

NURSES OF NOTE.

MRS. REBECCA STRONG.

The story of small beginnings, which have developed into movements of world-wide importance, is always of supreme interest, and that of the professional work of Mrs. Rebecca Strong, formerly Matron of the Royal Infirmary, Glasgow, which has been so fruitful in good results, is one which should be recorded at greater length than the brief notice which we have now pleasure in presenting, of the *doyenne* of Nursing-School organisation at the present time.

In the hope that it may encourage some who commence their professional careers under disadvantages, Mrs. Strong has kindly given us some details of the reasons which led her to adopt nursing as a career.

Being left a widow at a very early age, and anxious to make her life of some use, after consultation with an intimate friend—Miss Firth, a prominent midwife—she concluded to try nursing.

A sidelight on the status of nursing in the 'sixties of the last century, is that it was the usual thing for women who wished to become nurses to enter hospitals as scrubbers, and work their way up.

By this time, however, Miss Nightingale had established the Nightingale Training School at St. Thomas' Hospital, where she had found Mrs. Wardroper as Matron with advanced ideas and quietly working towards reformation, and, in certain wards, ladies, who had been given the title of "Sister," were made directly responsible to the Physicians and Surgeons in charge of them.

From Mr. Baggally, the then Governor, from Mrs. Wardroper, and from one of the Sisters who had been amongst the first to take up the new work, Mrs. Strong learnt something of its intention, and decided to enter the Nightingale Training School at St. Thomas' Hospital.

In those days the Nightingale probationers signed an engagement for six years, but that did not mean remaining at St. Thomas' Hospital for that period. "At the end of one year," Mrs. Strong relates, "you were supposed to have picked up enough knowledge and wisdom to fit you for pioneer work in other hospitals, you went wherever you were sent. Theoretical instruction was almost *nil*, which was a great disadvantage, the more enterprising had recourse to medical books."

On completion of her six years' engagement Mrs. Strong applied for the Matronship of the Dundee Royal Infirmary, and was appointed. Here she was fortunate in finding a very able Superintendent, the late Dr. Sinclair, who shared her views as to the necessity for definite instruction of nurses,

and, together, they did the best they could, which Mrs. Strong says was "very meagre"; better accommodation was provided, and conditions of work were improved.

In 1879 she was appointed Matron of the Royal Infirmary, Glasgow, where she found two very able Assistants, Miss MacKie and Miss Wood, who helped her in every possible way to introduce some kind of class work for nurses, supported by a member of the medical and a member of the surgical staffs; "but it was weary work; sleepy, tired nurses trying to take an interest in what they knew would be useful to them, and we unable to give them leisure." Ultimately, Mrs. Strong got impatient at the slow progress, and resigned.

In 1891 she was re-appointed Matron, much to her joy, as she had arrived at what she believed to be a clear idea of what the basis of a nurse's education should consist. In January of that year, Sir William Macewen had given a most stirring address at the annual meeting of the Glasgow Royal Infirmary, pointing out how a preliminary course of instruction in elementary anatomy, physiology and hygiene might be given in St. Mungo's College, and a second course on Medical and Surgical Nursing with practical teaching on ward work might be arranged.

With the help of the Medical Staff a scheme was elaborated and put into operation in January, 1892. Thus, the first Preliminary Training School for Nurses in Great Britain was established and proved so popular that one advertisement enabled Mrs. Strong to form a class nor did it need to be repeated. "The relief," she says, "was immense, and we all began to enjoy our work, relieved of the incubus of mixing study with it."

The influence of Mrs. Strong on the development of nursing extends far beyond her work at the Royal Infirmary, and her



By courtesy of the Glasgow Royal Infirmary Nurses' League.

MRS. REBECCA STRONG,
Doyenne of Scottish Nurses.

wonderful vitality was demonstrated in her speech at the recent re-union of the Glasgow Royal Infirmary Nurses, when she counselled the members of the League to be true to the best that is in them.

A staunch supporter of the movement for State Registration of Nurses, Mrs. Strong did much to promote its attainment through the weary years of opposition, and, as President of the Scottish Nurses' Association, shew as a forceful, inspiring influence in the Nursing Profession.

The Nursing Profession, both now and in the future, should offer thanks for the self-denial, the energy, the altruism, and the devotion to the public interest which, under Mrs. Strong's leadership, made the training at the Royal Infirmary, Glasgow, second to none in the kingdom, and have made her name honoured, not only by the Nursing Profession in her own country but throughout the world.

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