

The American Federation of Nurses.*

By Miss M. A. NUTTING, President.

The American Federation of Nurses is a very young organisation, representing, perhaps, the very oldest of all the professions, for history does not carry us back to a time so remote or so primitive that we cannot trace the beginnings out of which what we call the profession of nursing has been evolved. That evolution has been, it is true, slow, so slow that it appeared in its present form within the last quarter of a century, and that portion of it which entitles us to present ourselves here to-day does not cover even one decade.

Our Federation of Nurses is composed of two societies—the American Society of Superintendents of Training-Schools and the Trained Nurses' Associated Alumnae of the United States. The first of these societies is the oldest. It was organised in Chicago in the year of the World's Fair, 1893. The Medical Congress held then included a subsection on nursing, which brought together superintendents of nursing schools and hospitals representing both America and England. At the suggestion of the chairman of the Nursing Congress, Miss Isabel Hampton, then superintendent of the Johns Hopkins Hospital Training-School and the most notable woman whom the nursing profession in America has produced, the Society of Superintendents was formed. Intended to unite the heads of training-schools and all nurses in executive and teaching work in a common effort to improve the nursing profession, this Society has grown and fulfilled to a marked degree the objects for which it was formed.

Its definite aims have been to improve the training-schools by establishing universal requirements for admission, a more thorough and extensive curriculum, and a longer period of training, shorter hours of duty, and better quarters and conditions for pupils generally, and to enlarge and emphasise the woman's share in making hospitals what they should be. Much has been accomplished in all of these directions, and it has been the privilege of this society to give the first impetus in the following special directions,—the organising of a national association of graduate nurses, the establishment of a nursing periodical, the providing and maintaining a course in hospital economics at Teachers College, Columbia University, to train women for teachers of nursing. Originally numbering thirteen members, the society has now grown to about 130. The other branch of our federation is the Trained Nurses' Associated Alumnae, which came into existence in 1896. As before

stated, this was the direct work of the Superintendents' Society, which wished to develop in their graduates a sense of the grave responsibilities of their profession and the necessity of organisation in order to meet some of its pressing problems. This association has a membership of about 3,300 women, and consists of local groups of alumnae societies affiliated together. These local groups were originally formed and are still growing on very much the same basis—that of fellowship, the advancement of professional interests, the establishment of clubs, homes, and registries, and the special object of providing aid in illness or time of trouble. From these aims have grown the wider ones of education and a desire to give of their ability to society in general.

At the International Congress held in London in 1899 the idea of an International Council of Nurses was suggested by Mrs. Fenwick in the Matrons' Council of Great Britain, and was encouraged by Mrs. May Wright Sewall, who met English nurses in these gatherings, and who, at a meeting of a nursing section at which she presided, spoke informally to American nurses present on the subject of joining the National Council of Women of America, and through this being enabled to form international relationships. The following year in correspondence with Mrs. Sewall on this subject, the development of organisation among nurses was described to her, and her advice was that our existing organisations be federated, allowing us to enter the National Council of Women as a National Council of Nurses. This was readily accomplished by the voice of the two societies, and last year our federation was completed and we were admitted into membership with your organisation, and are now presenting ourselves for the first time to take our part in your triennial.

Our extreme youth gives us little to report of work, which, so far, has been almost entirely confined to building up our structure of organisation. We have for a year and a half published a magazine which we own as well as edit, called the *American Journal of Nursing*. It stands high as a purely professional journal, and represents the best things in nursing. We believe it will be a strong and valuable influence in the development of our work. The course of instruction at Teachers College for those desiring to fit themselves for administrative and teaching positions in hospitals is one of the best things we have undertaken, but it is growing but slowly owing to our inability to aid in providing endowments to carry it on. All our efforts towards the improvement of educational standards for nurses are hampered by the lack of any general realisation of the fact that nursing education, like any other kind of education that is worth having, is costly and cannot be properly carried on without teachers, books, and appliances, as well as hospital wards. This is one of our urgent problems. Of other work

* Report read at the Meeting of the National Council of Women Washington, 1902.

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