

A PAGE OF NURSING HISTORY.

A TRUE TALE WITH A MORAL.

THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF NURSES.

"The essential idea for which the International Council of Nurses stands is 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. The International Council of Nurses does not stand for a narrow professional, but for that full development of the human being and citizen in every nurse, which shall best enable her to bring her professional knowledge and skill to the many-sided service that modern society demands of her."

The International Council of Nurses was founded in London on July 1st, 1899—that is, forty-five years ago—and, thanks to the accurate reports of its progress recorded in the "Nursing Record and BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING," there is no excuse for error concerning this all important professional event. But on more than one occasion such error has appeared in print. We propose, therefore, to record in some detail the truth so that when those of us who took part in the ceremony of its founding and evolution have passed away there will be no excuse for error. And just here we record, with regret, that of the group of eminent nurses at home and from overseas who laid the sure foundations of our "International" there remains but Lavinia L. Dock, U.S.A., and the Founder.

Isla Stewart, Margaret Breay, Mina Mollett, Margaret Huxley, Isabel Hampton Robb, M. Agnes Snively, Grace Neill, Sister Henrietta, Grace Norrie, and, indeed, every member of the Provisional Committee in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, New Zealand, New South Wales, Victoria, Cape Colony, Holland and Denmark have passed to higher spheres of evolution and of usefulness.

THE ERRONEOUS STATEMENT.

The misleading statement which has appeared in print upon more than one occasion is to the effect that the International Council of Nurses was founded by the International Council of Women. There is no truth in this statement, as we shall proceed to prove; indeed, we go further and shall prove that the essential idea for which the International Council of Nurses has always stood—self-government of nurses in their Associations—was threatened had the International Council of Women exercised autocratic power in its association with the Profession of Nursing.

The International Council of Nurses was founded to avert this danger.

And now for a page of nursing history which has hitherto remained unrecorded and which we alone can put on record from personal observation:—

1892.

PREPARATION FOR COMMEMORATIVE EXHIBITION AT CHICAGO IN HONOUR OF CHRISTOPHER COLUMBUS.

Mrs. May Wright Sewell, Dean of a Girls' College in Indianapolis, U.S.A., addressed a meeting of women in Washington and advocated the organisation of an International Council of Women.

1893.

Mrs. May Wright Sewell addressed an International Meeting of Women from 23 countries at the World's Fair—in Chicago—and advocated the organisation of the International Council of Women. She invited delegates present to take a written invitation from her to women's national groups, in their various countries, inviting them to organise National Councils of Women for affiliation. Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, member of the British Royal Commission, who was present, was invited to deliver a letter to Mrs. Eva Maclaren in England asking her to bring the request before the most representative organisation of women in England. Mrs. Fenwick consented to deliver the letter.

Mrs. May Wright Sewell, hostess at a luncheon to many eminent women spoke eloquently of the International Idea. Many pioneers of women's emancipation attended the Congress, amongst them Lucy Stone, Julia Ward Howe (authoress of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic"), and Susan B. Anthony, all long since passed away, their work living after them.

On return to England from her visit to U.S.A., Mrs. Fenwick delivered Mrs. Sewell's letter to Mrs. Eva Maclaren, who submitted it to the President of the National Union of Women Workers, at that date the most representative non-political organisation of women in Great Britain.

The matter received consideration, but great objection was taken to any change of the society's title. Ultimately the National Union consented to accept office as the National Council without a change of name, and it was not until 1918, upon the recommendation of Mrs. Ogilvie Gordon, the President, that the name of the Union was changed to that of "The National Council of Women of Great Britain and Ireland." So many of the dominions and foreign countries had acceded to the American proposal that it became obligatory, and the meetings of the International Council of Women held in various countries were found to be educative in the highest degree.

The Marchioness of Aberdeen having been elected President, of the International Council of Women, in July, 1899, it was summoned to hold its meetings and Congress in London. For this gathering great preparations were made. Mrs. May Wright Sewell was to attend, and she had been nominated as future President. This, however, did not prevent Lady Aberdeen from also standing for re-election, which naturally aroused some feeling in the United States. Very wide interest was aroused in Europe in the London Congress, in which we took an active part. Mrs. Bedford Fenwick acted as joint Treasurer with Mrs. Booth, of Liverpool, and had also been elected Convener of the Professional Section, when a day was allotted for consideration of nursing questions of general interest. And now, for the first time, we will a tale unfold.

NURSING POLITICS.

To revert to nursing politics from 1887, when the British Nurses' Association was founded by a group of progressive matrons at 20, Upper Wimpole Street, London, W.1, the demand was made for Government recognition of nursing as a profession.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)