

History repeats itself. This expressive term was employed by the *British Medical Journal* in its issue for January 17, 1880 (p. 97). It was referring to the scandals at the Pendlebury Hospital for Children.

On March 13, 1880, it published a very strongly written and highly sarcastic editorial, which now reads almost prophetically (p. 405):—
“A curious anomaly in Hospital management at Pendlebury is observed in the relative positions of the Lady Superintendent of Nurses and the resident Medical officers. Usually in the absence of the staff and board the senior resident officer acts as their representative and controls the Hospital; but at Pendlebury it appears as if the Superintendent of Nursing is the leading resident official, the resident Medical officers being cyphers, except as regards their duties in the Wards. We are satisfied that this arrangement is a grave mistake. It imposes duties on the Nursing Superintendent which she cannot fulfil with satisfaction, and it is sure to introduce an element of discord into the Hospital.” The Medical profession, however, of Manchester would not tolerate this anomalous despotism, and after the gravest injury had been caused to the Hospital, public feeling was so unmistakably expressed that the Matron was compelled to resign, and the Committee to institute reforms.

But it is almost incredible that the Resident Medical Officers at the London Hospital are “cyphers” even “as regards their duties in the Wards,” and that the Medical Staff should countenance and actually support such an anomaly is more “incredible” still. For we are told that the House Physicians and House Surgeons “are the picked men of the entire college,” “the very best men that we can possibly produce” (Q. 7,800), and yet that these excellent gentlemen are absolutely not allowed to order Special Nurses for their patients; formerly they did so, and the Matron considered that “sometimes they were necessary, sometimes they were not” (Q. 6,542). Consequently, the subservient Committee ordained that only those patients should be supplied with Special Nurses whom the Matron considered to be in need of such extra care (Q. 6,542). Considering this official’s rare visits to the Wards and her absences from the Hospital (Q. 6,340), and that the Resident Doctors are presumably responsible for the lives of their patients, to prevent them from ordering special nursing for any case—however urgently it might be required—is almost extravagantly incredible. But it is a fact sworn to by the Matron herself.

We leave the Medical Staff to justify themselves to their professional brethren for thus placing their

House Physicians and Surgeons in subservience to the Matron in a purely medical matter. As the Nursing journal, and on behalf of Nurses, we protest against the Medical Staff thus supporting a “nursing despotism.” Because all experience proves that in the end such a *régime* is invariably fatal to the best interests of Nurses and of the sick.

An important fact and reprehensible practice is that the Matron is permitted to use terms to qualify the Hospital certificates of the Nurses as she pleases (Q. 6,420-1), making thereby the official document a mere prejudiced expression of private opinion.

Then there arises the question of the “trial” Probationers, which has been carefully kept in the background by the Committee. In its Report (p. 2) it states that five hundred and ninety-nine regular Probationers have been entered on the registers in the last ten years. But it makes no mention of the large numbers who every year have been admitted “on trial.” It is stated that no separate record is kept of these. They are taken into the Hospital and employed in tending the sick, yet they are not Hospital officials, and they are unpaid workers. They are kept for a month or five weeks, or even longer. Ten of them do the work of one Nurse for a whole year, so the system is as cheap as it is simple. Who the Matron chooses she appoints on the regular staff, and the others are turned out of the Hospital when they have accomplished sufficient gratuitous work for the charity, and—whether justly or unjustly—the Committee knows nothing about them.

But we maintain that the plan which is enforced at all well-managed Institutions should be adopted at the London Hospital. Every worker in the Hospital should be placed on the official register before she is admitted, and the Committee, whose servant she is, should have that knowledge of her existence and therefore of her career in that capacity. She is surely a human being, and not an anonymous unit. *A system which places unnumbered unrecognised unpaid servants of a public Institution under the sole control of one of its officials opens a wide door for abuses, and therefore cannot be defended as either just or expedient.*

It is bad policy to be haughty, repellent, un-social. The most resolute aspirant to wealth or position may stumble as he climbs, and, if no one stretches out a finger to save him, may roll headlong to a depth far below the point from which he started. A lift for a lift is the business rule of to-day.

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