

THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF NURSES.

THE VISION SPLENDID.

By Margaret Breay, S.R.N., F.B.C.N.

It is just thirty-four years since the foundations of the International Council of Nurses were well and truly laid, so well and so truly that they have borne with ease and success the great superstructure which has been imposed upon them.

To-day national Associations of Nurses in twenty-three countries, which thirty-four years ago were all but non-existent, are bound together in professional unity and international friendship in the International Council of Nurses, "the essential idea for which the Council stands being self-government of nurses in their associations with the aim of raising ever higher the standards of education and professional ethics, public usefulness and civic spirit of their members," and we can point with pride to the thousands and thousands of nurses around the world who through this Council—the first Association of professional women to be organised on international lines—are striving to translate this idea into practical action.

For the enlightenment of nurses of the younger generations who may be hoping to attend the Congress of the I.C.N. in Paris and Brussels next month, it may be well to recapitulate briefly the circumstances under which the Council was founded and some of the more important and impressive features of the Congresses organised under its authority.

The idea originated with Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, to whose vision, initiative, and genius for organisation the Nursing Profession owes so great a debt. Brought by her before the Annual Conference of the Matrons' Council of Great Britain and Ireland in London, in July 1899 (presided over by the late Miss Isla Stewart) and unanimously approved, an Executive Committee was at once formed, mainly of the Hon. Members of the Matrons' Council in various countries and through correspondence at once got to work. The Committee had the supreme good fortune to secure as its Hon. Secretary Miss Lavinia L. Dock, of the United States of America, and to her rare personality, unceasing work, literary ability, and unique gifts, the development of the Council is largely due. Several times she crossed the Atlantic in its interests and her stimulating friendliness

especially to nurses in those countries struggling for better conditions against autocratic power had to be experienced to be fully appreciated.

In 1901 organisation was so far advanced that, upon the suggestion of Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, and by cordial invitation of the Buffalo Nurses' Association, U.S.A., a business meeting of the Foundation Members of the I.C.N., and a Nursing Congress, was held during the great Exhibition in that city, its organisation being undertaken by Miss Dock, and Miss M. Agnes Snively, of Canada. It was an immense success, a Constitution for the I.C.N. was adopted. On a postal vote Mrs. Bedford Fenwick was elected President, Miss Dock Hon. Secretary, Miss Snively Hon. Treasurer, and plans were made to meet in Berlin in 1904.

BERLIN 1904.

Up to 1904 the Council consisted of individuals but at the Berlin meeting at which Mrs. Bedford Fenwick presided, there was introduced to the meeting Sister Agnes Karll, organiser, and later President of the German Nurses Association, then in process of formation, who welcomed those present to Berlin with great kindness, hospitality and professional good will. Then and there, mutual respect and friendship ensued, a friendship which notwithstanding the troublous times, in aftercoming years, held firm till the day of her death.

In Berlin the federation of National Associations of Nurses first took place, the National Council of Great Britain, the American Nurses' Association and the German Nurses' Association being accepted as members—the only National Associations of Nurses whose organisation was at that time sufficiently advanced to make such federation possible. It

had been decided that the meetings of the I.C.N. should take place quinquennially, and, in Berlin, it was arranged that the next meeting should be held in London in 1909, but later there was a general feeling that the period was too long, Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, and Miss Isla Stewart visited Paris in 1907 with the object of arranging an Interim Conference. On that historic occasion they first met Miss L. Chaptal, now the President of the International Council of Nurses, and through her good offices secured the interest of M. Mesureur, the Director-General of the Assistance Publique, and of M. André Mesureur his Chef de Service.

The kindness and assistance of the Director-General



MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK, S.R.N., F.B.C.N.
 Founder of the International Council of Nurses, London,
 July 1st, 1899.

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