

# THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED  
THE NURSING RECORD

ETHEL GORDON FENWICK, S.R.N., HON. EDITOR 1888—1947.

No. 2248. Vol. 103.

DECEMBER, 1955.

Price Sevenpence.

## Editorial.

### Christmas Meditation.

#### The Flight from our Hospitals.

IT IS NOT EASY to write a Christmas meditation, full of joy, hope and of promise at this sad period in our Nursing history. Something difficult to understand, and even more difficult to handle has crept into our profession, and we are now faced with a most critical situation, for the future of the Nursing profession is at stake. We need, at this unhappy time, someone with patience, generosity and far-seeing wisdom, to lead us out of this morass of confusion into stability and the ways of sound common sense and to restore an abiding good reputation to our profession.

With a few notable exceptions, one hears everywhere the same dismal story of the acute shortage of nurses, and of the appalling overworking of those good nurses who still remain faithful to their chosen career. Rumours are rife that in many famous provincial general hospitals, general and private beds are being closed down for lack of nurses; and that those wards remaining open, are staffed in many instances, by a long-suffering ward sister and her staff of auxiliaries and orderlies!

Had the late Mrs. Bedford Fenwick been alive today, she would have remarked in her caustic fashion—as she has said so many times in the past:—

“Nurses are themselves entirely to blame for the evils which have come upon them. For when the one portal of entry to the profession was swept away, by the action of senior members, then nurses deliberately threw away their own hard earned privileges and status. Once one admits a second grade of nurse, then there will be no end to the hierarchies below hierarchies, and we will be forced to submit to their demands for equal status and salaries. Indeed they will try to claim more for they will argue that they are doing the real nursing.”

And—of course—she was right, as she always was. For already we have the State Enrolled Assistant Nurses, the nursing auxiliaries and the ward orderlies, all disdaining domestic work, “because they are engaged in nursing.” Now comes the Nursing Assistant, Class II, for the mental hospitals, who are “to be trained in elementary nursing duties and be given a certificate of proficiency at the end of their training.” Recently a Royal Lady presented the first of these “certificates” in order to encourage recruitment!

Matrons of mental hospitals, harried and desperately worried by the insufficiency of staff to care for their patients are to have the questionable privilege of recruiting and training this new grade. They will come

from the failures of the recognised training schools, or from those less well educated people who are not fit for much in the way of a career, or from those who have no time to make a career because of marriage, children and other commitments. Could anything more sad or dismal have overtaken our once proud profession—the envy of all other countries of the wide world?

Are these people *really* the people we wish to attract to nursing? Would we like to be nursed by them and be under their sole care in Sister's absence?

No—a thousand times No! We want the best possible candidates and only the best will do! You might answer “Yes—we also want only the best but how in the world can we recruit them?”

The reply is simple—though very expensive and it is by putting first things first. State Registered Nurses must be treated as precious and as an enlightened and educated body of women. A great gulf must be fixed between them and their financial and statutory rewards, and those of all aspirants to nursing. Their salaries must be greatly increased so that student nurses with their small, but adequate training allowances, will look with longing and envy on those of their trained colleagues and lose no possible time in bridging the gulf that yawns between them. Give student nurses something to compete and strive for, and they'll enter the hospitals in a flood-tide in order to grasp the privileges of trained nurses for themselves. Otherwise, our profession is doomed and will shortly be in the hands of untrained, unskilled and unenlightened people.

Recently we met a young and attractive woman of 24 summers, who was a junior staff manager in one of a chain of large stores. When she was 20, she was sent to the staff college by her firm in order to learn administration and the general care of sales girls. At 22 she received her first appointment at £600 p.a. with a Christmas bonus thrown in. No doubt that same young lady would be nursing—if her future in nursing was as rosy as it is in business. Many Matrons over 50 years only receive a few pounds more per annum!

Many will criticise and argue that nursing still should attract the best girls because of its ethical standing and because of the warm, comfortable glow one experiences when doing good to others and when bringing relief to their stricken fellow men. All this is only too true. Nursing is the finest possible career that enthusiastic and altruistic young persons could wish to take up, and many young people candidly agree. But—as they rightly point out—one cannot buy the necessities of life with this warm and comfortable glow, and as clothes and food and the other amenities of civilised living must be paid for in cash, they reluctantly go where the cash is assured!

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)