

Royal British Nurses' Association.

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ORGANISATION.

We recently heard the statement made, "but of course the nurses are perfectly unorganisable." To a large extent the criticism is true. It came from one who had the utmost faith in the efficacy of organisation to ensure the progress and well-being of any given profession or trade. He would always claim that in ratio to the extent to which it could organise itself and maintain self-government would the success of its individual members depend. That organisation is uphill work at all times is to be admitted, but it is quite true that certain groups of workers show a much greater facility in achieving it than do others. This is due, doubtless, to many factors—the general type of mentality in those who compose any given profession or trade, the extent to which their conditions of work tend to draw them together or to keep them disintegrated, the state of thought and feeling engendered by their conditions of work, the number of hours out of the twenty-four which that work demands of them, and the time left at their disposal to give independent consideration to the needs of their profession, their breadth of vision and the extent to which they recognise a personal responsibility, an individual responsibility to one another. Without organisation, without the cohesion and strength that it brings, progress, education, economic stability and the harmony and balance which it can develop in relation to the conditions of sister professions equally organised, must inevitably be conspicuous only by their absence. Disintegration means retrogression and weakness. Unity means strength and power to march to greater achievement, power to transmute vague and abstract ideals into living realities. One might as well expect the human body to function as it should if the eyes, ears, limbs or digestive organs were separated from it, trying to work apart from it, as expect a profession to be a healthily working organism in the body politic while each member thinks only of her own individual concerns. And such disintegration is more disastrous in its results at the present time than at any other period in history, because it is entirely at variance with the spirit of the age. Essentially this is the age of the development of the ego, the "I," but along with this growing power to individualise there must run the consciousness that it must be used for the uplifting of the community, and not for the development of mere selfishness.

WHERE THERE IS NO VISION THE PEOPLE PERISH.

Now, for the last thirty years and more there have been those who have strained every nerve, made every sacrifice to achieve the organisation of the nursing profession. They had done much, and sowed the seed for much more, when they saw their life's work accomplished and Acts for the State Registration of Nurses upon the Statute Book. But, like old men of the sea, they have always, throughout the long struggle, had to bear the incubus of a majority who preferred to regard their profession as a sort of Cinderella whose fairy godmother would come some time, who preferred to shut their eyes to the fact that, without organisation, with-

out effort towards it, nothing could be accomplished and—"where there is no vision the people perish."

In spite of the protection which, more and more as the years advance, will be available for their profession, through the functioning of the Acts, it is true that until the nurses really see their responsibility to one another, see what co-ordinated effort *on the part of all* can do, the outlook is not one likely to be too rosy for the present generation. It matters little if head and hands and feet grow weary in well doing; it matters little if all the platitudes ever written in connection with the nursing profession be republished again; and it matters little if all the sentiment and patronage showered upon the profession since the days of Florence Nightingale be increased an hundredfold, if the members of the nursing profession cannot have the vision to see that each one is a part of a great whole and that that whole must progress or atrophy according to the tendency of its various units to join forces with one another or to remain disintegrated.

OUR HERITAGE.

It is fitting that sometimes we should think of the heritage that others have left to us. The various organisations of nurses in the different countries to-day, with all their ramifications, represent the inspiration and labour of many of our colleagues, and there are some of them, not a few, whom death has withdrawn from our ranks. By their forethought they have planted well and truly the seed of a better organisation of their profession. It remains with a younger generation to reap what they have sown, but this can only be done in one way—by uniting together in their organisations. Only by this can such organisations of nurses be made effective. It lies with the nurses to make them strong; upon the numbers who join them the whole strength of the profession depends.

THE TANGIBLE EXPRESSION OF SOME SPIRITUAL CURRENT.

But apart from purely economic and protective considerations there must enter into professional organisation a certain amount of idealism. There are people who will argue that pure, practical common sense is enough, but the fire of idealism lit in a profession stands for much; the force of such a united idealism, with the high endeavour to attain, can work miracles. It was something of this sort that drew people into groups in long past ages from the days of King Arthur and his Knights and on through the centuries after. We find it in many great religious bodies in the Middle Ages, in the Freemasonry movement, in our own great City Guilds, and so on. This aspect struck us the other day when a nurse, little given to platitudes, remarked: "You simply cannot realise all that the Association has meant to me, what it has been to feel that that wonderful motto is part of me." More than this she said, and made one feel that she felt the Association's old motto to be the tangible expression of some spiritual current in her Association, something that held within it most wonderful powers. Perhaps the thought is not a new one. There were many

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