

LEGAL MATTERS.

Several cases in the law courts during the past month have been concerned with the care of the sick, and with trained nurses.

"I AM NOT A QUALIFIED NURSE."

First that of Mrs. Dorothea Nancy Waddingham, charged at Nottingham Assizes with the murder of a woman patient who had made a will in her favour, in her nursing home at Nottingham, by the wrongful administration of morphia tablets. The jury returned a verdict of "Guilty" with a recommendation to mercy, and she was sentenced to death by Mr. Justice Goddard.

The circumstances of the case have been related at length in the press, and we do not propose to repeat them, but we do wish to emphasise the strong indignation felt and expressed that this woman who was not a Registered Nurse should, at the trial, and the previous proceedings in the Coroner's Court and before the Nottingham Magistrates have been described as "*Nurse Waddingham*," especially as Mrs. Waddingham told Detective Inspector Pentland of the Nottingham City Police—when he visited the home on September 24th, and informed her that the police were making enquiries respecting the death of Miss Baguley, in whose organs morphia had been found—"I had my training at Burton-on-Trent Hospital, but I am not a qualified nurse."

Yet persistently Mrs. Waddingham has been described as "*Nurse Waddingham*" in the press, and the public, for the most part, undoubtedly believe that she is a member of the profession of nursing.

Notice of appeal on behalf of Mrs. Waddingham has been forwarded to the Registrar of the Court of Criminal Appeal following a conference between her and her solicitor. Comment on the case while it is still *sub judice* is therefore precluded.

SHADES OF OLIVER TWIST.

We quote the following report from the *News of the World* of February 16th.

"Severe comments on the conduct of a matron, whom the jury held to have been 'most indiscreet' for giving a boy a shower-bath an hour before he died, were made at an inquest at Burnham-on-Sea on Leslie Dowling, 6½, an inmate of the Somerset Assistance Committee's Orphanage at Burnham.

"If I have made a mistake, all I can say is I deeply regret it," declared the matron, Miss Eveline Nuttall. "I didn't think that I was doing any harm. I certainly didn't do it in any way for punishment."

The jury found that the boy died from shock caused by intense cold in a case of malnutrition of the body, and shock from multiple minor injuries.

Mr. W. T. Glass, who represented the Somerset Public Assistance Committee, stated he would see that the jury's verdict was conveyed to the County Committee.

Patricia Marjorie Gatehouse, 15, declared she heard the boy cry, but he stopped suddenly. She found him sitting on the mat in the washroom. The matron appeared to be examining him or taking his clothes off. Earlier in the day he had been falling about, but he did not appear to be hurt.

When his clothes came off, the girl proceeded, the matron picked him up and took him to the kitchen.

PUT UNDER SPRAY

The spray was run over him for about two or three minutes, and Marjorie, on the matron's instructions, then bathed him.

As she was about to dress him he let go of the wash-basin to pull his underclothes over him, and he fell forward, hitting his eye on the corner of the wall.

When the matron took him into the dining-room she laid him down by the fire.

The girl described how, in about ten minutes, she got no answer when she told the boy there was cake for tea.

Dr. Maxwell Hall, medical officer at the Home, told the coroner the child was dead when he arrived. He examined him and found numerous bruises, and one particularly large one on the left temple.

Police-superintendent B. Barber: Would you describe it as fitting treatment for a boy of his physical development to have a shower bath?—No, I would not.

Warned that she need not give evidence unless she desired, Miss Nuttall explained that she had had 30 years' experience with children's homes. The mother of the dead boy died in Keynsham Institution.

On one occasion the boy bumped his head against the wall, and when she went out he pulled a hideous face at her and "literally bellowed" at her.

"ACTING DAFT."

Describing the incidents on the afternoon of his death, Miss Nuttall explained that she went to take off Leslie's overcoat, and she could not describe his actions better than that he seemed to be "acting daft and imitating a drunken man."

As he appeared dirty, she was going to wash him, but noticing that he was cold she thought it would be quicker to take him to the washhouse and give him a spray. The water was warm; it never ran hot.

She tested the spray before using it. As he, however, appeared grubby, she told Marjorie to bath him with hot water. Later in the kitchen she began to wonder if there might be something really wrong with him, and so took him to the dining-room and put him beside the fire.

When she went to make him comfortable he wrenched himself from her arms and bumped his head on the floor. Later she phoned for Dr. Hall.

Coroner: Do you often give children a shower in the middle of the day?—No, sir, I don't.

I cannot think of anything more unpleasant than a cold shower on a cold day.—It was not a cold shower. It was tepid, and the day was not too cold.

Miss Nuttall denied that she put the boy under the shower-bath by way of punishment. She did not think she was impatient with the boy."

Enquiries made from the chairman of the Somerset Public Assistance Committee have, so far, not been productive of information, concerning what action, if any, has been taken by the County Committee, but we gather that Miss Nuttall was not, at the date of our enquiry, in residence at the Somerset Public Assistance Committee's Home at Burnham-on-Sea.

On the general issue, however, we claim that a Home of this kind should always be in charge of a State Registered Nurse. A Registered Nurse would surely have deduced from the symptoms of the child in the present case that he was very seriously ill, and would not have subjected him to the shock of a cold or tepid shower bath on an intensely cold day—unsuitable and severe treatment even for a normal and healthy child. Reviewing the history and symptoms she would have recollected that both parents died of tubercular disease, as elsewhere related, that this little child had been "falling about" earlier in the day, that he cried, and stopped suddenly, and that he "seemed to be acting daft and imitating a drunken man. She would thus have recognised that he was very ill, possibly suffering from tubercular meningitis, and would have communicated these symptoms to the doctor before subjecting him to the torture of the shower bath, after which unconsciousness evidently quickly supervened, followed by death.

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