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Editorial.

Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap.

IT was always a fundamental principle of the pioneers of State Registration for Nurses that in the management of their own affairs, *professional freedom*—must be based on *economic independence*.

When, therefore, State Registration for Nurses was won and once on the Statute Book, the opportunity was taken to bring this ideal into force, when organising the Governing Body of the Nursing Profession, the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, it was financed entirely from the fees and subscriptions of Registered Nurses.

So satisfactory was this legislation that after some twenty years, the balance sheet of 1942 showed a credit balance of £5,928 9s. 2d. ! This was too good to last ! for there came the unjustifiable recognition by the State of a second-grade Nurse—the Assistant Nurse (to the detriment of the fully qualified State Registered Nurse). The passing of the Nurses Act, 1943, allocated power to the General Nursing Council for England and Wales to use the funds and property of Registered Nurses for the organisation of a group of semi-trained persons on a Roll of Assistant Nurses. In our opinion, it was totally unjustifiable that any Minister of the Crown should use the nurses' money without their consent to depreciate their professional standards of efficiency and the safety of the sick. The "wise" old days must now be recognised, as those prior to State interference, when the assistant nurse played a necessary part, in accordance with her limited capacity, under the supervision of trained Sisters, in hundreds of hospitals and institutions which were not recognised as State Training Schools for Nurses under the auspices of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales. Perhaps these conditions might still have prevailed but for the enormous rise in the number of hospitals and institutions in the last thirty years ; this was largely the cause of a very severe shortage of nurses. It was then that the assistant nurse with no State recognition, discovered that under the employment of nurses co-operations she would receive remuneration much in excess of what she already earned. Thus with typical indifference to just measures, the Royal College of Nursing raised the cry "the Control of the Assistant Nurse." !

Instead of recommending the control of those co-operations that supplied untrained persons (*for gain*) to the danger of the sick public, their solution of the problem was the recommendation that a second grade of semi-trained person, the assistant nurse, be recognised by the State, thus de-grading the whole of the Nursing Profession.

There is nothing hid that shall not be revealed ! When the British College of Nurses, Ltd., realised the financial significance involved, it inquired of the G.N.C. as to the cost of the inauguration of the Assistant Nurses Roll, and were informed that such was not a separate account, it is not now surprising to learn that, instead of a substantial balance, the G.N.C. shows an alarming deficit in its balance sheet for the year ended March 31st 1949, of £16,846, and that the finance of the Assistant Nurses Roll is such that the Chairman of the General Nursing Council reported at the January meeting a loss of £1,361 on tests carried out in connection with the assistant nurse and that the approach to the Minister of Health for a Treasury Grant had been refused !

In spite of the financial and moral débâcle which we believe was caused by the State recognition of the semi-trained assistant nurse, regardless of the recommendation contained in the Report of the Working Party on the Recruitment and Training of Nurses, that : "There is no question of suggesting the discharge of those assistant nurses now employed but only of discontinuing the recruitment of pupil assistant nurses—the Roll should be closed at a given date in the near future," the assistant nurse is still given status in the new Nurses Act, 1949 !

Why, alas ! did nurses take no heed, over the years, of the timely warning so ably stressed by their great Leader ?

We quote from her own words upon the subject :—

"We object to the closing of the Nursing Profession as proposed by the Royal College of Nursing primarily because it interferes unwarrantably with the liberty of the subject, and could not be enforced without litigation, and because semi-trained persons are to be included in the privilege to practise.

"At least 80,000 Registered Nurses on the State Register, who are not members of the Royal College of Nursing, have not been consulted by it, nor have they considered the result of this drastic restriction to practise nursing. Parliament has never closed medicine as a profession. Had this been done, the marvellous evolution in all its branches during the past half century might never have materialised for the benefit of humanity.

"Before any attempt is made to thrust the proposals for de-grading the Nursing Profession through Parliament, we claim that every member of the House of Lords and of the House of Commons should acquaint himself with the dangerous undemocratic propositions advocated in the Report of the Nursing Reconstruction Committee of the Royal College of Nursing—Section I, The Assistant Nurse—in connection with the de-grading of safe nursing standards and prevent any such disastrous legislation.

"Up-grade nursing efficiency should be the aim of legislation, not depreciation of standards already attained."

A.S.B.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)