

the years of its early beginnings and the period of its strenuous adolescence, it has been as inarticulate as youth itself.

But now the time for silence is over. It may be that nursing is still in an adolescent phase, but it has a platform and a programme, and in order to develop that programme effectively, in order to be of greatest service to the patient, nursing must have the understanding and co-operation of its composite possible patient, the public.

Nurses are inherently a silent folk. Innumerable women have found in nursing an answer to their desire for a *place in the sun* where they might do a helpful work with a self-effacement amounting to anonymity.

To this oft-times inherent reticence, moreover, have been added the inhibitions developed in training. Since nursing first took form under Florence Nightingale, there have been inculcated in the nurse from her earliest student days those qualities which tend to create professional reticence. She has been taught to refrain from discussion of individual cases. Her relations with doctors and supervisors are formalised, and the nurse is taught, or encouraged in, quietness of mien, modesty, and a dignified reserve.

Moreover, except in the case of the small group of leaders, nurses, especially during the early years of the profession, have been markedly individualistic in their attitude toward their work. They have been called to cases and they have left cases and have gone on more cases, with a complete disregard for, or unawareness of, the relation of that work to nursing as a whole. The public, except through the cases by means of which these nurses subsisted, did not exist.

When a natural tendency toward reticence is encouraged by professional dicta, it is understandable that the result would be the present one. Nurses have failed to recognise the desirability of talking of their work because both inherently and by training they have been averse to anything even slightly resembling publicity. Therefore, they instinctively have sought for reasons against this contact with the public, and the best of reasons has been at hand ready for use. Nurses have been too busy to assume the added burden of telling their story. . . .

The attitude of the public toward nursing always has been one of respect and esteem. From the time when nursing was a function of the religious orders

only, to the days of Florence Nightingale and so to our own time, nursing has held a place of high honour in the popular mind. Either the public has symbolised nursing, however, or it has formed its judgment upon those isolated cases with which it has come in contact. The public has rated nursing by the achievements of the individual nurse.

To the public, nursing has meant devotion to duty, bravery, gentleness. The uniformed figure holding a soothing draught to fevered lips is a familiar picture.

Said, in effect, a speaker the other day at a state meeting of nurses:

"The nursing and the teaching professions represent together a larger body of women than the total number of members of men's professions. We know about teachers, their objectives, their problems. But we know nothing of you nurses. Isn't it time to tell us about yourselves?"

It is a challenge to which the answer is: "Yes, the time has come to speak. We nurses were rightly silent in years gone by. There were other needs more imperative than public information. But now we are growing up and we are ready to come before you with our story."

It is more than right that it should be so. Nursing exists primarily for the public. It is the patient of whom the individual nurse is thinking as she does her work. It is the public need and the professional responsibility to answer that need which has brought nursing to its present professional development.

The public has the right to know about nursing of which it is the potential purchaser, and nursing is recognising more and more that it is impossible for a great profession of healing to live into itself. There is a time to keep silence and a time to speak. Nursing

has put behind its period of reticence when it was growing gradually from a respectable occupation for women to a highly scientific vocation with increasing professional status. Now it is ready to tell its story to the world. What is that story to be?

The Illinois State Nurses' Association is preparing to write a history of nursing in Illinois. All Illinois nurses, wherever they are, are asked to send all material they can. This may include publications, reports, pictures, anecdotes by word of mouth, personal experiences. The source of information should be given. Material should be sent to Mrs. Van Frank, Room 1504, 116 South Michigan Avenue.



H.R.H. THE PRINCESS ELIZABETH OF YORK.
The Little Princess Greeting a Disabled Soldier.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)