

A DECADE OF ORGANISED NURSING PROGRESS.

THE NATIONAL FEDERATION OF BELGIAN NURSES, 1922-1932.

In spite of efforts in Belgium, since 1907, to introduce the principles of Florence Nightingale into nursing, we can say that not until 1918 did this really take effect in our country. Nurses working in the hospitals, particularly those who had served at the front during the war, felt the imperative need to form a professional association which would yield moral support, occupy itself with their interests, and raise nursing to a position where it would be understood, recognised, and appreciated.

In 1918 a group of nurses met with the aim of creating interest in the founding of such an association. They wrote to America to get information, and Countess d'Ursel, who was studying at Teachers' College, New York, was advised there by Miss Nutting, who is always most helpful in the solution of nursing problems in the various countries. On February 11th, 1919, the first meeting was called at the headquarters of the Professional Women's Association, rue des Eperonniers, Brussels, and was attended by forty nurses from different public and private hospitals of Brussels and the provinces. A provisory committee was appointed and an organisation was founded with the title, The Nurses' Professional Association. On December 12th of the same year it was legally incorporated and its constitution published in the "Moniteur." On January 20th, 1920, at the first general meeting, the organisation began a study of working conditions for nurses; this included four items, i.e., moral conditions, one national official diploma, working hours, and salaries. At this time there were 170 members in the Association, and the founding of a National Federation was the main business of the meeting.

In the same year, at the instigation of the Association, the first Refresher Course was given for nurses, and, in co-operation with the Nurses' Club, an employment bureau was established for private duty nurses; this bureau has offices both at rue des Eperonniers and at the Nurses' Club, rue de la Source.

The Association got in touch with the outside groups, and great enthusiasm was shown by them in helping with the work of organising. Throughout the provinces new groups of nurses were founded; in April, 1920, there were, for instance, no less than 50 members in the "Union du Stuyvenberg," Antwerp.

February 23rd, 1922, the delegates from the different provincial organisations met in Brussels, and voted unanimously for the foundation of a National Federation of Nurses. The organisations from Brussels, Antwerp, Malines, Ghent and Tournai, as well as the Public Health Nurses' Association of Belgium, were admitted to membership in the Federation. The policy of this organisation is

self-government, i.e., an association whose voting membership and official positions are restricted to trained nurses.

The new Federation then took steps to affiliate with the International Council of Nurses. It was admitted at the meeting of the Council in Copenhagen, from May 22nd to 24th, 1922. Four delegates were sent to represent Belgium on this occasion: the Countess Louise d'Ursel, Mlle. Hellemans, Mlle. Ducarme, and Mlle. Schmitz. From this time forward the Federation represented the graduate nurses in this country and abroad. One of the first acts of the Federation in relation to foreign groups was to send financial aid to the Japanese nurses after the earthquake of September 1st, 1923.

In 1921 the office was moved from rue des Eperonniers to rue de Jonker, and in 1926, as the work was becoming more and more extensive, the Nurses' Club (Famille de l'Infirmière) offered the Federation an office in its building, 18 rue de la Source. From this date our secretary's office has been open three times a week regularly. The Federation took part in various projects in relation to nurses, and was represented by delegates at different meetings.

The impression received at Copenhagen by the Belgian delegates was one of influence; the International Council of Nurses is a power; our delegates were stimulated and encouraged to undertake the programme upon which the Federation had decided, namely, to establish nursing in Belgium on a solid and firm basis. The programme stands for the absolute necessity of professional education according to a minimum curriculum, officially enforced and controlled; professional dignity emphasising the social responsibility of the nurse; and continued development of nursing. It is concerned not only with the honour of the profession, but with the general well-being of the people. The more carefully nurses are educated, the more readily will they become intelligent co-workers with the doctors, and the more able will they be to meet the task which they have before them.

Being desirous of insuring the future of their members, several of the member organisations of the Federation have attempted experiments with insurance schemes. In 1924 the Federation took an active part in organising an insurance society which was called "Mutual Insurance for Nurses and Social Workers." Its constitution requires that the president be a graduate nurse member of

the Nurses' Federation. This society has now 1,750 members; it pays daily indemnity in case of illness, provides medical service and medicines, and supplies pensions in case of disability and old age. Through a measure passed on February 27th, 1925, nurses are admitted as employees into the pension fund and employment contract. The same year the Federation obtained from the Minister of the Interior the promise that it would be consulted in the case of proposed amendments to the Royal Decree of September 3rd, 1921, requiring a three year course of



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