

greatest ambition for nurses was to unite them in a powerful organisation for their own greater security and well-being, and to make the profession of Nursing the finest career for women in the world.

Mrs. Bedford Fenwick was a genius of the highest order, and she possessed extraordinary gifts and powers. She was a great and uncompromising reformer, blessed with clear judgment, a strong and determined will, and a total inability to admit defeat.

Her organising abilities were outstanding. She was past-mistress in the art of public speaking, and when occasion demanded, she would rouse her hearers to the highest pitch of enthusiasm. Thus she was fitted by nature to be a leader, and as such she achieved great things for nurses, for which she will always be remembered with undying gratitude by them.

Amongst her greatest achievements was the placing on the Statute Book of the Nurses Act of 1919, thus obtaining State Registration for Nurses and securing legal status and State recognition for them. She herself was Number One on the State Register of Nurses. She was the Founder and President of the British College of Nurses, Ltd., the Founder and first President of the National Council of Nurses of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the Founder of the International Council of Nurses throughout the world.

Her genius brought into being the Royal British Nurses Association, and in obtaining its Royal Charter she thus secured the first Royal Charter ever given to a women's professional organisation in the country.

A far-reaching and priceless work of hers was the provision of a free voice for nurses in the Press. She created the first professional organ of Nursing in the world, "The Nursing Record," now "The British Journal of Nursing," which she was editing until just before she died. Fortunately she never became senile, her intellect remained clear and lucid and capable of grasping technicalities: She was constructively critical and ready to do battle for right principles and for the preservation of freedom.

Many were her travels abroad in the interests of her beloved profession. She added lustre to the fame of British Nurses, and on their behalf she received many decorations and tokens of esteem from Royal personalities on the Continent. American Nurses were likewise devoted to her and fully appreciated her varied and unique talents.

So great a reformer as Mrs. Bedford Fenwick would know infallibly that more often than not her tremendous efforts would prove themselves to be thankless tasks. She knew that she would receive but scant

appreciation from those whom she was so greatly benefiting, yet with the zeal of a true benefactor she continued along her chosen path, often lonely, often misunderstood and maligned, yet here and there meeting a true friend who understood her genius, and allowed for her inability to suffer fools gladly. Truly she was a woman apart, and we cannot hope to produce such another outstanding leader from within our ranks.

We are proud she was a Nurse, proud that she was a British woman, and we are proud to sing her praises, even though we humbly acknowledge how unworthy is the effort when we praise so unique a character.

One of Mrs. Fenwick's characteristics was her utter independence of mind and body. Thus after her accident last year, her sufferings were increased tenfold by her enforced dependence on others. She could not endure her plight, and her misery on this account was painful to witness. Until the very last she attempted to do things for herself, for which she had not the necessary strength. Her doggedness and will power were never more apparent.

Her interest in the affairs of the International Congress of Nurses in Atlantic City, U.S.A., was lively until just a few days before she died. She advised the Council of the British College of Nurses to make substantial grants of money to members of the College who wished to attend. Following upon this advice the College is assisting five members to make the journey. Mrs. Fenwick fully realised the educational value of such grants, and one of her last happy gestures was to sign the cheques for the lucky members.

Her loss to our Profession at this time is calamitous. We, like our Nation to-day, need brave and fearless leaders. The interests of Registered Nurses require a watchful eye, for unless we take care to guard them, our liberties and statutory privileges will be filched from us.

Perhaps the mantle of Elijah will fall upon Elisha; if so, we must be quick to recognise the latter and follow the lead, however thorny the path may be. Liberty and freedom are the rewards of effort and watchfulness and are not the prizes for sloth and servility.

And now, for the moment, we must leave her. May she rest peacefully from her labours, and may her reward be fitting. May her name and her deeds remain forever enshrined in the hearts of grateful nurses, as they will most assuredly gleam and glow like beacons in the pages of history. When her biography is completed, no doubt she will be acclaimed as one of the greatest women of her century.

GLADYS M. HARDY.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)