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EDITORIAL.

ARTIFICIAL VERSUS FORCIBLE FEEDING.

The revolting practice of forcible feeding of women, in prison for conscience sake, who refuse to take the food supplied to them, is one of which the danger must be apparent to every experienced nurse, a danger which—notwithstanding all statements to the contrary—has been proved by the frequent release, by order of the Home Secretary, of women sentenced to terms of imprisonment, because of the critical condition of their health. The case which has recently occasioned most comment is that of Miss Lenton, the extent of whose injury is not divulged, but who was so critically ill that a doctor as well as a wardress accompanied her from the prison to her destination. This is a striking demonstration of the fact that forcible feeding, as administered in our prisons, to resisting victims, is dangerous to life.

To the trained nurse the fact which differentiates the feeding by tube of patients in hospital, and the forcible feeding of prisoners, lies in the word forcible. No nurse will deny the value of feeding by tube whether through the mouth or nose in certain cases. She has too often seen the life of the child with diphtheria saved, the life of the patient with stricture of the œsophagus prolonged by it, to do other than believe in its efficacy. But, the moment that the factor of force is introduced every fibre in her will protest—backed by all the strength not only of her humanity, but of her professional conscience—against the application of force in treatment which, if it is not to be dangerous, must be characterized with the greatest gentleness.

One of the first things impressed upon a nurse in training, who is entrusted to perform any office for a patient, is that, in using any appliance in connection with a mucous

membrane lined passage, the very greatest care must be exercised. No force of any kind must be used, and if a tube—be it a nasal, vaginal, uterine or rectal tube—a catheter, or the nozzle of an enema syringe does not pass quite easily, it must be at once withdrawn. It may have been unskillfully introduced, the size may be too large, or there may be some malformation in the patient obstructing its passage.

In the case of an adult sane patient, in hospital, resistance is practically unknown. The necessity for the use of the appliance is explained, and he or she, co-operates with the nurse in the use of a method which, skilfully performed, is painless if unpleasant. In the case of a sick child a little coaxing generally suffices.

But compare the ordinary dextrous routine practice connected with a nasal feed, as administered in a hospital ward, with the horrible procedures daily enacted in prison cells, where a resisting person in good health is pinioned, gagged, held down by a number of wardresses—not trained nurses—and fed forcibly. Does such food, often rejected shortly after it has been forced down, nourish the person to whom it is administered? We doubt it. In any case the process of digestion, and consequently the power of assimilation, must be seriously impaired by the mental disturbance undergone. The effects of a disturbed mental condition on the digestive system is very marked, a well known instance being the frequent repulsion to food of a person who has received bad news, or sustained sudden bereavement.

It is stated in justification of forcible feeding that it is "the only alternative" where the hunger strike is adopted in prison. This is not true of women Suffragists. What they demand is government by consent. It is high time that it was conceded, and that methods of barbarism ceased.

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