

MISS NIGHTINGALE AND REGISTRATION.

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Many and fascinating are the by-paths to the personality of Miss Nightingale now open to us in her "Life,"* and, of these, one of great interest to nurses, in the light of present-day conditions, is her attitude toward State Registration.

Before this book appeared, some of us had supposed that Miss Nightingale's part in the battle over the proposals of the R.B.N.A. in the eighties had been, because of her age and retirement, but a passive one, but the graphic pages of the "Life" show that this was an entire error. We see her there, the leading spirit in combating the demand for self-association and legal status, and learn that she entered into this, the last active struggle of her life, with all her old energy and fire unabated. It was she who provided the equipment and armour for the men who stood forth as her champions; it was she who furnished the ideas, the arguments, that they have automatically repeated until to-day, and in a form far more epigrammatic, far more incisive, than any of the modern "antis" have been able to attain.

What a great pity it seems that this, Miss Nightingale's last fight, should have been waged for a losing cause! But not surprising. How seldom does history show us a revolutionary of one generation who understands and sympathises with the revolutionaries of the next! Yet each generation must have its revolution and its leaders, or progress comes to an end.

The pages of the "Life" dealing with that historic struggle of 1887-1893 (and still on)—a struggle unique in nursing history, as showing a few democratic women pitting themselves against the autocratic and well-nigh supreme rule of the great London hospitals,—are weak and faulty in construction, as would naturally be expected. The author is here on unfamiliar ground. He is a layman, and unacquainted with the theme he is treating. Besides, the English movement for registration is not yet complete, and he is deprived of the help of recorded final events. That his uncertainty here is not the result of bias may be concluded from the generally free and open style in which the book is written, a style the most removed

from mere adulation, and full of critical comment. However, defective as his background and setting of the early registration movement are, Miss Nightingale's own position is amply and well set forth, and illustrated by many of her own words.

In these, her words, we find the clue to Miss Nightingale's strong opposition to State regulation of nursing education, an opposition that seems in such flat contradiction to her whole lifelong insistence on thorough training, an opposition which later events have proved to be so utterly mistaken. Miss Nightingale began by assuming the practical infallibility of the hospital with its training school. Now, considering her immense acquaintance with hospitals, this was a strangely optimistic view to take, and that she could hold it proves to us how much trained nursing was in its infancy at that time. But, holding it, all the further contentions of the opposition were perfectly logical.

But there was something else that was in its infancy in Miss Nightingale's day, and that was democracy. Great iconoclast, great revolutionist, as Miss Nightingale was, herself free from caste prejudices, meeting and treating all persons alike, she did not,—could not,—hold the democratic principles of a younger generation. It was because the younger women who led the registration movement had imbibed this modern spirit that they were able to foresee what Miss Nightingale could not see—namely, the advance of women in co-operative, self-sustaining association, united by the principle of solidarity, and attaining better and higher results than could ever be gained under the old system of a ruling oligarchy. They understood, as she did not at all, the modern economic problem and its relation to education and training. Already they had felt the need of applying some force to the hospitals which would secure an accepted and legalised minimum of teaching and of practical training. Miss Nightingale thought hospitals could not be registered. She asks, "How can you certify the hospital?" We know now that they can and must be registered and inspected. She thought a central nursing board would be an amateur body. "Who shall guarantee the guarantors?" But time has proved that the presence of professional workers on a central board is the best preventive of professional backsliding and decay.

A perfect embodiment of the newer outlook was found in one of St. Thomas's most distinguished pupils, Miss Isla Stewart, who for years was known around the world as one of the ablest and most progressive of Matrons.

* "The Life of Florence Nightingale," by Sir Edward T. Cook.

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