

## NURSES (SCOTLAND) BILL.

In our last issue we reported that the Nurses (Scotland) Bill was read a Third time and passed on June 22nd in the House of Commons, and sent to the House of Lords.

### HOUSE OF LORDS, WEDNESDAY, JULY 7th, 1943.

The Nurses (Scotland) Bill, the Order of the Day for the Second Reading, read.

Lord Alness moved the Second Reading of the Bill and explained its scope. He referred to the action of the English Athlone Committee, and the Scottish Committee of which he was Chair, both of which reported in 1938. A grade of Assistant Nurse was approved of and recommended by the Athlone Committee, the Scottish Committee, on the other hand—and it was a very strong and representative committee—unanimously declined to favour that proposal.

Lord Alness continued: "When the Bill for England became law, it became apparent to my right honourable friend (the Secretary of State for Scotland) that something must be done concerning the questions which had been elucidated in the English Bill, with regard to Scotland. Accordingly I reassembled, at his request, the Nursing Committee which had sat in 1938, and discussed with them the grade of Assistant Nurse. They intimated that they stood by their Report. So did I. But looking to the march of events in England, we felt that something must be done in Scotland, accordingly with some reluctance, the Committee agreed to the insertion in the Bill of a provision setting up the grade of Assistant Nurse for a temporary period, which has been fixed by the Secretary of State at five years. I may say that the limited proposal has the approval of local authorities in Scotland and of medical officers of health in Scotland."

#### The term Nurse.

Lord Alness proceeded to give reasons advanced for restricting the term nurse as there is nothing to prevent any person describing herself as a nurse without training or experience. As regards Nurses' Co-operations some are quite unscrupulous and supply nurses who have had little or no training at high fees. Scotland certainly needs to be protected, having regard to the restrictions which are now on the Statute Book, applying to England against an invasion by that type of "Nurse," and accordingly this Bill tries to stop that undesirable invasion.

The regulations for setting up the Roll by the General Nursing Council for Scotland was then described; it was identical to that for England.

#### The Five Year Limit.

Clause 2 (3) is vital. It provides that no person will be able to qualify for admission to the roll unless her training has begun before the expiry of five years from the commencement of the Act. That clause embodies a vital compromise, and is an integral part of the measure. With this important provision for a limit of time for the short term training of Assistant Nurses the Nurses (Scotland) Bill closely follows nursing legislation for England—as we pointed out in our last issue.

A Roll of Assistant Nurses is to be compiled by the General Nursing Council for Scotland. The Headquarters of the Registered Nurses are to be used for the purpose, and the fees of Registered Nurses are to be pooled for financial purposes, thus their money can be used to organise a class of semi-trained nurses in economic competition with them.

After apologising to their Lordships' House for the length of his exposition, Lord Alness moved that the Bill be read a second time.

A lively debate followed.

Lord Craigmyle said: My first word is this, that those who criticise this Bill endorse what the noble Lord and other distinguished people have said about the need of keeping this great profession efficient. There is no difference of opinion between us on that whatsoever. . . . The Alness Committee's report is one of the landmarks in Scotland. It surely ought to be possible to keep the profession dignified and fully efficient, and yet to do justice to a fairly large class of nurses to whom the noble lord has not referred, and to do justice to the people of Scotland. . . . The Secretary of State for Scotland has great sympathy with these people. . . . He has opened to them the Government hospitals owned and managed by the Department of Health . . . so I plead first on the behalf of the suffering population—and I plead next on behalf of the large body of nurses, V.A.D.s, Red Cross nurses and Nursing auxiliaries who, during more than three years past have in fact been trained, and have been doing fine service in responsible nursing in these Government hospitals as well as in military hospitals. Clause 14 leaves out any consideration whatever for these nurses. It treats them as outcasts permanently from the profession unless they go back to the very beginning—washing and scrubbing. . . . I have some hope in that matter. I hope the noble Lord will on the Committee stage do something to put that injustice right. . . . There is also the financial side. These people are earning from £55 to £75 per annum, much too low a wage . . . their salaries will drop to £40. In view of the urgent need for nurses in Scotland, such discouragement to a class who have acquired skill and training is surely not consistent with elementary commonsense.

Lord Craigmyle then expressed the hope that the fine Government hospitals should be utilised as training institutions for Red Cross and other nurses. He then discussed the question of the closing down of entries to the Roll of Assistant Nurses after five years. That is not in the English Act, which says nothing about the Roll of Assistant Nurses being temporary, and it was entirely owing to Lord Alness that the clause exists in the Bill for Scotland, and which tends to perpetuate the shortage of nurses.

Lord Kinnaird supported Lord Craigmyle, particularly from the point of view of the admission of V.A.D.s and Civil Nursing Auxiliaries. He stated the number of State Registered Nurses is insufficient, and there always will be a demand for less highly trained and less expensive nurses. V.A.D.s and Nursing Auxiliaries should be recognised in addition to thousands of Red Cross nurses, it is hard to believe that the standard of nursing is going to be lowered because such people as experienced V.A.D.s are kept in the service, "in hospitals I know V.A.D.s under a Sister are doing the entire nursing duties of the wards." He hoped the Government would agree to Amendments which will make this measure fair and just to V.A.D.s and Nursing Auxiliaries.

#### Systematic Training Necessary.

Lord Geddes said he had the greatest appreciation and admiration for V.A.D.s, but trusted that the point used by the two noble Lords will never be conceded by the Government. What we are trying to do is to build a highly skilled nursing profession, in order to get it there must be systematic training, and the continual confusion that arises in lay minds about nurses is that if women have had experience in a hospital they are trained. They are not. A properly trained nurse is almost as highly skilled a person as a properly trained young doctor attending on the patient. It is most important that the Council responsible for the standard of nursing training, the maintenance of discipline and the professional standard of the nurses should control the training right through just as the General Medical Council is responsible for the training of doctors. The best

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