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EDITORIAL.

THE ETHICS OF NURSING HISTORY.

Students of Nursing History, professional or lay, as they slowly garner precious information from records all too scanty, become absorbed in its interest, its ethical significance, its importance, its world-wide extent, its romance. It is moreover an honourable record of unselfish self-oblation. From time to time a peculiarly brilliant star has risen on our horizon and compelled notice, but down through the ages thousands of devoted women of whom there is no individual record have spent unostentatious and laborious lives in the service of the sick until they passed to their rest and their reward, all the time establishing traditions, and making history, the interest and importance of which has only comparatively recently come to be realised.

For the most part they were too absorbed in their work to write the history of their times, even had they realised its value to succeeding generations and possessed the ability to do so. Yet through the Middle Ages, in this country, and on the continent of Europe, the Religious Orders were doing valuable work for the sick, the record of which has to be sought for indirectly in the records of the Committees. Only when the Orders were dissolved, by Henry VIII, was the value of their work for the sick, the insane, the lepers, the homeless, forced upon public attention by the condition of the streets which for lack of other shelter these haunted.

The first serious and comprehensive History of Nursing is that written by Miss M. A. Nutting, R.N., M.A., and Miss L. L. Dock, R.N., brilliant members of our profession and ardent students of nursing history. It deals exhaustively with nursing history from the early ages, and must always remain a classic. Of the many gifts by which they have enriched the nursing profession this is one of the greatest.

In the third and fourth volumes the struggle for the professional organisation of nurses is considered at length, and in the compilation of this, in reference to many countries, Miss Dock, as Hon. Secretary of the International Council of Nurses, had the collaboration of the leaders of the National Councils of Nurses, assistance which she acknowledged with characteristic generosity by giving the Royalties on these volumes to the funds of the International Council of Nurses.

As this history is unfolded it is of absorbing interest to watch its development. Where there has been a

demand for genuine self-government there has always been a struggle, and one of the first things found to be necessary has been a voice in the press, through which nurses can communicate, and in which they can make known their views. It may be only a modest leaflet is attempted, or an important weekly or monthly organ, but certain it is that organisation cannot proceed far without this.

Nothing is more to the credit of the nursing profession that when the need became evident nurses arose to meet it, and slowly and painfully nursing history has been written by those who have in addition often to their professional work undertaken the arduous and unremunerative toil of unaccustomed journalistic work. For be it remembered in editing and maybe financing nursing journals, financial success has not been their primary aim. Rather they have recognised that in the struggle of an economically dependent class of workers for self-government often in direct opposition to vested interests they must be prepared for opposition and misrepresentation. All honour to those brave leaders who, realising what they would inevitably encounter, yet knowing the supreme necessity for nurses of self-expression, assumed this unenviable position. No page of nursing history reflects greater credit on our profession than that which records the efforts of trained nurses to maintain a voice in the press. They have been inspired by the highest altruism.

There is no need to enlarge upon the ethics of nurses in regard to their practical work. Devotion to duty, patients first, is the standard set before them on entering a hospital for training, and nobly the large majority respond to it. It is written large in their everyday work, where they assume risks as a matter of course, in emergencies when their quick initiative and trained resourcefulness avoids disaster, to go no further. In their history in the Great War, steadily continuing their work with bombs falling around, refusing to leave a torpedoed ship, saying simply "fighting men first," faithful often to death, those are the ethics of nurses by which they have won the confidence, the affection, and respect of the community whom it is their pride to serve.

Beauty and Peace have made
No peace, no still retreat;
No solace, none,
Only the unafraid
Before Life's roaring street,
Touch Beauty's feet,
Know Truth. . . .

John Masefield—Good Friday.

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