

Legal Matters.

WARRENER *v.* BARNES.

THE local press has devoted six columns of space to reporting the hearing of the action brought against the Mayor of Glossop (Alderman John Barnes) by Miss Ellen Warrener, late matron of Wood's Hospital, Glossop. Having regard to the issues involved in this case we do not think the prominence given to it is at all too great, as the lessons to be learnt, both by nurses and by the public are of the utmost importance. The attitude lately assumed by some committees, guardians, and medical men, with regard to nurses is one of unjustifiable autocracy, and undoubtedly this fact is due to the cue given by the officials of the Royal British Nurses' Association and the despotic and tyrannical attitude assumed by these persons in the management of nurses' professional affairs. It will be remembered that Miss Warrener was given three months' notice to leave Wood's Hospital, it being asserted that she had tyrannized over the nurses and that she had been unkind to the patients, but when Miss Warrener asked for any complaints which the council had against her to be made in writing, this was refused. Alderman Rigge proposed that Miss Warrener be given three months' notice to leave, and Alderman John Barnes, Mayor of Glossop, in seconding this resolution, made the following remarks:—

"The reason he (the Mayor) seconded the resolution was from personal observation at Wood's Hospital. From what he had seen himself of the nurses and persons there, he regarded them, neither more or less, than 'white slaves.' He would never submit to Miss Warrener, or any other woman in England, that had such tyrannizing control over human life. That was plain English for them, and he would not flinch from the resolution. From what he had seen, personally, the girls at the hospital had been in terror, and it would be a disgrace to him to flinch one inch, and he would not, even at the instigation of Ald. Rowbottom. He asked that the minutes be passed. When a patient was stretched on a couch, and the doctors were manipulating a man's leg, and he was compelled to cry out, as was only natural he should, with pain, the matron stood by and told him 'to think that it is someone else's leg;' he asked them if they considered that kindness or a christian feeling, to tell a patient that he should think it was someone else's leg."

This was the slander complained of, for which the plaintiff sought to recover £500 damages at the Manchester Assizes.

The defence raised by the Mayor of Glossop is remarkable:—

1. He never spoke the words.
2. They did not bear a slanderous meaning.
3. They were privileged.
4. They were true in substance and in fact.

It would be interesting if this gentleman would explain these conflicting statements.

Miss Warrener was appointed Matron of Wood's Hospital in 1889, and the hospital, which was a munificent foundation of the gentleman whose name it bears, was put under the control of the Glossop Town Council. A visiting committee was appointed to go round at stated intervals to make reports, and to receive complaints, if any persons had any to advance. Everything went smoothly until Miss Warrener had occasion to object to the extraordinary fact that when Dr. Bowden was appointed lecturer to the nurses he did not consider it necessary to consult the matron in any way, and he did not consult her. Lectures given to the nursing staff were held without her being consulted. The examination took place without her being informed of it, and a nurse who had a certificate of the St. John Ambulance Association given to her in connection with these lectures applied to Miss Warrener for a certificate, which Miss Warrener, having received no formal intimation that the nurse had passed her examination, did not feel at liberty to grant. Miss Warrener naturally and properly complained, at a committee held on June 30th of this year, that, owing to Mr. Barnes' action in resenting her justifiable complaint, and to Dr. Bowden's not having consulted her for the arrangements of the lectures, she found her control of the nurses slipping from her. No other result from such discourtesy could possibly have been expected, but Mr. Barnes, instead of appreciating and apologising for her very real grievance, told Miss Warrener that she was not entitled to be consulted. Upon this Miss Warrener said, "If you and Dr. Bowden are going to teach my nurses insubordination, what am I to do? A gentleman would not have done it. A gentleman would not have held these lectures, and had examinations, without consulting me." We entirely agree with Miss Warrener, and we say, further, a gentleman *could* not have done it. Mr. Barnes, instead of considering Miss Warrener's complaint, was very angry, and said, "If she said anything of that sort he would order her out of the room." She replied, "Well, I must speak when I feel that I am in the right." Up to that moment there does not seem to have been the slightest suggestion by anybody that Miss Warrener had been guilty of any impropriety of conduct towards the nurses or anyone else, or that there had been the slightest ground or occasion for finding fault with her in her position of matron at the hospital; but immediately after that the attitude of the committee, of which Mr. Barnes is a member, towards Miss Warrener, changed. When she attended a meeting a little later, a long list of questions was put before her concerning matters that had occurred years before, a great number of them making suggestions that some patient or other, whom probably at the time Miss Warrener had forgotten, had been improperly treated in the matter of food or otherwise, or that some nurse

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