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## Editorial.

### Thirty Years After.

A WAY in the shadowy mists of the year 1919, when England was emerging from the horrors of the first World War, a gay little dinner party was in progress in a fashionable house in the West-End of London. The occasion was the celebration of the passing of the first Nurses' Act ever to be placed on the Statute Book of these Islands. Chief guest and inspiration of the party of intellectuals was Ethel Gordon Fenwick, promoter and genius of the Bill, whose dogged and heroic persistence over a period of twenty long years, was responsible for the accomplished fact of State Registration for Nurses.

How graciously and happily she wore her victor's laurels on that auspicious occasion. No shadow marred her triumph, for she did not foresee that in the space of thirty years, much of her yeoman's work would be nullified. She could not know that State Registered Nurses, for whose professional integrity and financial security she had so valiantly struggled, would out of sheer indifference and incompetence be unable to hold fast to the privileges she had won at such a cost for them.

Amongst the benefits accruing to Nurses, resulting from this Act, are legal Status and State Recognition and protection. The General Nursing Council, holding statutory powers was created and the 16 members serving such are Registered Nurses elected freely by their colleagues to safeguard the interests of the profession and those of the sick whom it serves. One of the Council's responsibilities was the setting up and the maintenance of a State Register, containing the names and training schools of those women who had qualified by training and examination for registration. Certain punishments were reserved for persons wrongly claiming this accomplishment, and thus the sick community was safeguarded against unskilled and unprofessional attendance.

Another of the Council's duties was the formal approval of hospitals and institutions suitably equipped and built, and conforming to certain other minimum requirements, as training schools for nurses. This duty it has always justly and courageously carried out, often being reviled and slandered when its approval has been withheld. Lack of space forbids a more detailed account of the benefits which Registration brought to nurses.

Turning back the pages of the intervening years, one sickening and startling fact springs into prominence. **WE HAVE NOT KEPT THE FAITH, AND WE HAVE NOT STOOD FIRM.** Slowly but surely, one at a time, and with scarcely a struggle, we have allowed our privileges to be filched from us. We have squandered our rights, which

cost much effort and money, and we have allowed a second-grade of hospital worker to share our status and protection and to enter into financial and professional competition with us. We submitted to our monies being used to finance a Roll for them, and to furnish an office at our own beautiful headquarters in Portland Place.

Since those early days, so full of hope and striving, unskilled persons have cast envious and resentful eyes upon the fair rewards of State Registration. The exalted and powerful position of the General Nursing Council aroused smarting jealousy in the breasts of those who would like to wield the power of the Council, but who have no hopes of so doing. Therefore, its good name and just pronouncements were attacked and brought into disrepute. Powerful opposition was successful in reducing the very necessary training period to two years, for a second grade of "Nurses"; whilst discipline, so essential where life and death are in conflict, was mocked and derided as archaic and conventual. A long and vilifying Press campaign was engineered against Matrons, Sisters and other heads of departments, so successfully, that well-informed and intelligent young women gave hospitals a wide berth.

If the previous dearth of candidates to the profession was serious, it now became calamitous. Thus it was vitally important to staff the hospitals by admitting to training all who presented themselves. Selection of candidates (except in the teaching hospitals) became impossible and as a result, minimum educational standards went by the board. Then came war, and more Nurses than ever were needed. To keep this new grade of Nurses by the bedside of the sick the Government went to extraordinary lengths. Fulsome flattery was poured into their ears, and more money into their pockets, and eventually, in 1943 a new Nurses' Act was passed giving a certain status, security and other benefits to "Enrolled Assistant Nurses." Thus the first cuckoo was housed in the Council's nest.

In spite of all the Minister's efforts, however, the chronic shortage of nurses persisted. As recruits to the new grade did not come forward in sufficient numbers, it was obvious that some other solution would have to be found. So now, in the spring of 1949, when cuckoos are back again, another Bill is hatched, and some of its clauses make strange reading. In this latest parliamentary policy of expediency, we find the General Nursing Council has been "reconstituted" and had its statutory powers somewhat curtailed. Having got over that obstacle so comfortably, attention has been paid to the State Register. Notwithstanding the fact that this Register is paid for out of nurses' fees, it must be relegated to the scrap-heap because IT IS TOO EXPENSIVE. In the place of this

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