

To what other profession has it been granted within so short a space to realize itself and its work, to seek upon the lines of broadest and most enlightened policy a sure foundation of international professional comradeship. The butterflies of the aristocracy, the gold bugs of the plutocracy, have had their day in the government of our profession. Once again from the grim muddles of war the nursing profession in all countries will lift its head and flourish. Never again will the control of the amateur be suffered to hamper the work of healing and of succour to those poor fellows, under whatever flag they may agonize, who follow their country's call.

If there be any lesson that the nations of the earth have learnt already, though may be not yet in its entirety, from the European holocaust, it is the value of that trained skill, of that cheerful endurance, of that understanding science and of that perfect fearlessness, which characterise our profession, not only in the enthusiasm of military operations and the excitement of war, but in the far more heroic spirit which maintains its life-work under-paid and over-driven at so high a level in the years of Peace. I speak not of one country, but of all.

For our nurses themselves the war has had a different lesson to teach—the lesson that democratic self-government in its present form is the prime necessity of our profession. It may be safely said that had any other profession, any other body of working men or women been treated during the last three years, whilst working at high pressure, and with utter self-devotion in the Nation's service, as trained nurses have been treated, its members would have "downed tools" and come out on strike until such time as their legitimate grievances should have been adjusted, a fair living wage secured, and the invasion of blacklegs discontinued. What an awful strike for right, with what terrible results! It is solely to the patriotism and the love of humanity of our nurses that we owe it that such a catastrophe has not occurred. Love, my comrades, the most democratic of all forms of government has held us bound in the cause of the wounded, the dying, the helpless. Said I not truly that the nursing profession is a democracy? For love of our brothers in their agony we have patiently borne the burden and heat of the day, the insulting terms of service, the insolence alike of amateurs, of official ignorami, the underpayment of our responsible work, the introduction of the blackleg.

It has remained for the British Women's Hospital Fund (hisses) and the College of Nursing, Ltd., by a combined effort of the Stage and the Aristocracy, to hold up the nursing profession to the world as an object of charity. Hold out your hands, comrades, and ask for their alms; take your bags on your shoulders and beg the broken victuals of the rich, if, perchance, they may spare to you in charity some pence out of the sum which is yours by every law of right and jus-

tice. Accept it with the thankfulness due to the deep condescension of your patrons, the actresses and the aristocrats. Be very humble, very respectful, as becomes the democracy at all times; the recipient of promiscuous charity must needs bow the head and humble the spirit. It is her part, the part assigned to the democracy.

Do they really think it? Ah, the poor ignorant souls! Do they indeed imagine, in the depths of their narrow enclosures that we of the democracy will play that part upon their little stage? Comrades, our stage is no play-acting one, for our theatre is the world, where truth is real, and passion is real, and joy and sorrow are utterly real, and where the curtain will only ring down on the last act of all, the separation of the immortal spirit from the mortal body, which has served—well served it may be—its turn.

Yes, they thought to impose that last of insults upon us, to give us from above a little of the gold dust of charity. To us to whom in sickness they are but as lost children crying in the wilderness, in their ignorance and pain—to us! Why the very foundation of democracy is self-respect, and its corner stone that respect which each owes to his fellow-man. Charity to the profession of nursing? No. But justice we will have, fair play for good work done, a limitation of working hours, such as every working woman is entitled to, a recognition of our profession and of our professional status, the acknowledgment of the services rendered to humanity by us. Bare justice these, but we mean to have them. For sixty years the motto of our profession has been "onward." It is "onward" still, and ever will be. There is no future for a stationary democracy, but subservience.

Comrades, that onward march demands from each one of us our very best; and in order that we may not fall out of the ranks, that we may use our powers to their utmost, that we may do the fine work of which we are capable, that we may learn from each other, that we may guard the honour of our most honourable profession, that we may triumph over opposition, and finally secure for our nurses the status and recognition to which they are entitled, there are—amongst many others necessary—two matters which stand out from the rest, by reason of their deep importance. The one is COMRADESHIP, the other ORGANISATION. Look at it how you will democracy means comradeship.

No victory can be gained, and no ground maintained by disorganised forces, no matter how loyal, how daing. That is the lesson taught us by hundreds of lost causes, by hundreds of forlorn hopes gallantly led and nobly fought. If we have not learnt that much from history, and from our own observation, then life has indeed taught us little. Organisation, down to the smallest detail, is the keynote of success. Glance back for a moment over the sixty years of our professional life. Disorganisation everywhere, each hospital and infirmary following its own methods of making nurses. . . .

Individuals and individualists we must learn the

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)