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Editorial.

How Are the Mighty Fallen.

FREQUENT REFERENCE HAS been made in these columns to the growing dissatisfaction, amounting to bitter distress, expressed by patients and their friends concerning their experience while under treatment in hospital, which is increasing to an alarming extent, and alas! to the grievous detriment of the spirit of healing, so vital to the basic principles of Nursing.

How are the mighty fallen! We remember with what confidence vast numbers looked to our hospitals for comfort and relief in their suffering.

From among all classes of society, criticism comes of the lack of sympathy and humane treatment, which, to say the least of it, creates a sense of deep concern with some, and with others a declared vow of "thankfulness to be released from their sojourn and the hope that they may never enter hospital again," an utterance now too frequently heard!

In 1950 we drew attention to the opinion expressed in his Parish Magazine by Prebendary H. J. Reginald Osborne, Vicar of St. Saviour's, Walton Street, Chelsea, and which appeared also in the press, that there should be an enquiry by the Minister of Health into "callous" treatment of patients by nurses in some hospitals, of taking no interest in their work and neglecting their patients.

In our Editorial of January, 1951, we stated "Hard words indeed, and coming from such a source, words that cannot be lightly passed over as having been spoken in heat by one smarting under fancied or apparent slight. Can it be that we are losing the noble traditions of our Profession? Are those ideals of service at which we aimed high a moral standard for the new generation of nurses? What can be at fault that one who, by virtue of his position should not speak falsely, can consider us on the level of the 'Sairey Gamps' of the past?"

It will be remembered that on May 15th, 1953, criticism of Nursing was debated in the House of Lords, one point alluded to was the time spent by trained nurses on clerical work.

Lord Amulree, as a doctor, urged the importance of basic nursing rather than training students to become "little doctors." Lord Haden-Guest asked what action the Government was prepared to take. Finally, the Minister of Health, Mr. Macleod, called a meeting of his Advisory Council, and was anxious no time be lost.

All who have the public good at heart will welcome the good news published in the daily press on September 1st, that Major Cecil Poole, M.P. for Perry Barr, Birmingham, having had the experience of treatment in five hospitals, expresses himself adamant in bringing before Parliament searching questions on the present lamentable conditions now prevailing in the Hospital World.

It is his opinion that nurses are the finest body of women in the land. But he said: "The present training system is failing to give them the right conception of approach and relationship to the patient.

"The tendency everywhere is that the patient must be told nothing, either as to what is wrong with him or what is going to happen to him."

In our experience, the drift in Hospital Administration to detract from Matron's authority in those domestic departments pertaining to the care of the patients and nurses, insidiously pursued by Officialdom for the past decade, is primarily responsible for the present chaotic state of affairs. A state of affairs that should not be surprising when it is remembered that the first step in the downward course was the abolition of the One Portal System to the State Register of Nurses. Next, a few years later, came another blow in the recognition by the State of a second-grade nurse—The Assistant Nurse—to the detriment of the fully qualified State Registered Nurse.

Yet a further degradation came in the passing of the Nurses Act, 1949, in which the nurses, on their own Governing Body (The General Nursing Council), lost their clear majority of nine seats over all other persons!

Then the final injustice, which denied to fully qualified State Registered Nurses, under the 1919 Act, the printing and publishing of their State Register of Nurses.

We hold, therefore, that not until such misguided and unjustifiable legislation is rescinded, can the true spirit of healing, for which our Profession was once so famous, be retrieved.

Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that there are those in the Nursing Profession who realise the necessity of drastic reform. In this category we quote Miss Margaret Scales, S.R.N., S.C.M., the authoress of "Handbook for Ward Sisters," previously reviewed in these columns. It could be studied by all nurses with advantage. In this excellent work Miss Scales gives a clarion call to her colleagues, of how to keep the art of Nursing in its true perspective, by awareness of the real needs of the patient.

Courtesy and sympathy as basic principles are the keynote throughout the book. A. S. B.

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