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EDITORIAL.

RULE OF THUMB NURSING.

The correspondence which has been printed recently in the two leading medical papers in the kingdom under the headings "Exploitation of Nurses" and the "Overstraining of Nurses," fills one with amazement. It is true that many medical practitioners know little about the training of nurses, and what is entailed in it; that they suspect the nurse with a thirst for the knowledge which is the basis of efficiency of a desire to rank as a pseudo-practitioner of medicine; whereas, in reality, it is the ignorant woman who presumes to assume that rôle, and the highly educated one who realises that though the practice of medicine and that of nursing have a common origin, the former proceeds along the lines of medical science, and its direction in relation to the sick; and the latter is concerned with the expert application of medical treatment in its practical form. To do this efficiently it is unquestionable that she must have a knowledge of the causes of the patient's illness, of the symptoms which may develop, of the treatment and drugs prescribed, and what results it is hoped to secure by their use, the effects which they may have, and what are the symptoms of over-dosage. In this connection most nurses can call to mind lives which might have been saved had the responsible nurse not been so ignorant.

It is an ill return on the part of medical practitioners who are so dependent on nurses for efficient help that many serious operations could not be performed at all were it not ensured, that they should endeavour to limit the knowledge of these loyal helpers, and to restrict them to being merely "rule of thumb nurses." It is the trained nurse who enables the surgeon or physician to sleep at night when he has an anxious case on hand, because he knows that the patient will be cared for every moment of the night by the watchful nurse, and his directions faithfully carried out to the minutest details.

Yet Dr. Edmund Cautley accuses the General Nursing Council with desiring to exploit nurses, for charging them an examination fee which will do no more than cover the expenses of two (not one) examinations, talks of its "astounding Syllabus," and counsels it to drop this "ridiculous" document; and Mr. Charles A. Morton, Mr. C. Lionel Coope, and Dr. H. Kerr, M.O.H., Newcastle-on-Tyne, agree with him.

The mental attitude of these gentlemen is reminiscent of the medicine-man of mediæval days, who resented and feared knowledge for those associated with him—days when wise women were burned as witches.

THE INCIDENCE OF RHEUMATIC DISEASES.

An extremely interesting and valuable Report, which we commend to the notice of our readers, is that presented to the Minister of Health by Sir George Newman, Chief Medical Officer of the Ministry of Health, just published by His Majesty's Stationery Office, price 2s. 6d. net.

The Report, as Sir George Newman explains in his Prefatory Note, embodies studies in the incidence of rheumatic diseases occurring amongst insured persons in England and Wales during 1922. These studies have been made by a Committee of the Medical Staff of the Ministry of Health which he instituted in 1921, and are founded upon records made by certain insurance practitioners during the course of their ordinary practice amongst insured persons in the year 1922. It is the first general and organised effort of insurance practitioners to undertake a "team" or group inquiry.

The inquiry is a systematic attempt to impound one portion of the vast stream of clinical information pouring through the surgeries of insurance practitioners throughout the country. The observations have been made by these practitioners acting as voluntary observers for the Committee, and, unlike most inquiries founded upon hospital and other statistics, the base line in this case is an insured population, whose number is known, and whose age constitution can be estimated with approximate accuracy. Concerning the new facts made manifest, "chief amongst them is the finding that nearly one-sixth of the industrial invalidity of this country is due to diseases classed as 'rheumatic.' Each year these diseases are costing the Approved Societies nearly £2,000,000 in sick benefit, and the nation over 3,000,000 weeks of work from the insured population alone. Half this loss, both of money and of time, is due to chronic joint diseases."

Turning to the question of causation, the findings of the Committee's observers "support the view that tonsillar sepsis is an important ætiological factor. Fifty per cent. of the patients with acute rheumatism had enlarged or septic tonsils, and dental sepsis appears to have been so frequently associated with the various forms of fibrositis and diseases characterised by chronic joint changes, as to give some confirmation to the thesis that this condition produces, or predisposes to this form of rheumatism."

Of very special interest is the fact that the Ministry of Health as the directing agent, and medical practitioners throughout the country as willing and keen collaborators, can obtain statistics and base upon them conclusions of far-reaching importance and interest to the whole community. It is full of promise for the future.

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