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## EDITORIAL.

### THE PRISON NURSING SERVICE.

Those who are acquainted with the history of prison reform, of the horrors of the conditions of prisons in this country, when, little over a century ago, Mrs. Elizabeth Fry began her noble work among the women prisoners in Newgate, cannot fail to be thrilled and amazed at the progress which has been made during that period.

On September 30th, at University Hall, Gordon Square, W.C., in the course of the day set apart by the Nurses' Missionary League for its Valedictory Meetings to wish God-speed to fourteen members sailing for the Mission Field this year, Dr. Hall Morton, Governor and Medical Officer at His Majesty's Prison, Holloway, spoke to an interested audience of nurses on the Prison Nursing Service in England and Wales, and justified the appropriateness of his presence by saying that the work done by nurses in prisons was pioneer work, which appealed to the same type of nurses as those interested in missionary efforts.

Up to the year 1919, there were, he said, no trained nurses in the prisons in England, the hospital officer did her work efficiently as far as possible, but she was not a nurse, and in 1919 the Prison Commissioners appreciated that the time had come when trained nurses should be appointed to look after the female prisoners. An Advisory Board was appointed with the late Dame Mary Scharlieb, who originally had been a nurse, as Chairman, and there could scarcely have been a more appropriate appointment.

There were difficulties to overcome, and things always move slowly in Government Departments. He himself came on the scene in 1921, and found at Holloway Miss L. E. Jolley, as Lady Superintendent, and six or seven nurses, but the conditions under which they lived were unsatisfactory; for instance, in the matter of food the wardresses always make provision for themselves, except for dining in mess, and it was supposed that the way the wardresses lived the nurses could live also. That was rectified, and the nurses now had their own mess and their food prepared for them.

To-day, the Prison Nursing Service had grown until there were thirty nurses with a Lady Superintendent, at Holloway, and a total number of fifty in the Service. In every prison in England and Wales there was at least one nurse.

Dr. Hall Morton thought that the public took their ideas of nurses in prison hospitals and of the hospitals themselves, largely from characters from Dickens, books

describing nurses in Victorian times, or from the cinemas from pictures manufactured in America. What were the facts? Take Holloway. There were two hospitals, one for convicted women, the other for remand prisoners (containing together seventy-five beds). Some of the wards had twelve beds, others three, and others again were single rooms. These differed little from the wards in other hospitals. They were covered with linoleum, electric light was installed, there were open fireplaces, (with cages in front), the beds had spring mattresses and there were flowers on the tables.

The patients differed from those in the ordinary hospitals inasmuch as the latter could, if they wished, discharge themselves, but the patient in a prison hospital was compelled to stay, so she was at a great disadvantage and every safeguard had to be provided for her.

The patients were usually twenty-five to thirty mental cases, pure and simple, there was little surgery, as surgical cases were sent to an outside hospital, being taken there by a Sister in the State uniform. The midwifery cases numbered fifteen to twenty in a year, the miscarriages about the same, and there were a certain number of cases of venereal disease, but these had diminished to a remarkable extent.

As to the type of nurse required, the essential qualifications were that she must be State registered, and be a certified midwife. If, in addition, she was qualified in mental nursing well and good.

The age limit on appointment was from twenty-six to thirty-eight. Dr. Hall Morton did not advocate the appointment of young nurses, who were only just qualified. He thought it a great mistake to enter the Service until they had looked around, and seen what branch of nursing appealed to them. The woman was wanted who had quite made up her mind to settle down and adopt prison nursing as her life's work. The salary was £75 a year, and at the end of twenty-five years' service she was entitled to retire on half pay. All prison nurses were Civil Servants.

Each nurse is supplied with uniform, furnished quarters, a comfortable bed-sitting room with a fire all day, or whenever she wants it, a bonus of £37 10s., which practically covers her contribution to the mess of 14s. a week, and there are other allowances. Her hours on duty are ninety-six a fortnight.

Other interesting details were given by Dr. Hall Morton, and nurses are indebted to him for lifting the veil from a branch of their work done necessarily behind closed gates, and to the Nurses' Missionary League for giving them the opportunity of hearing authoritatively of the conditions of the Prison Nursing Service.

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