

To quote "A Short History of Nursing" by Lavinia L. Dock, R.N., and Isabel M. Stewart, A.M., R.N. who state:—

"This was the second revolution, probably equal in its daring to Miss Nightingale's—the more so, as Miss Nightingale herself was intensely opposed to it, for social conventions were still stubborn and the idea of professional autonomy for nurses was entirely new and, to many, objectionable. As this started our series of national associations, some little detail must be given to the difficult beginning of the struggle.

"Mrs. Fenwick wrote at the time: 'The nurse question is the woman question; we shall have to run the gauntlet of those historic rotten eggs.' This was proved true by the immediate hostility of the directors and governors of the large London hospitals, who perceived the economic implications of the demands. Aligned with the governors were many matrons and sisters, who either sincerely held conservative views or were unwilling to stand forth in opposition to their employers. This, briefly, was the origin of a cleavage in English nursing which for 30 years was to divide the hospital and nursing world into two opposing bodies and was to be much misunderstood and misrepresented."

Here the History records the valour of Isla Stewart, Matron of St. Bartholomew's Hospital—"of staunchest, most loyal Scottish strain," and other "faithful ones" who supported Mrs. Fenwick, "whose plain speaking and uncompromising spirit drew upon her all the wrath of the opposition."

THE FOUNDING OF THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL OF NURSES.

Thus from 1887 to 1899 the group of persons opposing State Registration of Nurses focused their personal antagonism on Mrs. Bedford Fenwick—an antagonism to professional self-determination which has continued to this day.

A FATEFUL MEETING.

The Meeting of the International Council of Women in London, June, 1899, approached.

The organising committee met, with Lady Aberdeen in the chair. She reported that a deputation of matrons had been received at which they had expressed their wish that Mrs. Fenwick should be superseded as organiser of the Nursing Session in the Professional Section of which she was convener.

Mrs. Fenwick demanded the names of these persons, when, of course, it transpired that they were ardent "antis" who presumably desired to prevent free discussion and, no doubt, support for State Registration of Nurses, to which they and Lady Aberdeen were opposed.

Naturally Mrs. Fenwick declined to resign on any such unconstitutional demand.

Lady Aberdeen: "I have consulted my brother Lord Tweedmouth. . . ."

Mrs. Fenwick: "I do not care for the opinion of Lord Tweedmouth or of any other lord."

Lady Aberdeen then stated she proposed to circularise constituent national organisations.

Mrs. Fenwick replied that if such publicity was

given to the attack upon her professional status, she would place the matter in the hands of her solicitor.

This was no idle threat.

After the termination of the meeting, upon returning home Mrs. Fenwick stated in writing her determination to take legal action should defamatory statements, privately advanced, be circulated by the Committee. And then, what?

In a flash she realised the necessity for the organisation of a self-governing International Confederation of Nurses.

On the evening of that fateful day, Mrs. Fenwick went to her study at 20, Upper Wimpole Street, London, W.1. She lit the lamp, and turned it out when the sun rose.

In the intervening hours, with the help of Margaret Breay, Mrs. Fenwick drafted a scheme for an International Council of Nurses, many provisions of which were incorporated in the first Constitution, and indeed still stand; its basic principle being "self-government by nurses in their own Associations, with the aim of raising ever higher the standard of education and professional ethics."

On the following day she placed her scheme before Isla Stewart, who warmly approved it. In strict confidence, Margaret Breay and Margaret Huxley were consulted.

The rest of the story is to be found in the History of the International Council of Nurses, 1899-1925. Here is recorded the story of how warned, the Nursing Profession was forearmed. How on July 1st, 1899, at the Annual Conference of the Matrons' Council of Great Britain and Ireland, held at 20, Hanover Square, London, W.1, the International Council of Nurses was founded on strictly professional lines and escaped, let us hope, for all time from autocratic lay control.

We hope that the fallacy that the International Council of Women organised the International Council of Nurses will for the future be recognised as erroneous. Our International Council has proved its self-determination for nearly half a century and, in spite of war, its record has been brilliant and beneficent.

E. G. F.

AN HONOUR FOR OUR INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT.

How tantalising is the post! Just as we go to press we learn that our International President, Miss Effie Jane Taylor, since 1934 Dean of the Nursing School of Yale University, U.S.A., has been awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Humane Letters.

Congratulations and more anon.

IMPORTANT NOTICE TO STATE REGISTERED NURSES.

In view of the coming election of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, registered nurses are asked to notify at once to the Officer of the Council, 23, Portland Place, London, W.1, any change of permanent address.

Notifications received later than July 31st, 1944, cannot be taken into account for the purposes of the election.

Owing to delay in obtaining paper supplies Retention Fee reminder notices will not all be ready for issue in August as usual—notifications are prepared in alphabetical order according to the entries in the Register—notifications to those whose names appear at the beginning of the Register will be despatched on August 31st, the others will follow during September and early in October.

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