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EDITORIAL.

A HUMAN RIGHT.

The maiden speech of Mr. Smallwood, M.P., in the House of Commons, is an indictment of the Army Council which that body will do well to meet forthwith.

Having lost his younger son in the War, Mr. Smallwood went out to France to see his elder son, who had been wounded for the third time. What happened he told to the House of Commons in the following words:—

"I was there in time. The second day passed, and the third came. I said to the doctor, 'I do not like the look of the boy.' I saw the Sister. The rules of the military hospital were, 'Be there at two, not five minutes before; leave at five, and not five minutes afterwards.' I said to the Sister, 'The boy is not looking what he ought to do,' and begged her to let me stop the night. She said she could not, strict orders being given that no one had to stop after five. But I said, 'I have got him to sleep, he begged me to stop.' She said, 'I am sorry I cannot do it. The Colonel has given strict orders that no one shall stop after five o'clock.' I begged that I might stay. 'No,' she said, 'the Matron will be round shortly, and you must not do so; but if you like to stop on your own responsibility you must risk it.' I stayed hidden there for three hours behind a screen. Then the Matron came round, angry because she found me, and insisted upon my leaving. I told her the circumstances, and I asked for the Colonel. Not one single budge would be made, not one single step would be taken. It was the last night my boy lived, and I was not permitted to stop with him. I felt—as any man who had been treated in that way would feel—I felt that the soullessness of the War Office is such as cannot be understood by the people outside."

We leave others to deal with the whole military system. At the present moment we are concerned with it in connection with our own profession, the traditions of which are that the greatest consideration is shown to the relatives of patients who are dangerously ill. It is the practice in civilian hospitals for a list of such patients to be compiled, and the near relatives of such a patient have the right of access to him at any time. Not only so, but, should there be a change for the worse in any patient, a letter, or if urgent a telegram, is sent to the nearest relative acquainting him of the fact. If this is not the case in military hospitals, the sooner it is enforced by the Director General of the Army Medical Department the better.

But we consider that the name of the hospital, and the name of the matron who was "angry" because a father pleaded to be allowed to stay with his dying son, and insisted on his leaving, should be given. For the record of the Military Nursing Services is an honourable one, and its members would not have gained the gratitude of their patients, and the confidence of the public, if such callousness were usual. The War Office may be soulless, but few trained nurses have hearts of stone, and further, if the matron felt unable to grant such a human right, she should herself have seen the Colonel and obtained the required permission.

That autocracy reigns supreme in the office of the Matron-in-chief, the disgraceful "serf clause" which her subordinates are compelled to sign is proof positive. Let us hope that Members of Parliament will insist on the elimination of this clause from the Nurses' Contract. The result of the servility which it inculcates is amply demonstrated in the case placed before Parliament by Mr. Smallwood.

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