

CLAIM BY PROBATIONARY NURSES FOR WRONGFUL DISMISSAL.

ACTION SETTLED.

[SLATTER *v.* GUARDIANS OF BRENTWOOD UNION
O'DWYER *v.* SAME.
MAGEE *v.* SAME.

[*King's Bench Division.*]

(*Before MR. JUSTICE DARLING and a Special Jury.*)

These were actions brought by three probationary nurses against the Guardians of the Poor of the Brentford Union, Isleworth, for damages for alleged wrongful dismissal. The plaintiff in the first action was Miss Mabel Slatter, of Bristol, who was employed by the defendants as a probationary nurse at the West Middlesex Hospital, under a written agreement for three years from April 7th, 1920. On April 13th, 1921, she was dismissed. The agreement was admitted by the defendants, but they contended that the plaintiff was discharged for disobedience.

Sir Edward Marshall Hall, K.C., and Mr. Leon Freedman appeared for the plaintiff; and Mr. Charles, K.C., and Lord Erleigh for the defendants.

Sir Edward Marshall Hall, in opening the case, said that there were thousands of people awaiting the verdict of the jury, although the actual amount in dispute in the action was only about £200. Boards of Guardians had been subject to considerable criticism since the days of *Oliver Twist*, and, though things were much better than they used to be, there was still room for improvement in the administration of the Poor Law. At the time of the dispute the chairman of the Brentford Board of Guardians was Mr. Greville Smith, and the chairman of the hospital Miss Cumberbatch. Miss Slatter, who was 25 years of age, had seen service with the Women's Corps in France. Everything went well at the hospital until January, 1921, when Miss Slatter went to see the Matron about the nurses' holiday, and was said to have been rude. In the following month the plaintiff, having seen an announcement in a newspaper that nurses were to undergo a competitive examination, said one day at luncheon that she hoped it would not happen in her time, as they would not stand a chance against nurses trained in first-class hospitals. That statement was reported to her superiors, and three days later she was called before the Superintendent, and was asked whether she had said that the West Middlesex Hospital was a third-rate hospital. When she denied that she had made such a statement she was told that she was deceitful. There were four inquisitions on the matter, and eventually the subject was dropped, on the understanding that Miss Slatter had apologised, although she protested that she had never uttered the words imputed to her.

On March 28th, there was a dance at the hospital, and the plaintiff, who was on night duty, was under the impression that she need not go on duty until an hour-and-a-half after the usual time. The nurses were eventually sent on duty without a meal

because they were late. On the morning after the dance, they were told by the Matron that dances at the hospital would be abolished. On April 13th, there was trouble with Nurse O'Dwyer, who was summarily dismissed. The matter aroused comment among the nursing staff, and a "round robin" was got up asking the Board for the reasons for the dismissal, and requesting that Nurse O'Dwyer should be temporarily reinstated while the subject was investigated. Miss Slatter was one of the forty-nine signatories. When the petition was presented, the nurses were called to the central hall, where they were addressed by the Chairman of the Board, who said that the nurses were "like a lot of office boys addressing ladies and gentlemen." He added: "I see Miss Slatter's name on the paper." The plaintiff was then called for, and as she stepped forward the Chairman said to her: "You are dismissed; get out of the building before nine o'clock to-morrow morning." She asked why, and the reply was: "You see that door; clear out, and don't go near the wards again." Since that time, Miss Slatter had been unable to obtain another place as nurse.

At this point his Lordship said that the trouble was a matter between the plaintiff and the Board, and he suggested that it might be arranged between the parties.

The Court adjourned while counsel held a consultation, at the conclusion of which

Mr. Charles said that he was glad that the action and the two following actions need not be tried further. It had been agreed that the defendants should pay Miss Slatter 40s. damages and her taxed costs, and that the records of the two other actions should be withdrawn without question of costs. Further, the Board of Guardians, who had considered the matter very carefully, were perfectly willing to give Miss Slatter and Miss Magee testimonials of their capacity and character.

His Lordship said that he was glad the parties had arranged the matters between them.

Judgment was entered accordingly, and in the other two cases the record was withdrawn.

Solicitors: Mr. E. V. Huxtable; Messrs. Charles Russell & Co.

PATHECANTHROPUS ERECTUS IN EXCELSUS.

We have quoted this report *verbatim* from *The Times* newspaper, as we desire to put this case on record from an entirely impartial point of view.

It was not denied by Counsel that Miss Slatter was dismissed by the Chairman of the Board without notice—publicly, and with ignominy, and spoken to by this official as if she was a dirty hound. Had this nurse been the lowest criminal no fellow creature would have the right to speak to, and treat her as she was spoken to, and treated, by Mr. Greville Smith, the Chairman of the Brentford Board of Guardians. Such conduct not only degraded his office, but was a gross offence against every woman present, and—right or wrong—the marvel is that her colleagues to a woman did not "clear out" with her.

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