

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD

EDITED BY MRS. BEDFORD FENWICK, REGISTERED NURSE.

No. 2014. Vol. 84.

MAY, 1936.

Price Sevenpence.

EDITORIAL.

PRESS EXPLOITATION OF THE TITLE "NURSE."

For the last few months we have grown accustomed to hearing very strongly expressed opinions from nurses on the loose manner in which the title of nurse is used by the press. From time to time we see it attached to one female delinquent or another, and in most cases her claim to the title rests on the most slender evidence. More often than not it is used to enable newspaper reporters to make the most of some piece of sensational or unsavoury copy, while any details or examination that might militate against the justification for its use are, for convenience, ignored.

It chanced to be in the company of a number of nurses that we saw a report in the newspapers of the Waddingham case as well as of another unsavoury case. In both instances the title of "Nurse" was gratuitously conferred by the press upon these women, and any feelings of curiosity or interest in the minds of the nurses that day were completely submerged by those of disgust and the strongest vexation. We at once looked into the State Register, and there was some little relief, although no mitigation of our indignation, when we found that the name of neither woman was on the Register. It has since been rumoured that the woman Waddingham had had the temerity to place the letters S.R.N. against her name on a card advertising her so-called nursing home, although we believe her whole experience in an infirmary was for a few months as a ward-maid. The casual manner in which the press have used what should surely, in these days, be regarded as an honourable professional title has given rise to feelings of bitterness, and very justifiably so, in thousands of women who have rendered high service to the community both in peace and war. Several wrote letters of remonstrance to various newspapers and also letters intended for publication, stating that the name of this woman, charged with murder, was not upon the State Register of Nurses and that she had no claim to the title of "Nurse"; doubtless because the case was then still *sub judice*, the letters were not published.

They indicated how this abuse of the title of "Nurse" in the newspapers and on their posters was bound to bring ignominy upon a body of women whose professional qualifications had been won at the cost of considerable sacrifice, and who have met the demands of the State, both in the examination halls and in relation to the comprehensiveness of their training in the art of nursing. An occasional paragraph here and there denying that Waddingham was a nurse was all

that resulted and the posters continued their appeal to the morbid love of sensationalism in its ugliest form, which dwells in the minds of a great mass of the public.

The power of suggestion acting through the medium of the subconscious mind is known to none better than the nurses, unless it be to those who have wares to sell, whether these be newspapers or cosmetics. By such suggestion there is manufactured Public Opinion, so tyrannical and forceful, so careless too often of truth. How long will it be before these relationships established erroneously between the nurses and a cruel criminal will cease to obscure for the man-in-the-street the high professional and ethical standards upon which the nurses have sought to build up their profession? We shall not soon forget these great headlines, constantly reappearing, that were so calculated to drag down our ideals in the eyes of the public, but there is one lesson to be learnt from what is, to say the least, an unpleasant experience. It is that the sooner we make a determined effort towards the establishment of Compulsory Registration of Nurses by the State and a complete protection for the title of "Nurse," the better it will be both for the interests of the patients and for the safeguarding of the nurses' qualifications.

Consequent upon enquiries made by the General Nursing Council for England and Wales as to the alleged use of the letters S.R.N. by Waddingham, after her name,—an allegation subsequently proved to be true—the Council's solicitor was instructed to watch the case at the Nottingham Assizes and to take any necessary action.

As will be noted, on page 128, a report was received by the Council on April 14th, enclosing a photograph of a visiting card with the letters S.R.N. after the name of Waddingham. Mr. Norman Birkett by permission stated at the conclusion of the trial that Waddingham was not a registered nurse.

The Waddingham case shows very clearly, that the supervision of the General Nursing Council as regards the use of the letters S.R.N. is not entirely effective, and we grant that it would prove exceedingly difficult to make it so without the suggested amendment to extend the powers and functions of the present Acts; equally ineffective in this case has been the law relating to nursing homes. Shortly, we have, on one side of the lantern, the commercialising of the sordid details of this case and the use of an honourable title to act as a foil to set into the highlight all the horrors of a terrible crime, in order to increase the sale of the newspapers. On the other side is the impotence of the present legislation to protect us from such tactics and an indication of the minor value placed upon truth as against sensationalism.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)