

"THE FINEST CAREER OF ALL."

As we go to press, an excited public is still worrying "The Finest Career of All," as presented in pamphlet form by an amazingly unsophisticated person in the hope of attracting the flower of womanhood to enter the London County Council Hospitals as Probationers—five hundred of which workers are required annually. Assuming rose coloured spectacles, the writer described in glamorous terms the luxurious charms of life in our municipal hospitals. Of course, the type of young woman to be attracted by the pamphlet was just the type most unsuited for the simple and arduous conditions of life which pertain in many of these institutions.

Had we been invited to write a call to nursing duty, we figure our pen inscribing some such words as these:— "Sympathetic, intelligent, beautiful girls (all good nurses are beautiful, souls shining through). I wonder if you know that in the district in which you live there stands a municipal hospital, where day and night hundreds of your fellow creatures—more or less helpless, suffering physical pain, and mental distress—would just love to have you around, helping them get well as quickly as possible, so that each may hasten home, where maybe those he loves are suffering want and distress, which he alone can alleviate. Or mother is worrying her heart out over the neglect of her children at home, or breaking it over the torture endured by a suffering child in the hospital ward.

"If you have no home duties, just slip along and call on Matron—tell her you want to help. She will soon realise you are the *right sort*, and soon you will have the joy of passing into the hospital for training, waving farewell to a shadowy Self lurking somewhere in the shadows, and enter upon a career than which none other can so satisfy the higher instincts of your nature. You will wake to realise that every little bit of strenuous duty well performed throughout the day is not confined within the four walls of a ward—or in the community house, in which you live with fellow workers, but that every human atom with whom you come into touch conveys afar the grace of your human understanding."

Nothing would induce me to allude in my pamphlet to creature comforts and "times off" or sports and the "light fantastic" and "go as you please." *Not one word.*

But to return to the hubbub aroused. The L.C.C. having, like His Satanic Majesty tempted with the delights of this world, found that a "Miss H." when she entered for training at St. Mary's, Islington, Hospital, found "The Finest Career of All" mostly moonshine. She promptly returned home and told her father "that there was nothing fine about being a nurse." Then Miss Esther Rickards, a medical member of the L.C.C., entered upon the fray. She reported the matter to the L.C.C. The complaints of "Miss H." were that a cosily furnished bedroom and other comforts were promised—and that when she was taken to the sleeping quarters her dreams were shattered, she found what she described as a "rather dingy, and certainly not cosy room—which she had to share with four other girls."

The result of Miss Esther Rickard's report was that the L.C.C. promptly and most unwisely withdrew the too rosy pamphlet.

Dr. Barrie Lambert, the woman chairman of the Council's Public Health Committee (which is the body responsible for propaganda to attract nurses), considers that the conditions of living for the nurses in most of the hospitals are excellent. But in a big scheme like this it is always possible to pick out a weak spot.

Miss Esther Rickards has told the Press that "This will be the first step in a great campaign to obtain better

conditions for the nurses, from whom there have been many complaints."

In consequence, criticism of the London County Council's nursing service in regard to the provision of rooms for nurses, following the withdrawal of the pamphlet, was dealt with at a recent meeting of the Council by Dr. Barrie Lambert, Chairman of the Central Public Health Committee.

Dr. Barrie Lambert stated that when the Council took over the hospital work of the Metropolitan Asylums Board and the Boards of Guardians there was a shortage of 500 nurses in the general hospitals. These posts had all been filled, together with an extra 500 nurses sanctioned by the Council.

Replying to a question on why the pamphlet, entitled "The Finest Career of All," was withdrawn, Dr. Barrie Lambert said, "This pamphlet was not a committee document, but was issued by the department for recruiting purposes after the take-over. The intention had been that each nurse should have a single room or cubicle. The Council, however, decided to increase the nursing staff by 500 so as to improve the nursing in the general hospitals.

"It therefore became necessary to use a certain number of double rooms until alternative accommodation could be found. As the pamphlet states that each nurse would have a room to herself, and as this might not be true in some 600 cases out of a total nursing staff of 10,000, the pamphlet was withdrawn."

Dr. Barrie Lambert stated that 892 rooms and 19 wooden partitioned cubicles would have been provided in nurses' homes at the end of the present financial year.

Five hundred of the trained nursing staff had been allowed to live out. Therefore, some 1,400 nurses had been rehoused.

Dr. Barrie Lambert, replying to a question as to how many probationer nurses resident in the Council hospitals had a bedroom to themselves, or shared a bedroom with one or more other nurses, stated that 3,664 had single rooms (brick); 215 occupied wooden cubicles; 92 occupied curtained cubicles; and 529 shared a bedroom. As regards the total staff of nurses of all grades, 91.8 occupied single rooms.

Dr. Barrie Lambert said there was evidence that the nurses at St. Mary's Hospital, Islington, were not dissatisfied with their conditions of service. The Matron-in-Chief had received letters from the staff at the hospital. They all expressed resentment at the attacks in the Press on their hospital. They all spoke of their happy life in hospital and the excellent conditions there, of the good food, and of their splendid nurses' home, and she herself had received a letter signed by 114 nurses at the hospital in the same terms.

Dr. Barrie Lambert said that she was extremely apprehensive of the effects of the attacks which had been made on the nursing service.

At a later stage Miss Rickards moved the adjournment of the Council to make a personal statement on the matter. The motion was lost.

Reform where it is necessary we all desire to see, and the privacy of a single bedroom is of the very first consideration in the well being of probationers. But we warn Dr. Rickards that attacks on the Matrons of Municipal Hospitals will only lead to disaster. She is reported as expressing the opinion that "the girls must have their own Homes, under their own committee of management, and away from the discipline of the Matron."

This fatal policy has already been sufficiently apparent in the centralisation of authority under medical direction at the L.C.C. Depreciation at Headquarters and contempt for the authority of the Heads of the Nursing Departments in Municipal Hospitals means misery for all concerned, especially for the patients admitted, for whose well-being we ratepayers feel ourselves responsible.

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