

THE NURSE AS CITIZEN.

During the Congress of the International Council of Nurses held in London in 1909 one of the principal resolutions brought forward concerned the political enfranchisement of women, then a very live subject, when the following resolution was passed, with two dissentients by the Governing Body of the Council:—

"That the possession of the Parliamentary Franchise, which places in the hands of women power and responsibility, will raise the standard of women's work and, in consequence, increase the efficiency of trained nurses."

Mrs. Garrett Fawcett, who conveyed to the International Council of Nurses the cordial greetings of the International Women's Suffrage Alliance, emphasised the fact that when women workers had to appeal to the Government to enact legislation on their behalf they found their lack of political influence and their consequent helplessness. For instance, their President had devoted a large amount of time and talent to the question of the Registration of Nurses, but so far they had not been successful in attaining it. Women's Suffrage was thus a practical question to which nurses should give time and thought. She hoped that when the Resolution on the Agenda dealing with Women's Suffrage was discussed it would be carried by a very large majority and prove that nurses stood side by side with other professional workers. Nine years were to pass, and much opposition and obstruction overcome, before the Women's Franchise Act enabled women over thirty to exercise the Parliamentary Franchise, and ten years before the Nurses' Registration Acts were placed upon the Statute Book.

When the International Congress of Nurses meets in London in 1937 these Acts will have been in force for eighteen years or over, and it is safe to predict that none will be found to question their beneficent effect, indeed, many of those who opposed their enactment are at present foremost in helping to administer them.

Now a generation of nurses who were children at the time of the passing of the Women's Franchise Act and the Nurses' Registration Acts, have grown to womanhood and have the right to exercise the Parliamentary Franchise, a right of which if we judge from the pictures we here present, and from many others which have appeared in the public press, they are availing themselves with enthusiasm.

But with power comes responsibility; 80,000 Registered Nurses can make their will felt in Parliamentary elections and also, with irresistible force in the election of the majority of their own Governing Body, the General Nursing Council, a privilege won for them only after the most active opposition. It is their duty to use that privilege with conscientious discrimination.

During the International Congress of Nurses in London in 1909 a Session was held on "The Nurse as Citizen,"

when Lady Helen Munro Ferguson, now Lady Novar, addressing the nurses present, from the chair, said:—

"You are to be congratulated that while with the expansion of industry and the growth of organisation, the work of many bread-winners has become so specialised that many spend their whole lives doing one monotonous process, or some uninspiring work, your horizon has been set back. New fields of work have been opened out for you, while the intellectual interest of your work has increased with every advance in medical and surgical knowledge, and on the social side your opportunities have increased, and with them your responsibilities also. Thus, while so many workers have to fight against the contraction of character which comes through the narrowed scope of their work, you can rejoice that every quality which you possess can be brought into play, and that your sphere of usefulness may be just as extended as you like to make it every hour of your day, and may be fruitful in self-development. This is important from the point of view of citizenship, for though it is true that every individual who lives worthily, however narrow his sphere, is contributing to the good of the State and borough, the most useful citizen will be the one who brings the greatest amount of

capacity to bear on the greatest number of opportunities.

"A nurse can never bring too much skill and understanding and capacity to her work, and every addition to her general knowledge, every interest she cultivates, every intelligent observation she makes on social phenomena will make her a better nurse and a more valuable citizen . . .

"Finally, a nurse should never allow the professional interest in a case, still less the round of trivial and lowly duties, to efface from her mind the larger aspects of her purpose, of her work. When she ministers to the poorest old chronic let her see herself representing that common brotherhood which binds society together; when she struggles for the eyesight of one poor fretful baby, let her see herself struggling for national efficiency. Then her thought will be not how commonplace is her daily work, or how limited are her opportunities, but how tremendous are her responsibilities, and her prayer will be: 'Help me, my God, my boat is so small, Thy ocean is so large,' and she will be lifted far above the humble and sometimes unlovely offices she performs, to realise her comradeship with every worker and thinker who has served her time and generation."

The picture on page 315, shewing nurses from Queen Charlotte's Hospital at the Polling Station, Marylebone, would have delighted a high-stepping "anti" we knew sixty years ago, when women's suffrage was even then becoming a "gadfly" to M.P.s. Her opinion expressed in no uncertain terms was, "Give women the vote! Bosh! They would only vote for the best-looking man!"



Early Voters from Charing Cross Hospital at Westminster Hall.

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