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EDITORIAL.

MATRONS IN COUNCIL.

The office of Matron has always been rightly held to be one of the most important and desirable in the nursing world, for as Superintendent of Nursing the Matron is firstly an educationist, secondly the standard of both practical and theoretical competence attained by probationers in training depends largely upon her efficiency, and thirdly her influence on the ethical standards of the nursing profession is far reaching, for it affects not only the nurses in the training school which she supervises, but as they pass out of it they hand on to others the ethical traditions of their own school.

When, in October, 1893, we assumed the hon. editorship of the *Nursing Record and Hospital World*, now THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING, realising the isolation of Matrons we organised a department of the JOURNAL in which they could discuss questions of professional importance under the heading of "Matrons in Council," which proved most successful.

In May, 1894, a question was discussed in this department: "Is the formation of a Matrons' Council desirable, and if so what should be its programme of work?" The result was very encouraging, and so it came to pass that the first organisation of Hospital Matrons in the British Empire was founded, the Constitution of which has commended itself to Associations of Matrons since formed.

Miss Isla Stewart, Matron and Superintendent of Nursing at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, was elected its Chairman, and later President, a position which she held and prized to the time of her death in 1910.

The objects of the Council, as at first defined, which were later expanded, were three:—(1) To enable Members to take counsel together upon matters affecting their profession; (2) To bring about a uniform system of education, examination, certification and State Registration for Nurses in British Hospitals; (3) To hold Conferences to discuss subjects of professional and also of general interest.

These objects now appear simple and legitimate but like other pioneer societies the Matrons' Council had to run the gauntlet not only of criticism, but of obstructive misrepresentation. The association of Matrons for any purposes whatever appeared to the lay nursing Press presumptuous and dangerous.

Also, it was the avowed intention of the Council to bring about a uniform system of State Registration for Nurses in British Hospitals, and at that time the Committees and Matrons of the large majority of the

principal hospitals in the British Isles were strongly opposed to what they regarded as "State interference" with their unlimited authority. For seven years the Matrons' Council alone kept the Registration flag flying with courage and pertinacity.

At the Annual Meeting of the Council in 1902, Mrs. Bedford Fenwick proposed that definite organisation for legislative purposes should be undertaken, and a society formed having State Registration of Nurses as its sole aim. The principle was accepted, and at a meeting of the Council held at Morley Hall, London, on May 30th, the Registration Sub-Committee presented a report of the work accomplished up to that time, and the Society for the State Registration of Trained Nurses was inaugurated.

The activities of the Council have been many, but undoubtedly the one most far reaching in its effects has been the foundation of the International Council of Nurses. It was at the Second Annual Conference of the Matrons' Council, held in London in 1899, that Mrs. Bedford Fenwick proposed "That steps be taken to organise an International Council of Nurses."

The hon. officers of the Matrons' Council together with its distinguished hon. members in various parts of the world, considered the best methods of organising an International Council of Nurses. The result all the world knows. Twenty-three National Associations of Nurses are now affiliated to the International Council of Nurses, besides which there are Associate National Representatives in nine other countries.

The services of the Matrons' Council, the manner in which it has averted dangers which threatened the Nursing Profession, and on numerous occasions has upheld its prestige are too numerous to mention, but for its work in promoting the State Registration of Nurses, and the development of the International Council of Nurses it must always be held in honour. It has been singularly fortunate in having had as Presidents such distinguished and altruistic women as Miss Isla Stewart, Miss Mildred Heather Bigg, R.R.C. and Miss Helen Pearse. To these must now be added Miss M. S. Cochrane, R.R.C., Matron of Charing Cross Hospital, who, as we report in another column, has accepted office as President. We wish her as effective and honourable a term of office as her predecessors.

There are now seven associations of Matrons in Great Britain, all federated in the National Council of Nurses, all doing useful work, but to none can it fall to experience the thrill of the members of the pioneer Council, as they climbed the hill of difficulty, or rejoiced in the accomplishment of their desires.

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