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Editorial.

The First Pageant of Nursing

“Let us Praise famous Men”

A KIND OF CLASSIC these words have become, but it is just as important that we look back on great times and seek by the stars of inspiration that shone in them, to make ideals live again and to cause the courage of the path finders to flow into our age and so on through other ages. Thus we can keep alive something of the spirit and adventure of great times, and hold them in safe keeping for those who will carry the torch of progress by and by.

But what, after all, are great times? They need not be great although they may see achievement. Attainment is not the measure of a great age, for the true greatness of an age lies in the struggle for some lofty purpose for the progress and good of mankind. By the measure of the struggle only can you judge of the greatness of a time. The struggle mostly brings little to the pathfinders themselves. Theirs it is to blaze the trail, catharsis may be their reward, the stripping-off of selfish ends, but the price of their progress is sacrifice and this sometimes even unto death. In the same sense it is not as a rule those who hold high place who become the real representatives of their time, but more often as the decades pass and multiply (we might almost say the centuries in some cases) the true perspective comes, when we look back on great times and recognise great men, in their lives often treated with contumely, as the true representatives of their age. Thus does Time's perspective show that very often the leaders of an unpopular movement, a minority movement, are the real representatives of their age. They live when others have gone into the shadows; they are the torch bearers for their own and succeeding ages, but it is the lot of the light bearers always to be hindered by the powers of darkness. They are misunderstood because people cannot understand the significance of their message and its promise. Neither do these people recognise the anxiety to achieve a reform in the short space of a lifetime lest the torch be dropped ere the battle is won.

At the risk of digression (forgivable because we are looking back on great times) we would repeat the words of a medieval mystic, chemist and physician—Jacob Boehme. Many a representative of a great time has followed his teaching, often unconsciously. In referring to it we are thinking of a great man. He says: “Where the road is steepest thither bend thy steps. What the world refuses that take thou upon thyself. What the world will not do that do thou. Walk contrary to the world in all things. Thus by the shortest road thou shalt attain to God.”

And why, you will ask, all this preamble? Well, simply because a chance glance backwards revealed the fact that in this month there falls the fortieth anniversary of a fine artistic creation—the first Pageant of Nursing. There have been others since but none of the same splendour as that held in the fine setting of the Connaught Rooms on February 18th, 1911. This Pageant, this descendant of the ancient mystery plays, might, in earlier ages, have taken place in a church, at least up to the time when we go more into a materialistic evolution. There was the long procession of Immortals. First the goddess Hygeia, followed by the Spirits of Nursing and Science, each with her attributes in procession. Then followed Saints and Queens, the first in plain garments and veils, the last in the splendour of rich robes and crowned; to lend artistic humour there came Sarah Gamp and Betsy Prig, for has not Charles Dickens placed those worthies among the immortals?

This great Pageant was held in support of a great Purpose—the attainment of an Act for the State Registration of Nurses. It is good that such an artistic creation as this should have been placed in that “great time” for the evolution of nursing, that time of professional struggle over a period of 30 years. So may we look back on a great time and see this star of artistic imagery shine in its skies.

The inspiration to produce the Pageant came from Mrs. Bedford Fenwick, and she was in fact its producer. There are two types of torch bearer, two types of representatives of their time; both played a part in the creation of the first great Pageant of Nursing, although this may not have been noticed much at the time. Mrs. Bedford Fenwick was one of those pioneers who could not “suffer fools gladly.” Almost she would seem to have counted ignorance as worse than vice at times. Her words and her pen were often full of fire; but unfortunately “light cannot shine where no light is” and most could not visualise, therefore, the significance of her message. She helped to blaze the trail with her pageant, organised it with that purpose, but there are always those who prefer to sit by dying embers rather than to follow the torch, even when, or because, it must lead through the hills of difficulty. But there is another type of person who also becomes a representative of her time. After their own fashion such support and quicken the spirit of a movement by their fine gifts, their devotion to a cause, their patient determination that a movement will not perish for lack of their support. Miss Mollett was one of those and it was her brilliant pen that produced the fine heroic English, so stately in its progress that it is a pity, for this alone, that apparently no copy now exists except in the archives of THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING; it ought to be in every nurses' library, perhaps one day it will. At the close of the

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