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Editorial.

LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE.

The progress of nursing organisation has been marked by various epochs. Thirty years ago it was still a strange and unacceptable idea to many parents that their daughters should wish to leave home at all to take part in the great work of the world. Leave to do so was gained with considerable difficulty; having obtained it, a woman was apt to think when she found herself in a hospital that she had obtained the *summum bonum* of her desires. She found work, plenty of it—very different from the organised routine of the present day—ready to hand; and heart, hand, and brain alike finding satisfying occupation, she settled down to her task, asking little of anyone, content to work over hours for under pay, if in so doing she could forward the cause she had so closely at heart—the better care of the sick. That is an attitude of mind which the average man can appreciate. Woman was in her normal position, sacrificing herself for others and wanting nothing for herself, and she was readily accorded the position both in fiction and in public estimation of three-parts angel.

But the years went by; the work of educated and conscientious women did wonders for the hospitals; and the wards, instead of being used by the poor as a last resort, became places of sweetness and light, to which they turned readily in time of need.

The women who had worked the transformation had time to look around them, and, being clear-eyed and level-headed, they saw that self-sacrifice was not the whole duty of woman. That if she worked for unjustifiably long hours, not only she herself but others suffered. If she accepted under pay for her work, she compelled others to take starvation salaries, and so there came to her an appreciation of her larger duty; in short, not only philanthropic but civic claims pressed upon her.

And with her realisation of these claims she felt the desire to consult with others of the same craft having the same difficulties and the same aspirations as herself. Why should not nurses, as other professional workers, have associations in which they could take counsel together? The idea was novel; it savoured too much of that obnoxious person the "new woman" to be wholly acceptable to the powers that be; still, though they might dissuade, they could scarcely forbid, and soon we had in our midst a flourishing Association of Nurses.

This Association, recognising the intimate connection between the profession of medicine and the affiliated nursing service, invited medical practitioners to a share of its membership, but, though inspired by the best and most generous motives, it soon became apparent that the step was not a wise one. Nurses, to whom co-operation was a new and strange thing, who were only feeling after organisation, who had everything to learn about business methods, about the responsibility which devolves upon them with the possession of a vote, and who had to find even their tongues—for they had never had experience of speaking in public—had invited into their midst members of the best-organised profession and strongest trades union in the world; a profession, moreover, which, while, as a whole, appreciating the work and worth of nurses, holds almost to a man that a nurse's sole duty is obedience. On the other hand, while accepting readily this position in regard to the treatment of the sick, outside the sick-room nurses claim the common human right to liberty of action and conscience. This is the position of the nurse at the present day, and the point really at issue between her and those, whether medical or lay men, who wish to control her actions is whether she shall be allowed these primary rights of every human being. It is a strange fact that the demand to exercise rights which men readily accord to men arouses the liveliest antagonism when made by women. Thus it not un-

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