

#### THE CANKER AT THE ROOT.

For years the most suitable girls had passed over nursing in their choice of a career. Could we wonder, in view of the long hours, hard work, and undefined duties and standards of training? Hospital governors in this country employed probationers more with the view of carrying out the nursing of the sick and the working of the hospital, than with the aim of training and turning out efficient nurses. The canker at the root was the exploitation of cheap labour. Economy in running public institutions was an admirable quality, but, when it was replaced by meanness, the outcome was shortage of labour and closed wards and the sick directly suffered.

#### SEEING RED.

Miss Paterson declared that to urge that nursing was a vocation and that, therefore, nurses objected to put pressure on employers for better conditions made her see red. She had no patience with those who claimed that nursing was a vocation and not a profession. Did the British public expect their poor to be nursed on the cheap by women with a vocation? If a hospital could not be supported by its subscriptions, don't let it be run at the expense of the nursing staff.

#### HANG UP THE HALO!

Let us hang up the "halo" and realize that the aims and ideals of the nurse were not lowered because she was working for her living and fighting for a strong economic position. Our terribly low economic position to-day was due to the facts that the probationer could not afford to risk her certificate nor the Sister her post. Moreover, one had very little energy left to rebel after twelve hours' daily work, and well the employers knew it. Any sign of reform (rebellion it was called) was quickly squashed by the Matrons, who, fearful of their own positions, had missed a glorious chance of organizing and leading their nurses out of the slave market into the purer economic atmosphere enjoyed by our Colonial and American Nursing Sisters.

#### MATRONS DESERT RANK AND FILE.

There were exceptions, splendid ones, said Miss Paterson, turning to the chairman (an incident acclaimed by a round of applause), but it would be a long time before we could forgive those who had deserted the rank and file in their fight for better conditions and gone over to the employers' side during the present crisis. The College of Nursing Company, Ltd., were the employers. The economic position of the hospital Sister would not be improved by them; the Company was formed when they saw a chance of the nurses improving their position at their employers' expense.

Nothing struck the Colonial nurses more than our lack of status. Perhaps the hospital Sister might be accorded a degree more than the private nurse, but we had all suffered from the patronage

of the aristocratic "ward visitor," who tried to run our ward for us; from the untrained Commandant, placed by virtue of her bank balance or birth over the trained woman working for a salary; and last, but not least, from the association of women who plead for charity on our behalf under the name of the Nation's Fund for Nurses. One and all, we were exploited and patronised to a degree the Colonials failed to understand.

The speaker contrasted the salaries of Sisters in this country with those in our Dominions. These are, in New Zealand, for Staff Nurses and Sisters £50-£100 (where the former have an eight hours' day; in Australia, with an eight hours day, £50-£96. Lately they have been under revision, and, at the Prince Alfred Hospital, Sydney, Sisters' salaries now range from £100-£120; in Canada the average is £120-£144, in one large hospital the head theatre Sister drawing £180 and all found.

These figures might make us gasp, but we could do more than gasp, we could earn the same by making a stand. The nurses had won a Royal Charter. The Conference was held under the auspices of the only nurses' society that could use the word Royal. Possessing the Charter, let them, as the Americans say, "get busy"—use it. We must strengthen the nurses' societies now affiliated under the Charter, force the Nurses' (not the Employers') Bill for State Registration through Parliament, set up an independent Nursing Council to arrange our profession and settle our salaries. Then, and not till then, could we hope to have the same professional and economic status as the nurses of the Colonies; but we should get nothing by sitting still and letting employers of nurses arrange our affairs, rather we should soon lose the little we already have.

Miss Paterson concluded by saying that as a probationer she fought, as a Sister she fought, and she intended to go on fighting until we attain our goal. (Applause.)

#### THE PRIVATE NURSE.

Mrs. Ernest Collins, who spoke from the standpoint of the private nurse, said that if the scale of salaries in institutions was what it ought to be there would not be overcrowding in the ranks of private nurses, and, consequently, there would be less competition and fewer of the long and expensive intervals of waiting between cases which made private nursing work anything but the pathway to affluence which so many people believed it to be.

She thought a great deal could be done to improve the prospects of private nurses if they would loyally stand by one another. The experience of most private nurses was that there was no cohesion to strengthen their position. Each nurse was more or less a law to herself, and far too often nurses had to accept conditions as to hours on duty, the fees charged for their services, &c., simply because the nurse first put in charge of the case had established certain precedents.

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