

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

IN A COTTAGE HOSPITAL.*

"In a Cottage Hospital," by George Trelawney, is a terrible picture of the conditions which are possible in a hospital where the discipline is lax and the welfare of the sick a secondary consideration. The author states that the story which he relates was told to him by a broken-hearted mother whose son died in South Africa during the Boer War, and that the medical details were mostly obtained from a carefully-written account which the unhappy young doctor had himself compiled whilst actually in the hospital where the tragedy of his life took place.

We have read this book very carefully before bringing it to the notice of our readers, and we can only say that the picture of corruption, neglect and immorality which it contains is appalling; and if such things are possible in any public institution at the present day—and we sincerely hope that the conditions are an exception, and not a type, as the author appears to think—then they constitute the strongest possible plea for the State Registration of Trained Nurses and the establishment of a governing body, which will amongst other things maintain discipline in the nursing profession.

The story opens with the advent of the new house surgeon, Dr. James Kargill, to his first charge, that of the Rebley Cottage Hospital, where he arrived late at night, cold and weary, when "something hot to drink, and a comfortable bed, were imperative and pressing wants."

The first was supplied by the stout Matron, Miss Burroughs, who herself brought his coffee, poured it out, volunteered to say grace, which irritated him, and gave him certain details of the hospital work, including the fact that the last house surgeon never interfered, and left her to manage nearly all the female cases. "He was very young-looking, you know, and working women don't like young men to interfere with them, do they? You will do as you wish, of course, but the women are used to me now," she concluded suggestively. She further gave him an account of the nursing staff, every one of them trained by her to a pitch of excellence. "It's so nice to have your nurses trained to do anything, and they all attend to their work and are so reliable, you know. . . . Above everything I like to keep them from any undue familiarity with the House Surgeon and members of the Staff. Some of them, I am glad to say, have fixed their hopes upon a higher life than this, and are truly spiritually-minded."

Nevertheless, Dr. Kargill's conclusion was right—"this woman is a humbug"—and from the hypocritical Matron, neglectful of her duties, careless of the charge imposed upon her in the

supervision of the nursing staff, and dominated by her infatuation for the odious and criminal—but apparently fascinating—old minister, to the youngest nurse, there appears not to have been one in the building with whom the attraction of sex was not the moving power. The committee were venal tradesmen, interested in supplying the hospital with inferior goods, including putrid meat; the visiting staff—numbering amongst them a criminal abortionist—for the most part regarded the nursing staff as women of easy virtue, and the nurses' sitting-room as a fast club where midnight suppers and other orgies were the rule; and seem fairly correct in their conclusions.

The new house surgeon had a fair sample of the propriety of the nursing staff on his first night, when tired out he at length essayed to turn into bed, by finding that the bed was of the quality known as "apple pie," and when he returned to the adjoining sitting-room, where he had left a fine fire burning, for a light, the fire had been extinguished by having water thrown over it. In the distance were faint sounds of whispering and suppressed laughter, then a sound of light footsteps, and a white figure in a dressing gown with long hair down her back and feet bare of any covering whatever came down the corridor, passed into his sitting-room, and applied her ear to the key-hole of his bedroom door. Startled by a cough from Kargill, she fled precipitately, slipped, and twisted her ankle, and that was the moment when his life's tragedy began. He seems to have fallen a victim to this Delilah fairly easily, but at least his love for her was deep and true, and its whole influence elevating; so that the end of the life of this frivolous sensualist, poisoned by the knowledge of former wrong-doing, was better than the beginning; though the wrongful means which she took to avert its disastrous consequences ended in tragedy.

The young house surgeon was, in fact, brought face to face with a hot-bed of iniquity, and try as he would he found reform impossible. When the clumsy instruments in the hands of an incompetent surgeon resulted in the death of a patient on the operating table, and he tried hard to get a more up-to-date supply, he found himself baffled by a dishonest secretary. The visiting staff, slack or worse, gave him no support.

The appalling story of the sailor who, devoted to his wife, returned to find her dead, and the subject of a post-mortem examination, to gratify the partiality of one member of the staff for "specimens"; the rowdy picnic, and finally the arrest on a murder charge of a member of the staff, are all graphically told—told with an earnestness which leaves the impression on the mind of the reader that the author believes in the truth of his story, and is possessed with the conviction that he has a mission to accomplish in cleansing the hospital world, as did Dr. Kargill the Rebley Hospital before he went forth to his death.

It is not a book for the young person, but it is a book to read.

*By George Trelawney. (T. Werner Laurie, Clifford's Inn, W.C.)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)