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## EDITORIAL.

### PATRONAGE IS OUT OF DATE.

Mr. Howard Spring, the great novelist, in his article in the *Daily Mail* headed "The Scandal of the Nurses," attacks what is called "the new charter" which the Ministry of Health has "initiated for the benefit of what is called, with splendid irony, 'The Nursing Profession.'"

Mr. Howard Spring asserts:—

"A 'profession' suggests to the average mind some way of life elevated above the routine of trade and business, and *paid accordingly*. The 'profession' of nursing has been, till now, one to be avoided by any woman who was not looking for hunger during her training, a laboriousness amounting almost to slavery during her working life, with wages that a shop-girl would laugh at and an old age of penury and neglect.

"That, I say, has been till now the life of those engaged in this 'profession.' No wonder that, as Miss Horsbrugh recently remarked, the Ministry of Health is 'anxious that more women should take up nursing.'

"The Ministry will continue to be anxious unless this promised 'charter' gives nurses more food and liberty during training; more leisure during their working lives; more money; a pension on retirement.

"These are the minimum conditions on which a beginning may be made with getting rid of the scandal of the 'nursing profession.'"

Mr. Spring continues: "I am not talking from guess work or hearsay; I have watched my own sister's career from its beginning to its end." He then states that when her training was ended she spent her life as a district nurse. She never earned more than three pounds a week, and a year ago she died in harness, penniless. "It was, perhaps, as well. She was getting on in years: the thought of retirement was beginning to worry her."

The nurse's circumstances are compared with that of the policeman. He is employed by the State—the nurse is not; he is pensioned in the prime of life—the nurse is not. Childbirth, illness, and disease are constant and accompaniments of village life, and when the nurse retires she has not the policeman's comfortable competence.

One statement accounts for much of what Mr. Howard Spring complains:—

"A few local women controlling what one must

assume are totally inadequate funds are the arbiters of the district nurse's fate; and that is something the State will have to alter pretty quickly if it wants to see the increase in numbers that Miss Horsbrugh speaks of.

"The district nurse, with her often immense tract of rural territory over which she toils through the hot summer days and the dirty winter nights on foot or on an old push-bike or, in rare instances, in a motor-car: this woman is the very lynch-pin of medical work in country districts.

"She works, theoretically, in conjunction with the local doctors; but to take only one side of her task I would not care to guess how many babies she brings into the world while the doctor is 'on the way.'

"These women make no claim to be heroines; they have no organisation that has so far been successful in pushing their case; and if you don't push in this world you are apt to go to the wall. Now, sheer necessity is pushing their claims for them, and it is to be hoped that scandalously overdue reform will not be postponed till 'after the war'—that convenient adjournment of so many inconvenient problems."

We have always sincerely admired the wonderful and invaluable work of District Nurses. What they suffer from is a form of patronage which may mean well, but which inevitably undermines their power of initiative and independence of action.

Take any committee controlling district nurses. They are quite obsolete and out of date—even the Queen's Institute for District Nursing. Cast your eye down the list of persons (men are great offenders in this connection) who control hundreds of "professional" Queen's Nurses. Do you find the nurses on these committees? You certainly do not. "Queen's Nurses" have no national organisation through which they can secure representation on the National Council of Nurses of Great Britain. The superintendents of District Nurses, both in England and Scotland, have secured such representation; it is time they helped the nurses to do likewise.

Also all grades of District Nurses should be represented on councils and committees under which they serve. We hope Mr. Howard Spring will add his powerful influence to ours in this demand. Patronage is out of date. Co-operation is the keynote of success.

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