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ETHEL GORDON FENWICK, S.R.N., HON. EDITOR 1888—1947.

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## EDITORIAL.

### THE PRICE OF FREEDOM IS ETERNAL VIGILANCE.

For many months now Dame Rumour has been a disturbing factor in the Nursing World—whispering the ambitious intention of one of the affiliated associations of the National Council of Nurses of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to assume the functions of a National Association.

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING having jealously guarded the interests of the National Council of Nurses from its inception, scenting this danger, issued a solemn warning to all affiliated bodies, beseeching them to maintain and cherish the independence of their leagues and associations.

At the meeting of the Grand Council of the National Council of Nurses of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, held on May 22nd, it was officially disclosed that it was the Royal College of Nursing that wished to assume the functions of this great national association—when by an overwhelming majority this very representative gathering voted against this movement.

That the Royal College of Nursing is the member body of the National Council of Nurses of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, which has been actively at work for some time past in the attempt to usurp the functions of the National Council of Nurses, is, in the light of the persistently autocratic policy of that College, not surprising!

It must be remembered that in the days when the struggle for State Registration was in progress those responsible for founding the College of Nursing (in 1916) issued a leaflet in which it was stated:—

“Every Certificated Trained Nurse should apply at once for Registration by the College of Nursing.

1. Because the Council of the College of Nursing has drafted a ‘Nurses’ Registration Bill’ which provides that the Register already formed by the College of Nursing, shall be the first Register under the Act. If, therefore, you are on the College Register you will, automatically and without further fee, be placed upon the State Register when the ‘Nurses Registration Bill’ is passed.

2. Because every nurse who is placed upon the College Register is *ipso facto*, and without further fee, a member of the College and is entitled to vote for the election of the Council.”

Such a promise could only have been given by an association expecting to become the governing body of the Nursing Profession; but when the Nurses’ Registration Act received the Royal Assent and became law in December, 1919, it was found that Parliament refused such a monopoly, and that the Act provided for an independent body to be set up—The General

Nursing Council for England and Wales. Consequently the College of Nursing was unable to fulfil its promise to thousands of nurses.

There is no doubt that this desire for power to control the Nursing Profession still prevails in the Council of the Royal College of Nursing at the present time, and we wonder if the members of that Council are conversant with the aims and objects of the National Council of Nurses, or have studied its inspiring history of almost half a century, with its contribution to the expansion of the International Council of Nurses—as this organisation should be of an “untouchable.”

One of the main principles of its foundation was that it should remain National and International, and free from political influence; this could not continue were it replaced or controlled by one association whose aim is to gain absolute power in nursing politics for its own aggrandisement.

On this subject we are reminded of the words of a great publicist:—“All power corrupt but absolute power corrupt absolutely.”

In her declining years the Founder, Ethel Gordon Fenwick, looked back on the building up and development of the National Council of Nurses with affectionate pride, ever vigilant that its aims should remain ethical.

Nevertheless, because of her long experience of battle with those elements working for power to control the Nursing Profession, and her prophetic vision, she had no illusions, and greatly feared that the possible fate of this pearl of great price might be that which it has just escaped!

Liberty depends on the division of power, and it is most gratifying that through those nurses, alive to their right to professional freedom, the first battle in this field has been won.

Now that the majority realise the value of this free federation of nurses they will, we have no doubt, rise to their responsibility under its re-constitution, to meet the increase in cost, which will be considerable.

In that altruistic era of nearly fifty years ago, it was by voluntary service that the National Council of Nurses, and many other ethical and social movements, were inspired and conducted.

In our materialistic times these ideals are passing, and it therefore becomes inevitable that arduous secretarial work demands a salaried officer, exclusive of other cost. Nevertheless, for freedom of conscience and for our priceless independence no sacrifice is too great, for as the poet tells us:—

*We must be free or die, who speak the tongue  
That Shakespeare spake; the faith and morals hold  
Which Milton held.—In everything we are sprung  
Of Earth's first blood, have titles manifold.*

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