

THE BRITISH MEDICAL JOURNAL AND "NURSES IN HOSPITAL."

The correspondence which has been running in the *British Medical Journal* since June 6th is now closed. It opened with a letter signed "Naval Patient," criticising methods of treatment, diets, and appliances used in the wards, but which contained the following expression of appreciation of the nursing staff:—

"Fortunately, there is a brighter side to the picture. I learnt a lot from the experience of being at the wrong end of the scalpel, and not the least was a new appreciation of the magnificent efforts of the nursing staff. How they can keep smiling, still be gentle and considerate after anything up to 13 hours a day I do not know. The fact that they maintain their efficiency and pleasantness day after day amazes one. They are poorly paid, badly fed, and treated in their off-duty time like children. One can only be filled with wonder and intense gratitude and hope that the opportunity may occur to repay in some way the debt which one owes for so much kindness and consideration."

So far, so good.

On June 27th, there appeared two letters, signed "Esther Carling" and "W. L. Peacock" referring to "Naval Patient's" remarks *re* nurses. The former asks: "By whose apathy does such a state of things occur? Have not doctors had a directing voice in running hospitals from their inception? Are not their wishes and convenience partly responsible for the conditions affecting nurses to-day. They have so long allowed the idea that nurses are their servitors that lay committees have become affected and have, in their turn, accepted as inevitable an attitude of 'Serve the doctors first.' . . . Nurses are badly handicapped in their own efforts to secure reforms by the sacrosanct aura that has been allowed to pervade hospital management. Here is a chance for 'Naval Patient' and others to act, and to do so while all kinds of 'reorganisation' are in the air we breathe."

"W. L. Peacock" records in detail the history of two cases which, he writes, "I think are fair samples of many more and even sadder cases." He proceeds to record in detail the overwork and neglect of two nurses which resulted in breakdown and brought both to chronic ill-health, with serious suffering. Of their strain on duty, "Matron is not told because nurses are there to nurse, not to be nursed. This is the stock mental placebo with which 'authority' condones its damnable, shameful, callous carelessness. I don't apologise for the adjectives!—criminal negligence would perhaps be the more just term. . . . This attitude of regarding nurses as mere hospital fodder is a disgrace to medicine; the cases I have mentioned can be duplicated over and over again at almost any hospital."

"An investigation of the conditions of work, rest, recreation and feeding is long overdue. Let a start be made with a following-up history of nurses who do not complete their training, and I fancy complacency will be shocked."

In its issue of July 18th, a letter was inserted signed "S. L. B. Wilks," which aroused indignation not only amongst matrons, but in nursing ranks generally: "The brutality of matrons (and sometimes of sisters) to their nurses is notorious," he wrote. "It needs no investigation."

"It is not universal. I know one hospital well in which the nurses, and particularly the probationers, are watched over with an almost maternal care. Why does this state of things exist? And why is it allowed to continue? I think it is because (1) The care of the nurses is left entirely to the matrons; and (2) the matrons are chosen for their organising and disciplinary capacity without regard to their humanity. The fact that matrons as a class are conscientious workers, devoted to duty, only makes things worse. They have been through the mill and have survived."

"They are healthy and hard, and they think others should be the same. An occasional slacker or would-be valetudinarian among the nurses confirms the matrons in their mercilessness."

"The remedy lies with hospital boards and medical officers. Matrons must be made to realise that they are responsible for the health and comfort as well as for the efficiency of their staffs. To this end there must be propaganda. The Ministry of Health and the Nursing Press are obvious means. Perhaps two or three actions against hospitals for compensation in carefully selected cases in which life or health has been needlessly sacrificed might help. Have the nurses an organisation that could carry this out?"

Dr. T. C. Mackenzie, of Inverness, severely criticises Dr. Wilks's statements. On August 1st, "I submit," he writes, "that his statements and the general tone of his letter are unsupported by well-known and widely recognised facts, and that they constitute an unjustifiable and gross attack upon many who are responsible leaders of a great profession."

In the issue of August 15th, Miss Helen Dey, President of the Association of Hospital Matrons, took up the cudgels for the Matrons. She wrote:—

"I am profoundly shocked by the letter of Dr. S. L. B. Wilks in which he says 'the brutality of matrons (and sometimes of sisters) to their nurses is notorious.' I wonder, does Dr. Wilks know of one single case of 'a brutal matron' at the precise time, or is he thinking of an isolated case or two in the past of a matron who was, perhaps, too harsh and narrow in her discipline? Surely if Dr. Wilks does know of such a case, it is his public duty to bring it to the knowledge of the chairman of the hospital concerned for investigation. . . . The greatest worry a matron can have is the serious illness of a member of the nursing staff. Apart from what I feel is a most unjust assertion, these statements make the work of matrons more difficult than it is already."

DR. W. E. SNELL, COLINDALE HOSPITAL, ADVOCATES UNIVERSITY STATUS.

Dr. W. E. Snell writes: "The shortage of nurses, both in quantity and quality, is a subject which is necessarily exciting much attention at present. Many suggestions have been made for remedying the shortage, and, in particular, criticism has been levelled at nurses' homes, the school-girl atmosphere engendered by them, and the petty tyranny exercised by members of the administrative hospital nursing staff."

"My intention in writing is to propose that the nurses' training schools should be affiliated to a University, and that nurses who have completed their training and the necessary examinations for State Registration should receive a B.A. degree of the University. In this way the social and intellectual status of nurses would be considerably raised! Parents would know that their children were receiving a University education and would be more likely to encourage their daughters to enter the profession. The initial difficulties in working out such a scheme might be great, but I submit that it is one well worthy of consideration and for which the time is ripe."

Dr. A. Hobson writes, in the same issue: "I have followed with interest the recent correspondence in your columns about the difficulties and troubles besetting the nursing profession, but so far I have not seen any suggested cure that really gets down to the root of the matter. In my view the present system of training nurses has got to be changed from an apprenticeship to a trade to an organised teaching of a profession. The position to-day is remarkably similar to that of the medical profession in the middle of the Nineteenth Century."

Dr. Hobson puts forth a scheme of training which has

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