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Editorial.

THE SUICIDE OF NURSES.

The frequency with which suicide occurs amongst nurses naturally arouses enquiry upon the part of the public as to why this should be the case, and it is apt to assume, in most instances quite incorrectly, that the over severity of the discipline enforced in hospitals and institutions is the cause of such rash actions.

Thus in the recent case of the suicide of a probationer at the Carshalton Cottage Hospital, it was reported that she took her life by drinking strychnine after being reprimanded by the Matron for a slight fault. Many people would draw the conclusion that the reprimand was over severe, but the evidence at the inquest showed that the Matron, Miss Rose B. Mustard, was both kind and gentle and that the deceased probationer was of a very passionate nature and violent temper and resented being told, even gently, of any small failing. Dr. Cressy, Medical Officer to the Hospital, stated also that she was neurotic. This brings out a point to which we are of opinion too little consideration is given in the selection of probationers, namely, that of temperament.

It is right that enquiries should be made as to physical and moral fitness, but no less searching questions should be asked in regard to the temperament of the applicant. A great strain is imposed upon the nervous system, both of probationers in training and of certificated nurses in the course of their work, and bearing this fact in mind those of equable temperament should be selected, as they are most able to stand the strain of nursing life, and consequently make the best nurses. Strict enquiries on this point are the more necessary because relations are apt to think that the discipline of hospital life will be good for a girl who is of

difficult temper, or unmanageable at home, and consequently many such girls apply for admission to nurse training schools.

Another important point which arises out of the evidence given in the course of the inquest on the Carshalton tragedy is the necessity for keeping poisons under lock and key. We confess that the opinion expressed by Dr. Cressy, Medical Officer to the Hospital, on this point appears to us amazing. He said that "to talk about locking up poisons was absolute nonsense," and that it involved "a great deal more trouble than he would like to take, and more, in fact, than he would take."

It was brought out that the drugs at the Carshalton Hospital are kept in a cupboard just outside the bedroom door of the deceased probationer, the key being left in the lock. They were removed to this place because "the doctors agreed that it was not safe for them to be downstairs, and they chose this spot as the safest place away from the public." In protecting the patients and the public, the medical staff appear to have overlooked two points (1) that drugs such as strychnine and ether, if needed, are, in the case of some patients, wanted instantly, and a patient would probably be dead by the time they were fetched from upstairs, and (2) that to leave drugs readily accessible to nurses, and more especially to new and untried probationers, is to put in their way the temptation to dose themselves, without medical direction, from which so much evil results. In our opinion there should be a poison cupboard attached to every hospital division and all poisons should be kept strictly under lock and key, the key being in the charge of the Sister or Head Nurse, and the Matron having a master key. By this means the patients would be safeguarded, and only nurses of proved stability and trustworthiness would have access to dangerous drugs.

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