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EDITORIAL.

THE WORLD SHORTAGE OF NURSES.

There is no denying the fact that in the great Profession of Nursing, we are once again at destiny's crossroads and, at the moment, no great and wise leader has come forward with inspiration and knowledge to lead us along the right path. Many undesirable factors have contributed to this present debacle, some of which could have been prevented, others were almost inevitable.

One of the basic causes for the present-day shortage is the dearth of young women. Our profession is not alone in its plight. All professions and the industries are short of candidates, and since World War I not enough girls have been born. Social evils have seriously depleted the population, and now the shortage of houses and decent living conditions aggravate this cause even more. Young people wishing to marry now hesitate. They naturally shrink from living with their in-laws and they feel that they cannot have babies without homes and prams, and until the hard conditions for the present-day housewives have been eased. Anything which the Government can do to remedy these pernicious circumstances and to encourage people to have larger families will be a long-term policy and can only influence the profession in years to come. Education of the young along saner and more realistic lines likewise can only affect conditions in the near future.

How is this problem to be tackled to ease the situation today? All countries of the world are looking for a lead in this direction. It is useless and untruthful to blame governments and hospital authorities for the impasse today even though they were definitely to blame in the past.

However, it is imperative that something should be done, and as speedily as possible. There is an old adage which runs, "God helps those who help themselves." Naturally, Almighty God expects to be invited to any big endeavour and perhaps we have been remiss in asking for this all-powerful assistance. It seems to us that a National Day of Prayer, especially for the direction of the Nursing Profession and for wisdom in the guidance of its affairs would not be out of place today. Could not one Sunday be chosen and set apart for this very necessary Christian and national Nursing Service when all churches could unite in a great public act of intercession for light upon the difficult and dangerous situation which has arisen in our ranks? Indeed the act could be international and we ask the International Council of Nurses to endeavour to bring this to pass. Almost all hospitals have their own chapels and chaplains, and surely the

great leaders of all the Christian Churches would lend their assistance to such a mighty plea for help?

After such a day perhaps we could set about our problems more energetically and with greater success. Another point we feel is worthy of emphasis, and that is, that Nursing is still too dependent on Medicine. Nurses must be made secure in the knowledge that in their work in the hospitals, homes, factories or Services, they are not the servants of the Medical profession, but the servants of their patients, just as is the case with the doctors.

We think too, that the present-day tendency to "monopoly" is very disheartening to young and progressive registered nurses. Many of the smaller and desirable voluntary hospitals are rushing to associate themselves with the larger and more traditional London hospitals, thereby hoping to escape being "taken over" by the Ministry of Health under the new National Health Act. Thus many "junior" matronships are being created and young women are being deprived of their chances of an independent career and the opportunities of exercising their own initiative and authority. Matrons of the large hospitals who already have quite enough to do to govern their own staff and look after the wider interests of their patients, are being given extraordinary powers over the staffs of the smaller associate hospitals, perhaps to the detriment of both. Thus many coveted "plums of the profession" are being left to rot, or are being picked before they are allowed to ripen, so that only a few may ripen lusciously. So is bred envy and greed and the lust for power amongst a chosen few.

More good and independent posts must be created to give happiness and the will to strive to a greater number of nurses. These posts ought, in justice, to be given to the best candidates, and the present-day methods of choosing the leaders in our profession must be scrapped. Many excellent registered nurses who have worked and studied hard at great expense and deprivation to themselves have not received the just rewards of their labours, and thus despondency and disappointment have overtaken them at the period in their life when they should normally be of most use to the profession. It is the inhuman treatment that nurses receive, and the slights they bear in their professional status, that younger candidates in the profession are quick to observe and act upon and which are detrimental to recruitment and to the persevering character of would-be nurses of today.

We doubt very much whether it is possible, or even useful, to go on bribing unwilling Nurses by offering larger salaries. Big money does not satisfy in the long run. What all Nurses want is good status, freedom and independence of service, and the certainty of getting to the top of the tree of their profession. G. M. H.

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