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EDITORIAL.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SCIENTIFIC DIETING OF THE SICK.

The inquiry held into the cause of death of a patient in which the doctor in charge refused to sign the death certificate, which has been widely reported in the daily press, has many instructive lessons for trained nurses and the public.

Dr. S. A. Clarke, who attended the deceased, said at the opening of the inquiry that neither he nor Sir Sydney Russell Wells, whom he had consulted, was satisfied as to what caused the patient's death. The inquiry was thereupon adjourned for a report from Mr. John Webster, a Home Office Analyst, as to the contents of the stomach. At the resumed inquiry, on January 26th, Mr. Webster stated that there was no evidence of any poison.

Dr. Clarke at no time suggested that he had any suspicion that his patient had been poisoned, though that aspect almost inevitably presented itself to the police when a death certificate was refused; but he did suggest that had his directions as to diet and medicine been carried out, the patient might very possibly have been alive to-day.

Every trained nurse knows the importance of suitable dieting in cases of valvular disease of the heart, from which this patient was suffering. Incidentally, the case illustrates the importance of thoroughly grounding probationers-in-training in food values, the appetising preparation of food, and the reasons for the prescription of certain diet in various diseases.

The companion and housekeeper of the patient deposed that she had held this position for twenty-four years, and they were attached to one another. The invalid had fish almost every day, and was very fond of sheep's brains. She sometimes had chicken, which was always steamed, also plenty of eggs, and a patent food, milk puddings and jellies. She usually had bread and milk for supper. Questioned as to

why the medicine ordered for her employer had not been given to her, she asserted of one medicine that it "did her no good"; of another that it was given to produce sleep, and she was "chary of making the patient sleep too much"; and of a third, "it made her queer. Sometimes it made her restless, but more often sick."

The position in which the doctor was placed was, therefore, that his carefully thought out scientific treatment was of no avail, because it was in the hands of an attendant ignorant of his aims, who had the audacity to question, criticise, and ignore his instructions.

Dr. Clarke stated that the patient suffered from valvular disease of the heart. He objected to the whole *régime* adopted. He objected to fish at every meal, and to sheep's brains if they made the patient sick. Death was substantially accelerated by the conditions surrounding. The patient was dominated over. He never got a straight answer from her. He was absolutely certain she did not carry out his instructions. He ordered a nurse, but the maid would not have one. If his instructions as to diet had been carried out, the patient might be alive now. He considered the vomiting was caused by improper feeding.

A friend of the deceased lady stated that the patient would not have a nurse "because Ellen could not get on with her." From November to her death witness went to see her friend daily; she did not consider the proper diet was given to her.

The Coroner, summing up, said the jury had heard the result of the analysis. The next point was, had there been any negligence?

The jury returned a verdict of "Death from natural causes," and the Coroner added: "I must say I think Dr. Clarke acted quite properly in refusing to give a death certificate in this case."

The moral of the case is the value of scientific nursing, the protection afforded to the public by a State Register of Nurses, and a compulsory Syllabus of Nursing Education, enforced by Act of Parliament.

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