

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD
EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

No. 792.

SATURDAY, JUNE 6, 1903.

Vol. XXX.

Editorial.

WHAT WE HAVE SAID, WE HAVE SAID.

"Both individual acts of self-defence on the part of the wage-earner, and individual acts of benevolence on the part of the employer, are most useful, as they establish standards to which the average worker and employer may in time be legally compelled to conform. Progress must always come through the individual who varies from the type and has sufficient energy to express this variation. He first holds a higher conception than that held by the mass of his fellows of what is righteous under given conditions, and expresses this conviction in conduct in many instances formulating a certain scruple which the others share but have not yet defined even to themselves."—JANE ADDAMS.

At the recent Conference on "Registration as it affects the Community" the point of view of different sections of the community was dealt with by various speakers, that which was allotted to ourselves being "Registration as it affects the Graduate Nurse," and we remarked in this connection that nurses were admittedly an unselfish community of women, but the instinct of self-preservation was a strong one, and they must look after number one.

This remark appears to have given offence to the lay editor of a contemporary. We are not surprised, for we find, that the professional and unprofessional point of view of nursing questions is often at variance. But we gave this advice deliberately, and we repeat it. Not from any sordid or unworthy motives, but because we believe, as may be abundantly proved from the history of all professions and trades, that the individual members of any community, who accept unjust conditions of labour, of education, of professional status, accept conditions which are injurious not only to themselves, but which injure the whole profession of which they are members. They are bound to protect their own interests, because not to do so would be to impose unjust conditions upon their colleagues.

Thus, if no nurses had ever consented to accept the pittance offered them in return for

their skilled labour by would-be philanthropists, who desire to effect their philanthropy by sweating the labour of the worker, we should not have the degrading spectacle in our midst of women working for 15s. a week as district nurses in rural districts. The best that is in a nurse cannot be paid for in cash, but, unless she receives a fair remuneration for a fair day's work, it is impossible for her to give out her best. As a skilled worker she is entitled to adequate remuneration for her labour, and we have the highest authority for holding that the labourer is worthy of his hire. Again, if nurses had refused to accept inadequate education, a very different standard would be in force at the present day, and in regard to professional status we have only to point to the lack of the appreciation of individual responsibility on the part of the majority of members of the Royal British Nurses' Association when the control of that Association was captured by a few officials, to realise that if nurses forego their individual rights they imperil not only their own liberties, but those which they hold in trust for their colleagues of future generations, and which they have no right to surrender.

In this sense, then, nurses must look after number one, and by so doing they will best safeguard not only their own interests, but those of the community at large. For the *raison d'être* of our demand for just conditions in relation to our profession is that we may qualify ourselves in the most thorough manner for our responsible work of the service of the sick. Stripped of all twaddling sentimentality, our demand is briefly for efficient education and fair remuneration, so that, free from harassing conditions, we may devote the best that is in us to our work. As President of the International Council of Nurses, we have no hesitation in asserting that the best work can only be accomplished by self-respecting nurses, that is, by those who have had the courage to insist on righteous conditions as the basis of government and organisation in their profession.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)