

## NURSES OF NOTE.

## Miss Margaret G. Thomson

*Late President South African Trained Nurses' Association.*

Miss Margaret G. Thomson, who held the Office of President of the South African Trained Nurses' Association at the time of the International Congress of Nurses at Helsingfors, and contributed a Paper on "South Africa," began her nursing career at an early age in a Mental Hospital in the North of Scotland, where, she relates, the living conditions of the nurses were most primitive, and the art of nursing was practically unknown. The appointment of a Physician-Superintendent, accustomed to hospital administration, and of a trained Nurse as Matron, were changes which soon created a new order of things, under which she was able to train, and obtained the Certificate of the Medico - Psychological Association.

Being still too young to obtain admission to a general hospital, Miss Thomson next entered the Belvidere Fever Hospital, Glasgow, and studied all branches of infectious nursing, including smallpox and bubonic plague.

She received her general training at the Western Infirmary, Glasgow, where she had good surgical experience in the wards of Professor Sir William Macewen, of whose operating theatre she had charge for several years.

Her first appointment, after completing her training, was as Night Superintendent at Rainhill County Asylum near Liverpool, a post which she held for two years, when she returned to Scotland to study midwifery, and obtained the C.M.B. Certificate. While acting as Assistant Matron in Bangour Village Asylum Miss Thomson applied for, and was appointed to, the position of Matron of Valkenberg Mental Hospital, Observatory, Cape Town, South Africa, a position which she has held for the past seventeen years.

Since her arrival in South Africa Miss Thomson has taken a keen interest in all nursing affairs in the Union. She is one of the Foundation Members of the South African Trained Nurses' Association, and has held the office of Hon. President of the Western Province Branch as well as of the Association.

Of South Africa Miss Thomson writes that as a country it differs from all other countries in a material sense. The impossible always happens in Africa. There is something in its nature which makes it an exception to the rules of all other countries. There is a certain contrariness which is suggested in "the rivers without water, the flowers without scent, and the birds without song," which puts gold on the tops of mountain ranges, leaving the valleys a desolate waste, and which puts diamonds in the most unlikely, unheard of places that could possibly be imagined.

"In Darkest Africa" there is the glory of perpetual sunshine. To all new-comers it is the land of hope and

promise. No one who has lived in South Africa for any length of time can ever leave it without longings of regret for the days when he lived near the heart of things. It maintains its sway over those it has once attracted; no man can live under the spell of its sunny skies, amidst the splendour and glamour of its wide spaces, and not feel pride in the sheer joy of such intense living. Man has certainly made good. He has fought and mastered the powers of nature. He has tamed the wild animal. He has subdued the savage. The woman has done no less. She also has endured and conquered, and together they have built up a great empire in one of the outposts of civilisation.

South Africa was the first country to register its nurses (in 1891 under the Medical and Pharmacy Act), and, strange to say, it still refuses to give its women the franchise, another instance of its contrariness.

Up till 1914, Miss Thomson states, there was no nursing organisation in South Africa. For the most part, the nurses were devoted to their duties. In their ranks they had many noble women whose names will go down to posterity as great pioneers. The name of "Sister Henrietta," the great Kimberley Nursing Sister, will always be remembered by the great work she has done for the community. They lived lives of self-abnegation, and were content to labour on, doing long, long hours of duty for little recompense, and for little or no recognition. They had no self-interests, and were considered to be the most inarticulate body of workers to be found in any community.

The proposal to form an Association was met with much opposition and even derision from some quarters. Some said the idea was a good one, but the scheme was quite impossible because of the long distances and the scattered population, but there were others who visualised success and gave their utmost support, so that the project was carried through in spite of all opposition.

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at the instance of Dr. Tremble, and the foundation of the South African Trained Nurses' Association was to a great extent inspired by him.

The Association started its career in 1914. Among the promoters of the scheme honourable mention, says Miss Thomson, must be made in the records of Miss Child, and also of Miss Nutt, who acted as Matron-in-Chief of the Military Nursing Service in South Africa during the war, and was the first General President. Miss Alexander, the General Secretary, is also one of the builders. She has possibly added more bricks to the structure than any other member of the Association. Although the organisation is of recent growth it has a fine record of achievement to its credit. It has been a blessing to South African nurses, and it has proved itself to be a force in the nursing world.



MISS MARGARET G. THOMSON,  
Late President South African Trained Nurses' Association.

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