

# THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED  
THE NURSING RECORD

EDITED BY MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK, REGISTERED NURSE.

No. 2023. Vol. 85.

FEBRUARY, 1937.

Price Sevenpence.

## EDITORIAL.

### THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT IN HOSPITALS.

We wonder if the complaints which we have received from a few nurses—that “the rules of this hospital ignore our spiritual life,” that “there is no promotion in the upper ranks in this hospital for Catholics,” that “my religion militates against appointment as Matron in an English hospital,” are justifiable complaints, or if in a Protestant country preference is not given to those of that faith for the maintenance of the general well-being of the institution.

Nursing is undoubtedly a vocation which has been evolved largely from the humanitarian motives inspired by strong religious conviction, and, indeed, until within comparatively recent times it has been almost entirely in the hands of religious orders. There were advantages and disadvantages in connection with this condition. The disadvantages were that the members of religious orders, being bound to work wherever they were placed by their superiors, it follows that if the head of a community did not possess both a knowledge of and a love of nursing, sisters might be deputed to nursing work who did not possess the nursing instinct, and did not bring to it that devotion engendered by a definite permanent dedication to nursing.

The science of nursing, though the most sweet and lovable of mistresses, is an exacting one, claiming whole-hearted allegiance, and anyone desirous of serving her must be prepared to make many sacrifices, and to bring many costly offerings to her shrine. It is even claimed that the vocation of nursing is so absorbing as to be incompatible with the discharge of religious obligations. If we examine the question further, however, we shall find that when the work of nursing was dissociated from religion, and handed over to seculars who regarded it simply as a means of livelihood, the standard both of work and of morality sank very low indeed, and that at the beginning of the last century it had sunk into such disrepute as a calling that it was almost exclusively in the hands of the ignorant and incapable, a condition most detrimental to the well-being of the sick and standards of national health. It is noteworthy that our profession was raised from the low and degraded level to which it had fallen by the efforts of women inspired by strong religious convictions. Friederike Fliedner, Elizabeth Fry, Florence Nightingale, Agnes Jones, were all actuated by the highest motives in their endeavour to raise once more the vocation of nursing to its proper place, and they gathered around them bands of noble and devoted women inspired by the same strong religious motives. There is no doubt that many of the brightest examples of the nursing profession

are those who have received their inspiration from their religious convictions, and that many excellent women are working devotedly and unobtrusively in our hospitals whose motive power is their religious belief.

It behoves committees of nursing schools, therefore, to be tender with regard to the religious convictions of these nurses, and not to put unnecessary obstacles in their way in the fulfilment of their religious duties or professional advancement. Such difficulties, we believe, are more often caused by want of thought than want of heart, but they press none the less hardly for this reason.

Many nurses, for instance, value highly the possibility of attending an early celebration, or a mass. There are many nurses who derive strength from attendance at such services, which is not only a benefit to them, but incidentally to their patients.

There is no doubt that hospital authorities, who, by their regulations, make such attendance impossible, will lower the standard of the nursing staff, if they drive from its ranks conscientious women to work elsewhere, where religious privileges which they value are attainable.

In these material days, when the profession of nursing is being adopted less as a vocation than as a means of livelihood, everything should be done by managers and matrons to encourage *conscience* in young student-nurses, and give facilities for their spiritual life.

### NURSING PROFESSION AND THE CORONATION.

The Ministry of Health is anxious that a limited number of seats, some 200, should be allotted to members of the Nursing Profession to view the Coronation Procession and we sincerely thank the Minister for this recognition. The Ministry has consulted representatives of the General Nursing Council, the National Council of Nurses of Great Britain, the College of Nursing, the British College of Nurses and the Queen's Institute of District Nursing on the matter, representatives of which Organisations attended a meeting at the Ministry of Health and have been invited to advise the Ministry as to the allocation of seats at an early date.

The Committee has already agreed on a scheme of allotment which we publish on page 33.

The seats are estimated to cost from 30s. to £2, a sum we feel sure many nurses will be pleased to pay to view the magnificent pageant of the Procession of the King and Queen to and from the Abbey Church of Westminster on this historic occasion.

The Nursing Services of the Government have in the past been honoured with seats within the Abbey and no doubt will receive due recognition upon the present occasion.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)