

NURSES BEFORE THE CORONER.

The fatality which occurred at an important London Hospital, whereby an infant was scalded by water from a steam kettle, thus accelerating its death, proves the need for vigilance in carrying out every nursing duty. Routine duties are apt to become mechanical, and yet the least deviation, or carelessness, may be followed by the death of a patient and result in an inquiry by a Coroner, which indicates that he considers there is cause for questioning whether the death occurred from natural causes.

In the case referred to, a three months' old infant was admitted to the hospital suffering from pneumonia, and a steam kettle was ordered.

The nurse concerned stated at the inquest that she "placed the kettle on the gas-ring in the tent. As the steam was not sufficient she turned up the gas and then left." She went to the door of the ward to speak to a nurse, having called the attention of a colleague to the child, but not specially asking her to look after her. In about three minutes she was called back, and told that the boiling water from the kettle had splashed on to the child.

The nurse who called her deposed that while standing by the next cot she heard the sound of water bubbling. It came from the spout of the kettle, and fell on to the sheet of the deceased's cot. She did not see any fall on the child. She immediately removed the kettle, and called the nurse concerned.

The doctor in charge of the case stated that the child's condition was very serious, and he had ordered her to be treated by a steam kettle, as a means to save her life. The child was scalded on the right side of the scalp, the right arm, and right side of the chest. He thought the water must have spurted from the spout of the kettle. Death was due to pneumonia, accelerated by shock from the scalds.

He had never known one of these kettles spurt before. Replying to the Coroner he said he thought the gas must have been turned up too much.

The nurse, recalled, said that the gas was not turned up to the full extent.

The Coroner expressed the opinion that although the nurse said she was absent for three minutes he did not think she was so long away. She had given her evidence in a straightforward manner, and there was no intention of carelessness. He found that the death was accidental, adding that he thought

the nurse should not have left the gas turned up. There was no blame attributable, but the matter should be kept in mind.

We observe that in cases which come under the jurisdiction of Coroners—and we had the reports of three cases last week—they are usually leniently disposed towards nurses, and, while correct in their summing-up of the situation from the legal point of view, do not invariably understand the nursing details.

For instance, there is the position of the steam kettle. From the nature of the scalds it would appear that the spout of the kettle was pointed towards the child's head, whereas it should always be at right angles to it, the object of the treatment being to render the air within the tent moist, which is achieved by this method, and danger averted.

The use of gas in connection with a steam kettle is in our opinion open to question; this, however, is a matter for the hospital authorities; but, in any case, after the gas was turned up the effect should have been observed before leaving it. Possibly the higher gas pressure at the present time may have had something to do with the tragedy.

We think that if Coroners insisted upon the great responsibilities of nurses, and the serious results which may arise from any momentary relaxation of vigilance, nurses would be impressed with the seriousness of even small duties. Where lives are in the balance every action may have important consequences.

THE G.N.C. ELECTION.

SELF-DETERMINATION OR SERFDOM.

Wednesday, January 24th, at mid-day, was the last hour for receiving the Ballot Papers for the General Nursing Council Election, at Headquarters, 12, York Gate, N.W. We are informed that the envelopes are to be opened on Monday, 29th inst., and the Ballot Papers are to be counted on the following day, January 30th, so the result of the Election will be announced next week. We shall then know if Rule 9 (a)—designed to exclude the Independent Members of the Council and those Candidates advocating self-government for the Nursing Profession, and making it possible to place the government for the next five years under the control of the College of Nursing, Ltd.—has been successful. If through this illegal Rule, the Executive Officers, lay and otherwise, of the College, succeed in packing the General Nursing Council, the only benefit will be a free voice outside the Star Chamber.

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