

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

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

No. 1,022.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 1907.

Vol. XXXI X

Editorial.

THE USEFULNESS AND HONOUR OF THE NURSING PROFESSION.

One of the questions with which nurses are confronted at the present time is the need of a Defence Union. From time to time questions affecting not only individual nurses, but their general welfare suddenly arise, which must be dealt with immediately. At present no organisation exists for the purpose of dealing with such matters, and although the Matrons' Council of Great Britain and Ireland has, with admirable promptitude stepped into the breach, it is certain that not only the members of that public spirited Council, but all Matrons and nurses throughout the country should be united in a society, the special office of which is to protect the usefulness and honour of the Nursing Profession as a whole, as well as to defend individual members in case of need.

If precedent for the formation of such a Union is required we have only to point to the Medical Profession which has initiated and supports two strong societies—the Medical Defence Union, and the London and Counties Medical Protection Society which hold briefs to safe-guard medical interests, and they do this so excellently that a letter from one of these societies often serves to effect the settlement of a question which might otherwise be fought out in a court of law. Defence is not defiance. In relation to national defence, for instance, we know that the surest guarantee of peace is the maintenance of an effective standing army, and the same rule holds good in relation to sections of the community. The fact that strong societies exist for the purpose of safeguarding their interests is the best guarantee that those interests will not be assailed.

Midwives have realised this, and have recently formed a Midwives' Defence

Association, and the lessons which nurses have received in the past should certainly teach them the necessity of uniting to safe-guard their individual and collective interests and the honour of their chosen profession, not only for their own benefit, but also for the protection of the sick whom they serve. Had a Nurses' Defence Union existed when the Hon. Officers of the Royal British Nurses' Association threatened one of its members with removal from the Register because she had exercised her right to communicate with other members of the Association through the professional Press, it is probable that that historic letter would never have been penned, and it is certain that had the nurse belonged to such a Union it would have fought the case in the Law Courts, a course which she was forced to take individually.

Instances of cases in which the interests of the whole nursing profession were involved are fresh in the minds of all readers of this journal. There was the proposal of the Local Government Board to recognise as "qualified nurses" women who had received a year's training in poor law infirmaries—a course which would have lowered the standard of nursing, not only in poor law institutions, but throughout the nursing profession, had it been carried into effect. There was the secretly organised scheme sprung upon the nursing profession by a few employers of nurses, with the object of capturing its control, a few city magnates being put forward as the backers of the scheme which had to be opposed before the Board of Trade; and there is now the proposal of the Metropolitan Asylums Board, to lower the status of the Matrons in the hospitals and asylums under its direction, and inevitably the status of the whole of the nursing staff. All these instances prove that organisation is needed if the primal instinct of self-preservation is to be exerted.

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