

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD
EDITED BY MRS BEDFORD FENWICK

No. 1,682.

SATURDAY, JUNE 26, 1920.

Vol. LXIV

EDITORIAL.

THE VICTORIA CROSS— “FOR CONSPICUOUS ACTS OF BRAVERY.”

The little bronze cross, of no great intrinsic value, bearing the words “For Valour”—instituted by Queen Victoria on January 29th, 1856 as the decoration of the Victoria Cross—is probably more coveted than any other; for it indicates that the wearer showed conspicuous bravery, initiative and resourcefulness—“where valiant men were all”—under circumstances of extreme peril. So far it has only been awarded to men, but the recent war has proved beyond question that women are capable, not only of enduring danger unflinchingly and heroically, but of voluntarily assuming responsibilities which involve exposure to, and disregard of, great dangers, from motives of patriotism, or in order to save life.

Prior to the South African war, the Royal Red Cross was regarded as the Nurses' Victoria Cross. It, also, was instituted by Queen Victoria, on St. George's Day, 1883, “For zeal and devotion in providing for, and nursing, sick and wounded sailors, soldiers, and others with the Army in the field, on board ship, or in hospitals.” It was only rarely awarded, and conferred real and well-merited distinction on its possessor. The South African war to some extent, and the Great War still more, cheapened the value of this decoration, both by the institution of a second grade, and also because its possession does not, at present, necessarily imply initiative, resourcefulness, or special bravery. Probationers, and V.A.D.s who had served a few months in a military or civilian hospital where wounded sailors and soldiers were received, were eligible for, and in many instances received, this decoration, as well as many Matrons, Sisters and Nurses who, while doing admirable and valuable work for the sick

and wounded, performed it under quite ordinary conditions.

His Majesty the King has now interpreted the feeling of the Nation by establishing new rules to govern the conferring of the Victoria Cross, and, in an Order published in the *London Gazette* of June 18th, it is ordained that amongst those eligible to receive this coveted decoration are:—“Matrons, Sisters, Nurses, and the Staff of the Nursing Services and other Services pertaining to hospitals and nursing, and civilians of either sex serving regularly, or temporarily, under the orders, direction, or supervision of any of His Majesty's forces.”

The decoration has previously been awarded “for conspicuous acts of bravery”; now it may also be gained by “some daring or pre-eminent act of valour or self-sacrifice, or extreme devotion to duty, in the presence of the enemy.”

When a deed of valour is performed by a body of sailors, soldiers or airmen, it will be open to them to select one or more of their number, by secret ballot, for the V.C. If the same regulation were enforced in regard to the award of the V.C. to members of the Nursing Profession under similar conditions, it would afford the best guarantee of a right selection under difficult circumstances. To be selected by one's peers, under such conditions would be an honour to be worn modestly, but proudly, by a nurse all her life long.

In the name of the Profession of Nursing we beg to offer to His Majesty the King its loyal and dutiful thanks for the great honour he has conferred upon it in making its members eligible for the Victoria Cross, and in the recognition of the value of their work that such an honour implies. It should stimulate every member of the Profession to walk worthy of the vocation wherewith she is called.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)