imperial Military Nursing Service will live up to the standard which has always been set in the British Army, and will fulfil their responsibility to the V.A.D.s."

"If, however, in the course of experience, it transpires that practical problems do arise I am sure the Minister will give sympathetic consideration to any such problem."

As regards the representative character of those who signed the report, it was signed by the representatives of the V.A.D. on the Committee.

We entirely approve of the V.A.D.s being placed under the supervision and control of Queen Alexandra's Imperial Military Nursing Service. They have the privilege of serving in hospitals supervised by nurses of this fine service and are to be congratulated upon the privilege.

THE MEDICAL PROFESSION AND A NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE.

The Medical Profession is holding its own in its discussions with Mr. Ernest Brown, the Minister of Health, on the organisation of a National Health Service.

They demand a Royal Commission to inquire into the whole subject before the Ministry of Health presents its final scheme. One thing the medical faculty strongly objects to is to be placed under provincial groups of laymen who have no knowledge of their highly skilled profession, and who would inevitably stultify the progress of medical science and practice and reduce it to a trade—as has been the result of the Nurses Acts, 1943—for England and Scotland so far as the Nursing profession is concerned.

The gross injustice with which the Registered Nurses have been treated by Parliament, through the initiative of the present Minister of Health, is a warning the Medical Profession would be wise to appreciate before it is too late.

We venture to add that as the success of Medical practice often depends upon the expert knowledge and skill of the nurse, it is to be regretted the medical profession failed to oppose the de-grading policy of Lord Horder.

NURSES (SCOTLAND) BILL.

In our last issue, we reported that the Nurses (Scotland) Bill had been presented to Parliament on May 6th, 1943, by Mr. Secretary Johnston. The Bill was supported by the Lord Advocate, Mr. Solicitor-General for Scotland, and Mr. J. Westwood, M.P., Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Scotland. A powerful group of officials to influence political opinion in opposition to any protest advanced by a group of working nurses known to be bitterly antagonistic to the de-grading of their professional hardly-earned standards of efficiency and of their economic security.

The Bill was debated and read a second time on May 27th, 1943. Considered in Committee, reported with an amendment, considered and read a Third Time, and passed on June 22nd, 1943.

The provisions of the Bill are almost identical with those promoted by Mr. Ernest Brown, Minister of Health for England, in the Nurses Bill, 1943, thrust through Parliament with such indecent haste on April 22nd, consultation with Registered Nurses as a whole having been determinedly evaded.

The Nurses (Scotland) Bill commandeers the headquarters of the General Nursing Council for Scotland, 5, Darnaway Street, Edinburgh, for the organisation of a Roll of semi-trained nurses, and it provides with no uncertainty in Clause 19 that money received by way of fees from Registered Nurses shall be available by the Council for paying expenses in connection with the organisation of the Roll of Assistant Nurses.

This astounding provision in both Acts passed through parliament without one word of protest from any politician present!

Debate on May 27th.

With a lack of understanding, or, indeed, of any sympathy with Registered Nurses in Scotland, several members threw bouquets to Mr. Johnston, the promoter of a Bill calculated to degrade the present efficient standards of nursing in Scotland—the reporting of which is mere waste of time.

Mrs. Hardie (Glasgow, Springburn) being apparently the only person in the House who understands the economic and educational conditions of nursing as a profession, expressed her disappointment that the Bill, providing as it does for the dilution of nursing standards, should have been brought in so quickly at this time, when, with improved financial conditions, it had not been proved necessary. To lower the standard at such a time was a mistaken policy, and Mrs. Hardie expressed her disappointment with the Secretary of State so slavishly following the English Bill in this respect. In view of the fact that a Scottish Committee (Lord Alness) has reported adversely on the subject, Mrs. Hardie drew attention to Clause 2 (3), the provision that after five years, which says:

"Unless Parliament shall hereafter otherwise determine nothing in rules made under this Section shall enable a course of training begun after the expiry of five years from the commencement of this Act to qualify any person for admission to the roll."

Mrs. Hardie concluded that the clause means that after five years this type of assistant nurse will cease to exist without the permission of Parliament.

After further debate, which proved that the laymen who took part in it had no expert knowledge of the standards of nursing education and efficiency now attained, or of the inevitable suffering to the sick of lowering them, which did not alter any of the objectionable provisions, the Bill was committed to a Committee of the whole House for the next Sitting Day.

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