

REVIEW.

"HOSPITAL NURSE."*

By Doreen Swinburne.

Reviewers of books indulge in a few aids in their task, and we own to a certain suspicion that written on hospital matters by a trained nurse, love and marriage may be its theme. Thus we take a peep at the last page, and if needs be sniff the orange blossom, before reading the first, and act accordingly. "Hospital Nurse," by Doreen Swinburne, recently trained for four years at the Westminster Hospital, London, closes her critical survey of work in that institution with a paragraph which encourages us to turn back to the "Foreword," by Sir Bernard Docker, K.B.E., J.P., Chairman of Westminster Hospital, and read "Hospital Nurse" with very real interest, although we cannot endorse his opinion that this work is "a charming book." It is no such thing. It is a forceful, if crude, picture of the personal experience of a young woman in training as a nurse, which cannot, and ought not to be accepted as of universal application. There are others!

From personal experience as trainee, Sister, and Matron, with intimate knowledge of nursing conditions and organisation in many parts of the world, "Hospital Nurse" appears to us a rootless plant, blossoming forth full blown from soil of which it has no realisation. It has, therefore, no comparative value. Before passing judgment on nursing conditions to-day, their historical evolution should be studied, especially the history of the last half century. The struggle for professional status, its acquisition in 1919; the reasons why the majority of trainees know none of these things, and why, therefore, they criticise conditions like blind bats in a hay-loft!

Such ignorance is a danger to efficient organisation, and those who have purposely kept our Student Nurses in abysmal ignorance of professional evolution, cannot complain when they come face to face with crude demands for drastic reforms, which must be conceded at an early date.

"Hospital Nurse" opens with a picture of conditions in the old Westminster Hospital, facing the splendid Abbey Church of Westminster, an inspiration, indeed!

To quote: "Upstairs the wards were clattering (Why always ceaseless scurry and clatter?) into order which prevail throughout the day. A frantic probationer ran the last bed-pan into the sluice and prayed that those who had refused them would manage to last over the morning until the wards closed for lunch. . . . She ran an eye over the specimens—yes, they were all there except old Mrs. B.'s. . . . If Sister complained. . . she'd jolly well tell her that if she *would* order so much cascara. . . ."

"Damn! (What would her mother say if she heard her language these days?) The ward clock said 9.40, and if she did not get into the kitchen soon those other hungry cads would have eaten her bun. . . . As the late comer stumbled into the kitchen, confused with apologies: 'I'm so sorry, nurse—wanted to get Queen Adelaide's bed-pans finished.' . . . The crisp voice of her most competent staff nurse broke in upon the appreciation of her first mouthful of bun.

"Nurse, you will be off duty from 9.30 to 12.30 to-day.' How typical. Well, thank God she had finished her bed-pans, or it would have meant sacrificing a whole half hour of her precious free time."

It would appear, from the above breathless report, that discipline and order were foreign to the Westminster Training School, and we could not help the retrospective flash of memory to those wonderful days, 60 years ago, when, as a probationer, we *quietly* entered the wards of the wonderful old M.R.I. at Manchester, and in charge of an expert staff nurse, who assisted with every detail of

ward duty calculated for the comfort and well being of the patients. No fuss, no flurry, no *damnation!* Lessons which we applied as a Sister at the London Hospital, and as Matron of Barts in the training of nurses, and what fine women they were. The generation which demanded legal status and won it.

But "Hospital Nurse" is not all bed-pans and hunger and "swear words," although we are told that hunger played a larger part in the life of the author than "ever before," and we read of many attempts to appease the claims of the inner man.

Rebellion.

The chapter on "Rebellion" claims that "most nurses have at some time or another felt that the weight of rules and regulations, together with the meshes of red tape which abound in an institutional life, are strangling the individuality from them. It sorts out, presses and squeezes until the passive individual is allowed to emerge some years later, a fairly smooth working and uninteresting impersonality with little imagination and as little sympathy."

The rules described as "Bosh," which were by no means unusual where girls in their 'teens are concerned, were evidently resented as irksome, and "taking the bull by the horns," in other words, the Matron:

"We decided that we would make a request that the rule about not going out after duty at night might be removed. . . . I shall never forget Matron's face when the Assistant Matron had to inform her that several of the nurses wished to speak to her together, and *at least 40 of us walked in*. She rose magnificently to the occasion, listened to what we had to say, told us she would consider the matter and that we might send a *deputy* to her for an answer in three days.

"A deputy went, and the answer was, we might go out three times a week till 10.30 p.m., if we put our names down in a book stating the time of going out *and the time of our return*. . . . In fact, we didn't want to go out three times a week—but to *choose* when we would go." So much rebellion brought us once again to earth.

Examinations for S.R.N.

Chapters on the G.N.C. examinations, preliminary and final, are illuminating. Matters were, of course, a bit difficult in war time, but our young candidate found compensation: "a nice kind old man whom I had heard was 'a pernickety old devil—don't let him put you off,' sat sipping coffee and nibbling sugary biscuits. All the morning he had been asking terrified nurses simple questions, to which they thought there was a catch, and no doubt was in need of some stimulant.

"Bless his old heart, he went straight into pneumonia, as a pig into clover. . . . We dived into a glorious orgy of rising temperature, dry heat, fetid smell, dehydration, *crisis!* fluid, rest, *ad infinitum*. I haven't seen a case like it since I was a very new probationer—but he loved it—and I passed the examination."

What of the Future?

Miss Doreen Swinburne possesses a keen power of observation, a lively wit, and graphic pen. Take her pictures of Royal Occasions, the New Nurses' Home at Westminster; War, Dunkirk, and a Blitz Night. It must be realised that she has a future in journalism, and now that she is no longer cramped in an environment where her temperament clashes with her mental powers, it is to be hoped that she will find scope for her special gifts which are considerable.

We wonder? Will she, like so many of her associates, rise in the professional scale and hide her talents in a napkin? Or will she realise that with her unusual ability it is her duty to study the history of nursing economics and proclaim a just demand for professional emancipation and content?

E. G. F.

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