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EDITORIAL.

THE HONOUR OF OUR PROFESSION IN THE DUST.

There cannot be a nurse, who has any sort of respect for her profession, any compassion for the dying who has not had her feelings scarified by the revelations in a recent article in *John Bull*, and, so far, no earnestly looked for denial of the dreadful "Death Dance" described has appeared, no extenuating circumstances could exist in such a case, and enquiries have gone rather to establish the allegations made than to disprove them. We hope that the London County Council will realise that the general public, and the nursing profession in particular, claim that the affair should not only meet with a searching enquiry and a frank disclosure of facts, but with the remedies suggested to avoid their repetition. We cannot but feel that if steps are not taken to enforce higher moral and ethical standards, the constantly recurring cases of misdemeanour and the leniency with which they are often viewed by those in authority, will prove a very heavy incubus to advancement in the status of nursing.

One would imagine that there could be no two opinions as to how seriously nurses should view the position, and yet we do hear two points of view expressed. One nurse writes: "I lose heart altogether about the future when I read these things. What is our profession coming to? Surely we must fight with all our strength to cleanse it of such practices that bring disrepute upon us all and the scorn, often thinly veiled, of those whom we serve in their times of crisis and anxiety." But here is the other point of view: "Yes, of course it is just horrid that that thing should have got into print, but we know *John Bull* exaggerates, and so I am not going to think about it at all. I think all these things will just come right in time. We must just wait for evolution. Think how far we have evolved in the last fifty years; in time these evils will disappear." But have we progressed so far? Three hundred and fifty years or so ago St. Camillus, starting his movement for hospital reform, tells of how, in the hospitals, he saw the eyes and mouths of the sick closed before they were dead; but of the sixteenth century he has nothing to relate comparable to the horrors of this orgie at Hackney Hospital. Surely there is not one of us, who read the great placards on the streets on "The Hospital Dance of Death," who did not grieve that the honour of our profession lay in the dust in the eyes of all London.

It is all very well to talk about mercy in such cases and in others where nurses, by the commission of

criminal offences, have merited removal from the Register. "Nothing emboldens sin so much as mercy," says Carlyle, and there is not the slightest doubt that the leniency with which acts of a criminal character are being regarded by many people, so placed as to have considerable responsibility, where ethical standards are involved, is causing a perversion in the moral outlook of the profession which is really serious. Insidiously, like some disease, laxity in moral standards is gaining ground. Right is right and wrong is wrong, and the person who finds all sorts of presumable excuses for a criminal or cruel act reminds us very much of the nurse who, when called to go to a sick person, rolled her quilt about her and said, "Let another go, I want to sleep." So it is in affairs of the profession. Some wrap themselves comfortably about with sentimentality and (again to quote Carlyle) this is "Twin sister to Cant, if not one and the same with it." "Let others fight; theirs it is to strive and struggle and court unpopularity for our profession." But "*all progress is strife to the end.*" There is no such thing as leaving it to evolution, for the choice is *always* a two-fold one—evolution or degeneration—things never remain as they are. It behoves every nurse to see that the banner of moral standards in the profession is carried high, for if we don't public opinion will come more and more to look askance at a profession that has had every possible opportunity given to it for progress if it would but have the courage and energy needed to manage its own affairs, instead of avoiding responsibility and "waiting for evolution."

We should be glad to see regulations instituted by the London County Council prohibiting dancing and other noisy recreation in the corridors or anywhere in close proximity to hospital wards, where so often there are those who are drawing near to the gates of death and others whose lives are shrouded in illness, pain and care. Few people think of dancing in a private house where a sick person lies, and surely it is infinitely out of place when carried on within reach of hospital wards.

We contend also that the first thing the London County Council should do in connection with the administration of its hospitals, is to issue a code of Rules calculated to give to the matron her rightful place and full authority as Head of the Nursing Department, a right claimed for her by Florence Nightingale seventy years ago, in order that she may have power to maintain discipline and a high sense of duty. Without such authority she is being called upon to make bricks without straw, and the moral tone of our Municipal Hospitals, and the standard of nursing will inevitably depreciate.

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