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## EDITORIAL.

### "A SUBSTANTIAL PENALTY."

When the nation takes into its charge classes of persons, who have thus no means of self-protection, it rightly enacts laws to safeguard those for whose welfare it assumes responsibility—infants, minors, feeble-minded, and especially the insane. For the tragedy of the last class is that while, for their own benefit and that of the community, they are placed under care, they are removed from public observation, and therefore from the protection afforded by public opinion, and, at the same time, from the nature of their complaint; arising from a disordered brain, they are often difficult to deal with, requiring sympathy, tact, wisdom, and patience. Indeed, patients suffering from mental diseases require the very highest type of men and women to attend them, both as regards personality, and trained skill.

This fact was not always appreciated. There are now in the museum at Bethlem Hospital a collection of implements formerly in use in that institution, which are instruments of torture rather than remedial agents for the treatment of the sick in mind. The words "asylum" and "keeper" indicated the attitude of mind of the public to these poor people. Remedial treatment was not the object of institutions for the insane so much as their restraint. Even in the highest circles the keeper had almost absolute power over his unfortunate patient, and it is on record that when George III. transgressed, his keeper knocked down that unfortunate monarch "as flat as a flounder."

The present stage of evolution is one of remedial treatment. Attendants and nurses are trained to give mental patients nursing

care, the employment of physical force in dealing with them is recognised not only as cruel, but as stupid and unscientific, and all those employed in the care of the insane are strictly prohibited from striking or maltreating them, under the regulations of the Lunacy Board of Control.

It is, therefore, inexcusable for a nurse to use physical force in dealing with a refractory patient, as in the case of an unfortunate woman at the Brookwood Mental Hospital recently, the sequel to which was the prosecution, at Woking Police Court, by Mr. K. G. Thomas, acting for the Surrey County Council, of Anna Elizabeth Matthews, a former nurse at the hospital, for alleged ill-treatment of this patient. The defendant admitted having smacked the patient's face, but denied ill-treating her. Evidence was given by the chief nurse that she saw the patient sitting on a form, her hands being held by a nurse, while Nurse Matthews, who was standing behind her, struck her three or four blows in quick succession on the head and neck. The medical superintendent, Dr. J. A. Lowrie, deposed that he found bruising on the back of the patient's neck, and there was blood on her clothing.

The Chairman of the Bench said they would be failing in their duty if they did not impose a substantial penalty, and fined the defendant £5, which appears to us totally inadequate in view of the gravity of the offence, especially as this is only one of several similar cases which have been reported in the press recently. If sentences of imprisonment were passed when helpless patients are cruelly assaulted, it might have a deterrent influence and protect other patients from such assaults.

We do hope that the General Nursing Council will do all in its power to raise the standard of mental nursing in every way.

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