

THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED
THE NURSING RECORD

ETHEL GORDON FENWICK, S.R.N., HON. EDITOR 1888—1947.

No. 2164.

Vol. 96.

NOVEMBER, 1948.

Price Sevenpence.

EDITORIAL.

John Cohen Esq., M.A., Ph.D., F.B.Ps.S., University of Leeds, has explained his reason for the publication of the Minority Report, Working Party on the Recruitment and Training of Nurses:

“My inability to sign the Majority Report, together with my colleagues, is due, I regret to say, to a divergence of view between us on the nature of the basic problems in the nursing situation. . . .”

After reading this report, a member of the Editorial Board was moved to write an open letter to the author.

REALLY, DOCTOR COHEN!

Those of us who were deeply disappointed in the Report of the Working Party on the Recruitment and Training of Nurses were so looking forward to yours and expected great things of you, Doctor, and much help, and you did mean to be helpful, didn't you? But, you know, your seventy-eight pages have not told us much that we are not already aware of, nor about which effective steps have not already been taken in the most advanced hospitals. Of course, we know that the Hospital Service has its black spots; outside of Utopia, can any large Service or Enterprise, either public or private claim to have none? Don't misunderstand me, Doctor; we do agree with you that the nursing conditions existing in Hospitals should not be toned down. All any progressive Matron asks is a sympathetic ear from the Committees empowered to take action, and encouragement from the Government to promote rapidity of the action taken. But we do like a whole picture and would have liked to have heard something of what has been done by those Hospitals which have been busily engaged in keeping their copybooks clean.

We do admire your industry Doctor, and if you have read all those ninety works referred to in the Bibliography, we admire your thoroughness and we thank you for the pains you have taken; but are we any nearer a solution of the sick and infirm population? Words, words, words, Doctor, they are fascinating little things if we don't let them run away with us. But of themselves, poor things, they are soulless, unless arranged to mean something. The installation of labour-saving devices, you say on page twentyone, “affects the size of the domestic staff needed.” True enough; but you go on to say “which, in turn, affects the number of nurses required.” Oh, dear me, Doctor, can the introduction of a mechanical scrubber affect the numbers of nurses? Of course, you may be looking far

into the future and foresee a decline in the incidence of Housemaid's Knee and a subsequent reduction in the number of “occupied beds” and *ipso facto* of the nursing staff required.

We admire your Higher Mathematics, and are happy to know that you have studied Algebra; but, while speaking much for your erudition, does it really tell us the truth? Can human beings be reduced to a mathematical problem? Is there no unknown factor in your calculations? We thank you for your recognition of our powers, but we are none the less flattered that you think an increase of nine trained nurses per one hundred patients will reduce the average stay of our patients in Hospital by one whole day. We apologise for you to those other known factors, omitted from your calculations, who also contribute to the recovery of our patients, the almoners, the dietitians, the cooks, the physiotherapists, the radiographers, and other colleagues. Any Hospital Matron could have told you, without your calculations, that she would like to employ more trained nurses, and how many. What she was hoping you would tell her, Doctor, was where to get them from.

And this business of publishing the vituperative outpourings of a group of frustrated females who obviously do not hold Emerson's belief that “Discontent is the want of self-reliance; it is infirmity of will.” Really, Doctor, doesn't it savour just the least little bit in the world of backbiting? You know we nurses have never claimed to belong to the ministering angels. Like Malvolio we have had greatness thrust upon us. It's those romantic males, Doctor, who did it. No wonder one of your correspondents would like to see Matrons replaced by Male Supervisors. Perhaps the good Doctor fancies himself as the confidant of girlish troubles and the mopper-up of overflowing eyes. We have never claimed, as I said, to be “Marthas”—but we do claim to be a fair cross-section of the female population, and to possess no more bad temper or vindictiveness than other females. Have you never met a sharp tongued wife, Doctor? I have, and schoolmistresses, waitresses, shop assistants—butchers, bakers and candlestick makers. And, for that matter, Doctor, we have all met many rude and sharp tongued members of your own Honourable Profession.

If alongside your extracts you had published line for line letters from people who *had* completed what they had set out to do, and perhaps also, that so important thing in British justice, the other side of the stories told by your disgruntleds, we should have admired your sense of fair play so much. Really, Doctor Cohen, you do disappoint us.

D. W.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)