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## EDITORIAL.

### A BRAVE POLICY OF REFORM.

It is long since we have been so enthralled with book or paper as we have been in studying the Centenary number of the *Lancet* of October 6th. Its founder, Thomas Wakley, has always been one of our heroes, and, in the thirty years' struggle for the organisation of the Nursing Profession, if ever we were tempted to be depressed, we had only to call to mind the career of this great medical reformer to take heart of grace. To tackle with success a hundred years ago two such problems as medical and hospital reform demanded great courage and determination. These the founder of the *Lancet* possessed in the highest degree, and they were needed in the fight with prejudice, privilege, and nepotism before the first Medical Act was placed on the Statute Book.

We learn from our contemporary that its founder, the youngest of eight sons of a Devonshire farmer, was only 28 years of age when the first number of the Journal appeared. "The idea of producing a weekly paper was the outcome of a short but exciting personal experience as a medical practitioner and a chance acquaintance with William Cobbett. . . . To him Wakley confided his views upon the anxious position occupied by the rank and file of the medical profession at that date, and from him received the natural advice that he should get the arguments for reform in front of the reading public at the earliest opportunity."

The history of the development of the campaign for the Registration of Medical Practitioners and that for the Registration of Trained Nurses is strikingly similar. Thus when Thomas Wakley entered upon his medical training he found that although the student might play his part in the educational scheme laid down, the authorities at the hos-

pitals were not prepared to play their part. The eminent people who received the fees delegated their duties to their demonstrators, presence at post-mortem examinations was only secured by the clandestine feeing of porters in post-mortem rooms, and "the student could be relegated to a position in his profession which was marked out from the beginning to be, and to remain, inferior, not in the least through want of personal merit, but entirely because he had not paid a fee to apprentice himself to a great man. . . . Command of money at the beginning of a student's career might ensure success, while lack of money was condemnation to an inferior position."

Nurses know well that while they contracted to serve a hospital for three years in order to be trained for a nursing career, they had no guarantee of adequate training, and might find themselves ill-equipped at its termination. They, too, could be relegated to a position in their profession which was marked out from the beginning to be, and to remain, inferior. The system of promotion by payment was for many years in force in many hospitals, the cream of the work and a shortened training being given to paying probationers who were speedily promoted to the position of Sister and Matron, while the non-paying probationer, however highly educated, could never rise above the position of staff nurse, and might have to work under, and take professional instructions from, the woman to whom a few months before she had helped to give an intensive course of nursing.

The establishment of the *Lancet* as the organ of medical reform, in the interests of general practitioners; the withdrawal of the veil from practices conducted behind closed doors; the uneasiness at the growing power of this organ in the press; the hospital surgeons and physicians ranged in unbroken phalanx in opposition to the new and, as they considered it, mischievous print; the legal actions which ensued—all have their counterpart in the his-

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