

The British College of Nurses, Ltd.

Registration Day.

The commemoration of Registration Day, held again for the first time since the outbreak of war, on Friday, December 10th, 1948, was a happy affair.

This year, the ceremony took place in the Council Chamber, which had been beautifully decorated with flowers by the office staff, and never looked more charming.

In the centre of the long table, a splendid frosted cake inscribed 1919-1948 gleamed, supporting no less than 29 blazing candles!

The special feature of the celebrations was the Address given by Miss A. Stewart Bryson, S.R.N., on "Reminiscences of the Fight for the State Registration of Nurses—Those Were the Days!"

When we have at heart what we believe to be a just cause, and experience what a privilege it is to follow the Pioneers of a great endeavour for the greater part of one's life, the simple question arises—when did it begin? What induced us to start on this tortuous way for our convictions?

Thus it is that memory awakes with all her busy train as we turn to the year of grace 1903.

Those were the days!—the spacious days of plenty, our country then so rich!—the Edwardian Reign but a year old, when carriages and horses only sped through Hyde Park, and the City thronged with horse-drawn vehicles of every description which travelled, so it seems to us now, on their easy-osy way—the ubiquitous motor, perhaps envisaged, had not yet arrived!

Looking back, it was a happy-go-lucky age in many ways; Hospital Nurse Training Schools were then a law unto themselves as to standards of training, a state of affairs which stirred our pioneers in the interests of the sick to fight for thirty years so valiantly for State Registration of Nurses—a Movement which had for some time been inaugurated.

To one, green from the North—Lancashire born and in Cheshire bred—London was indeed an entrancing city in which to find oneself at work in hospital, and it was our happy fate that, unable to go herself, our Matron, then the late Miss S. A. Villiers (eventually S.R.N., F.B.C.N., J.P.), presenting a ticket, suggested we might use it in her stead to attend the Conference and first Annual Meeting of the Society for the State Registration of Nurses, of which we had never heard!

So on May 8th, 1903, at 20, Hanover Square, London, this first Conference, so perfectly arranged, quite caught our imagination, and was to us unique, as an organised Conference of Nurses was then a novelty. The excellent speeches delivered by those pioneers present, women of culture and foresight, on the various aspects of State Registration were most impressive and inspiring.

Miss Louisa Stevenson had travelled from Edinburgh to preside, and we saw for the first time that ardent State Registrationist, Miss Isla Stewart, then Matron of St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London, who, on this outstanding occasion, presented flowers to the Chairman.

There was no doubt, however, as to who was the Leader of the Movement, for when Mrs. Bedford Fenwick rose we realised a magnetic personality in a powerful speaker, one of unbounded energy, a courageous and beautiful woman to boot! who had drawn Matrons and Nurses from all over the country, and who, with characteristic despatch, saw to it that the business that day culminated in the passing of a Resolution that a Bill be drafted for the State Registration of Nurses.

In expressing appreciation on our return to duty, we could only say never had we heard before of State Registration for Nurses, and never so inspired to work for a cause, now convinced! We were for it, so, with pride, sub-

scribed five shillings to become a life member of the Movement!

The tremendous progress of the pioneers resulted in the Bill for the State Registration of Nurses, in manuscript form and tied up with pretty green ribbons, finding its way into the House of Commons early in February, 1904, Dr. Farquharson having consented to introduce it.

We Meet With Opposition.

Alas! for our hopes, and how exasperated we were to find the powerful opposition of vested interest and social patronage launched against the Movement—a body of thirty-six persons comprising three members from each of the twelve London Hospitals with Medical Training Schools. This body gave wide publicity to a Resolution: "That this Council is opposed to any Registration of Nurses, and that steps be taken to oppose any Bill in Parliament having such registration for its object."

History shows, which it is our privilege to follow in some 63 volumes of THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING edited by the late Ethel Gordon Fenwick, how grimly this unenlightened body kept its resolution.

In 1904, Bill blocked . . . 1905, Bill crowded out . . . 1907, Bill talked out. . . . At this period we learned, in one of the many of her fireside reminiscences, that Mrs. Fenwick was almost despairing of finding a sponsor for the Bill, when, one evening, the housemaid entered her room with a letter from Miss Sophie Munro, which she always looked upon as Heaven sent, who wrote: "Have you ever approached Lord Ampthill? I feel sure he would be interested."

On this suggestion no time was lost: His Lordship proved a firm friend and champion of Nurses, and as early as 1908 brought the Bill for the State Registration of Nurses in the House of Lords.

The struggle still continued, until in 1916 we were baffled to fight even better, when the same element of opposition formed a College of Nursing, ostensibly to obtain State Registration of Nurses!

That story is well known—that in founding the College of Nursing, Ltd. (now incorporated by Royal Charter), a leaflet was issued in 1916 to every certified trained nurse, that she should apply at once for Registration by the College of Nursing, Ltd., and promising that the names of nurses on the College Register would automatically, and without further fee, be placed upon the State Register of Nurses when the Nurses' Registration Bill was passed.

In so doing, the instigators intended to obtain complete control of the Nursing Profession, assuming they would become the Governing Body.

That brings to mind the thrill of the sudden summons to hear His Lordship in the House of Lords oppose the College of Nursing Bill. His splendid Address on that occasion is an unfading memory.

Those days meant effort, but always worthwhile, lifting one far above the petty distraction of the daily routine.

So after many Meetings of the Central Committee for the State Registration of Nurses, founded by Ethel Gordon Fenwick in 1910, Major Richard Barnett, M.P., in January, 1919, sponsored the Central Committee's Bill for the State Registration of Nurses in the House of Commons, when, in opposition, the College of Nursing, Ltd., brought in a Bill for the State Registration of Nurses, trying to wreck Major Barnett's Bill.

At this impasse, Major Barnett was asked to withdraw his Bill. On communicating this point to our great pioneer, Ethel Gordon Fenwick, her indignation knew no bounds, when she declared to him: "Never! We stand with our backs to the wall!"

And so fortified, Major Barnett saw to it that our Bill still stood.

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