

## The Nursing Conference.

### A PRACTICAL STANDARD OF NURSING.

By MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK.



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LADIES—I have given my Paper the title of "A Practical Standard of Nursing," because, if we are ever to attain to a useful professional standard, either in ethics, education, or practice, we must aim at a practical standard; and, in the forcible vernacular of the States, we must not "chump off more than we can chew."

When I was a small child, I remember seeing an old woman seated smoking on a mile-stone. Every now and again she shaded her eyes with her hand, and looked intently along a straight road. I enquired for what she was watching.

"I'm awaiting Time," she replied. "I passed him on this 'ere road upwards of twenty year ago, and he ain't yet in sight. 'Tis strange, sometimes I think he'll never come. It ain't good to be afore Time." This old woman was considered mad. She was a philosopher.

Now there are many women, to-day, keenly alive to the misery of being "afore time;" and the more eager amongst us, who have forged ahead along the road of Progress, are apt to feel somewhat disconsolate, seated on Life's mile-stone waiting for Time. And we scorn the platitudes of the inert, in which there is a grain of truth, when they remark: "A good time is coming" or "all in good time," "the time is not yet come" or "another time," and "sometime," and worst of all, "anytime." My motto is, "there is no time like the present," and in this I hope you will all agree.

One fact is clear. The majority of nurses, who think, are most satisfactorily dissatisfied with their professional affairs—but, as yet, how many are there amongst us who can focus the reason of this discontent? I venture to reply very few. Now this is a dangerous condition of mind, because the human being who does not know his own mind is sport for fools, and food for knaves. Let us, therefore, take a clean sheet and write down in plain figures the sum total of our desires under the two headings: What is wanted, and How to get it.

What is wanted, I venture to suggest:—

- (1) A Minimum Standard of Professional Education.
- (2) An Impartial Examination.

- (3) A Registrable Diploma of Nursing.
- (4) State Registration.

How to get it:—

- (1) By Organisation and Co-operation.
- (2) By forming for this purpose a National Association of Graduate Nurses upon a basis of just representation.
- (3) The adoption by the National Association of a Practical Standard of Nursing Education, Examination, Certification, and Registraton.
- (4) By educating the Public, and through them, Parliament in the justice of the Nurses' Cause.

All of which means, when summed up in one word—Work. It will be well, then, to look matters in the face, and sum up our experience in the past; how we are situated to-day; and our hopes for the future.

It was in the year 1887, that I first proposed to form an Association of British Nurses, "for mutual help and protection, and for the advancement, in every way, of their professional work" Many here present to-day were pioneers in that movement, and know with what singleness of purpose and high aims, the British Nurses' Association was formed—and how arduous were the labours of those who worked for this Association until the granting of the Royal Charter in 1893? My reference to the following five years, which brings us up to date, shall be brief, because with the revision of the Bye-laws, an official and medical dictatorship has been inaugurated, and for all practical purposes the Corporation ceases to be an Association of Nurses with either power of expression or performance. The policy of the Association is inspired and guided by one consistent principle—and that is the denial to trained nurses of their right of free co-operation for "mutual help and protection and professional advancement." In proof of this assertion, I will give instances.

In 1894, the President signed, on behalf of the Executive Committee, a statement which recorded that "It is the hope of the Corporation that the time is not far distant when the State will see the importance of recognising a definite diploma of nursing, and of giving its official sanction to the maintenance of the Register of Trained Nurses." In 1897, Mr. Fardon, the hon. Sec. and the Nurse delegate of the Executive Committee, voted at an important public Conference with the British Medical Association in support of the following resolution:—"That a legal system of registration of nurses is inexpedient in principle, and injurious to the best interests of nurses, and of doubtful public benefit." So that the Royal British Nurses Association has been used to oppose the principle of State Registration of Nurses, which it was formed to attain.

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