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EDITORIAL.

"WHAT WE HAVE WE HOLD."

The history of the organisation of the Nursing Profession, from the founding of the British Nurses' Association by Dr. and Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, in 1887, and the subsequent organisation of National and the International Councils of Nurses, are recorded in THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING formerly THE NURSING RECORD, in the 87 volumes extant. These records have been carefully studied by several American nurses from time to time at the office of the journal, and recently we have received enquiries from British nurses interested in Nursing History, and have given permission for study at 19, Queen's Gate, London, to nurses anxious for authentic information. We were influenced by the following letter:—

"Several generations of nurses have come and gone in the past half-century, and few have acquainted themselves with the history of their profession from a national and international point of view. Thanks to the personal interest and financial self-sacrifice of a few, notably the late Dr. Bedford Fenwick and the late Miss Margaret Breay, the record is complete in print, and all may learn the truth. Should they wish to know it—but such a study takes much time, which is not available for us all—could not our invaluable BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING add to its benefactions by publishing month by month extracts from its past papers of salient events which urged and foreshadowed professional organisation as it exists to-day? It is only by such knowledge that we present-day nurses can appreciate what we owe to the pioneers of the past and what is our duty in support of their initiative and in support of the professional status and privileges they have won for us. This would appear the more advisable as there is apparently a very dangerous tendency on the part of various authorities to depreciate what has been attained in Great Britain and which may be lost to us through our own ignorance and lack of energy to secure what has already been granted to us by law.

"Take the history of the British Nurses' Association—its valiant fight before the Privy Council for its Royal Charter in 1892, determinedly opposed by many Nursing Schools, Matrons, and doctors. The pamphlet entitled "The Victory of the Nurses," containing the verbatim Report of the Inquiry before the Privy Council, might well become a text-book for nurses and the public, who apparently know little or nothing of the

struggle of the Nursing Profession for the right of self-government and Registration.

"The draft Bills for State Registration might also be studied with advantage, that of the National Society for the State Registration of Nurses taking precedence; that of the R.B.N.A., the seven drafts of that of the College of Nursing, Ltd., the Scottish and Irish Bills, and finally the Government Bills of 1919, which became law in that year and are now in force.

"It is unthinkable that, after all these efforts, the English nurses are to be deprived of the benefits so dearly won; but they will be so debased unless they unite and fight for their rights. Government Departments, the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, the British Medical Association, the Royal College of Nursing, the London County Council, Public Municipal Bodies, Members of Parliament, the Trade Nursing Press, and other interested persons, are all apparently willing to lower nursing standards by one means or another, and unless Registered Nurses are alive to the interests of the sick, and with sound knowledge of the history of professional progress can keep tight hold of the status and economic privilege they have won, woe betide them."

A thirst for knowledge is a very wholesome sign. Acting upon the suggestion in the above letter, we dipped into Vol. I of THE NURSING RECORD, April to December, 1888, and found its contents amazingly interesting. Practically a clean sheet where nursing politics were concerned. The British Nurses' Association, founded on December 7th, 1887, at 20, Upper Wimpole Street, London, by a group of 40 conscientious Matrons, evidently inspired by intense love of their work and a keen appreciation of its value to the sick and needy, realising the value of union in attaining higher education and power of professional expression for nurses, full of enthusiasm and sure of ultimate attainment, one and all prepared to work for the whole and not for self. Indeed, after dipping into half a dozen volumes, it would appear that extracts from past events might usefully be reprinted if only to make us realise the gratitude we owe to the pioneers of nursing organisation. Proud, of course, that the seed of professional solidarity was first sown in England, and still more proud that, through national and international combination, there has been so grand a growth throughout the civilised world of sound and progressive nursing standards. But the attainments of the pioneers must be sacredly maintained. What we have we hold.

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