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BEDFORD COLLEGE FOR WOMEN: 5

An International Alma Mater

On April 1, 1919, there gathered at Cannes a small group of men and women, representatives of the fine great Allied powers. They had come with the endorsement of their Governments to consider ways of carrying over into peace the lessons The Red Cross had learned during the Great War, of putting these efficient and essential organizations at the service of humanity, not only in the present crisis, but for all time and in all countries. In the minds of these men and women was forming a world-wide humanitarian project.

They had determined that the Red Cross Societies should not demobilize; that these great forces, energies and thoughts for the alleviation of ills which had been the products of the chaos of the War should operate for the further benefit of their civilian populations. They looked forward to the time when there should be a Red Cross in every country in the world, and this organization should be recognized by the people as the national organization responsible for their general welfare. They planned the establishment of a central group, international in its personnel, whose duty it should be to arouse national societies to a sense of their obligations, to assist them in their organization if they so desired, and to be a clearing-house for information that should be of use to all.

And as this project crystallized in their minds, the importance of nursing, and particularly of public health nursing, as an essential part of any health campaign, soon asserted itself. A Committee of the leading nurses invited to the Congress was formed to present



resolutions concerning nursing. At a meeting of this committee, Dr. Welsh voiced the sentiments of the Congress with the words: "In a sense no more important subject than nursing has been brought before the Red Cross Conference. We can scarcely think of the new activities now projected without an increased nursing service. Few realize as yet the career in public health nursing that is opening to women . . . . There is no field of activity for the Red Cross Societies but can be greatly aided by public health nurses, and no agency through which more good can be done".

Following this Congress, the headquarters of the "League of Red Cross Societies" was established at Geneva. There the newly-created Directors of Divisions faced bare walls, empty desks, a few pages of "Resolutions" for guides, and the knowledge that in their hands lay the immediate future of this service to humanity. Their resources existed wherever they would seek them; their scope wherever they would carry it; their problem was the need of the world.

The Resolutions which had been adopted by the Section on Nursing at the Cannes Conference, contained, among others, the following:

" Resolved that suitable personnel for instruction, both in the care of the sick and in public health nursing be sought and trained so that such personnel may return to their own countries, qualified to inaugurate and direct movements for the establishment of training schools and for the training of nurses."

This has been the philosophy that has underlain all subsequent activities of the Division of Nursing of the League. Foreign nurses might be loaned to a country desirous of building up training schools and public health nursing programmes, but only for a sufficient



time to enable nurses of that country to obtain the necessary training. A health and nursing programme is never successfully imposed in any country and administered from without; it is best served by its own countrywomen whose understanding of her people and devotion to their welfare have their roots deep in the national consciousness.

Here was the immediate task for the Division of Nursing of the League of Red Cross Societies.

The advantage of centralizing the instruction at one University was quickly recognized; here all efforts and money could be expended, the course standardized, and the nurses enjoy the same opportunities for study and instruction. Here lectures by specialists in their own fields could be delivered, and a definite type of work, the product of the best in all countries, be developed. London was chosen as the city in which the course should be established as being most available to the majority of foreign students and offering excellent facilities for University courses and the study of nursing procedures.

The problem of inducing the Red Cross Societies to select a nurse for post-graduate instruction in public health and to finance this year of study was second only to that of the establishment of the course itself. The first year it was given at King's College for Women, and the pioneer class numbered 19 students from 18 different countries. Although this beginning course was an experiment from every angle, it proved conclusively the opportunities there were for development, and the need it would meet ~~in~~ in promoting public health work in many countries.

At the beginning of the second year, in 1921, the International Course in Public Health Nursing as it is called, was opened at Bedford College for Women under the auspices of the League of Red Cross



*Bedford College*  
Societies. The Faculty instantly grasped the tremendous possibilities and significance of such a course, and their co-operation and interest have made for much of the success of the work. Waiving the customary strict entrance requirements, Bedford College for Women admits students to the International courses upon the recommendation of the League. This has enabled many foreign nurses to take the course who could otherwise not have matriculated in an English college. The scholarship of these students has more than justified the concession made on their behalf.

As each student is the product of a vastly different background of race, education and nursing standards, and as the work that each will undertake upon her return to her own country presents quite different problems, so the preparation for this work that each shall receive must be adjusted to her needs.

*Bedford College* (The Faculty) have made it possible to plan a somewhat elastic curriculum, giving the maximum of individual instruction, and allowing the students to register for portions of various courses as these seemed to meet their needs. When students have experienced difficulty with the language, special tutoring has been arranged, and many of the lecturers provide typewritten notes of their lectures.

In 1924, when the Nursing Division of the League decided to establish a second course in answer to many requests, an International Course for Nurse Administrators and Teachers in Schools of Nursing, it instantly met with the same helpful co-operation from Bedford College for Women and the College of Nursing.

Each year as the students from all over the world have gathered in London for their work, the need for a residence for them has become increasingly apparent. The president of the Czecho-Slovak Red



Cross suggested that such a residence be provided and eight other National Red Cross Societies have joined in contributing toward it. The gift of the British Red Cross has been the leasehold for six and a half years of a house at No. 15 Manchester Square. The wisdom of this step cannot be overestimated. Living together during this year, these women form lasting friendships, and discuss each other's problems which are common to them all. This breakdown many of ~~the~~ the racial barriers that ~~many~~ may have kept them apart and allows them to absorb the culture and riches that each have to offer.

"International House" will be more than a home for the students; it will be a club where lectures will be delivered, a nursing library assembled and a welcome extended to all foreign nurses visiting in London. The Faculty of Bedford College for Women is represented on the House Committee, and gives the same careful consideration to these problems as it does to all matters relating to the International Students.

For Bedford College for Women appreciate the earnest effort, and eager interest of these foreign nurses, and the sacrifices many of them have made for this year of study. The problems it holds for them and the difficult work they will undertake will need all their courage and all their wisdom. And the College is concentrating its efforts in their behalf.

The students appreciate this understanding and this thoughtfulness. For each of them Bedford College for Women has the added significance of an Alma Mater in a foreign land, an Alma Mater forever associated with their work, where their year of study will have broadened their tolerance and deepened their sympathies, where, among other things, they will have learned the splendid spirit of internationalism.



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The Internationals now number sixty-eight from thirty-four different countries, and are doing work of which any college may well be proud. Of the forty eight engaged in public health work, forty hold positions as supervisors or directors of these activities and eighteen of them are conducting courses in public health for nurses. Thirteen are employed in hospitals, and wherever they may be are spreading ever wider the benefits of the knowledge acquired in their year in London. Their work shows vision, initiative, originality. Child welfare clinics, health demonstrations, new public health nursing services, newspaper and magazine articles, lectures with cinema, - these are but a few of the activities by which these enthusiastic young women are carrying on their health instruction. They have unlimited work to do, often in the face of unexpected disappointments and discouragements: Bedford College for Women and the League of Red Cross Societies has every confidence in their ability to do it well.

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