

# THE BRITISH JOURNAL OF NURSING

WITH WHICH IS INCORPORATED  
THE NURSING RECORD

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

No. 2160. Vol. 96.

JULY, 1948.

Price Sevenpence.

## EDITORIAL.

### METAMORPHOSIS OR GOOD-BYE?

Will the coming of Nationalisation see the going of that sorely tried woman—the Home Sister?

Will she join the ever swelling ranks of the unwanted? Join her colleagues, the even more sorely tried House-keeping Sisters who have been allowed to die without an epitaph? Everything would seem to point that way. For the past ten years or so there has been a gradual infiltration. Change is progress only when the change is an improvement on the *status quo*.

What have been the complaints against Home Sisters? Those of harsh discipline, too strict rules, unwarrantable intrusion into privacy, and lack of encouragement of Nurses' social occasions. These faults are certainly true of some—why? Surely because they were temperamentally unsuited to the post. The right temperament brought the best Home Sister—one who was guide, counsellor and friend; one who was always ready to help, from showing the best way to make up an intricate cap, to giving advice on sore feet; one who was ready to admire a jaunty Spring bonnet and congratulate a newly-engaged; one who was ready with hot milk and timely medicines for the near-ill. Honour be to her. Home Sisters can hardly be blamed for the rules, some of which found origin, not even in the head of the Matron, but in the Hospital Board Room. To be a martinet is also a matter of temperament, and the blame lies with the one who appointed her, in that selection was at fault. Are we likely to lose the "nosey-parker" because the job is turned over to the non-nurse? Personally, I doubt it very much. There was good and bad in the old service, and inevitably the bad gave rise to the most uproar, for—

"The evil that men do, lives after them;

The good is oft interred with their bones."

So it has been with Home Sisters. But there will also be good and bad in the new service. We haven't the monopoly of bad temper and inquisitiveness. The first Warden it was my lot to deal with had worked in Hostels where the front door was locked at ten at night and there was no communal life. She strongly resented the Nurses' late hours and all festivities. We can only hope that there will be more of the good than the bad.

So much for temperament. Perhaps the work will benefit? It is a waste of a Trained Nurse's time to count sheets and pillow cases and run after maids. This work can quite well be done by another. But what about that important part of a Home Sister's

duties—care of the Nurses' health? It is not possible for this to be done adequately by a Warden, and yet it is of great importance in a Nurses' Training School. Someone will have to be found to do it, and it will probably mean the appointment of a Sister in charge of Health. A kind of Health Visitor in the Home. She would also run the Sick Bay, where this is conveniently situated for the purpose. Here we have two appointments in the place of one. Which brings us to another argument largely used to prove the need for Wardens, that is, the shortage of Nurses and the need to keep the Trained Nurse at the bedside; so she will be, at the Nurses' bedside, full-time where before she was part-time. What other tasks can she be given to make her post worth while? Could we do without her? I think not, if we want to maintain or surpass our present standard of health among Nurses in training. She will presumably be attached to the administrative staff and, in return for helping that harassed body, will expect relief for periods of off-duty. It is doubtful, therefore, if there will be much of a back-to-the-wards movement.

What will the Warden do for relief? At present, where there is only one Home Sister an overworked Housekeeping Sister or Assistant Matron relieves her, and she in return relieves them. There cannot be this reciprocity when there is a Warden. Will those willing-horses, the Nursing Staff, both relieve and be themselves unrelieved? Obviously they should not, and the Warden herself should have an assistant for the purpose. Fortunate woman! She will already be doing less than her predecessor and will also have more help!

What will this fortunate woman, who should also be the paragon of all the virtues, receive in salary? There is as yet little to go on, but one large Hospital recently advertised for a Warden at £500 with full board-residence; and that is the starting salary! Have any Home Sisters received so much, even at the end of their careers?

How about supply? I venture to predict that, attracted by the salaries, at first the supply will be adequate, but not for long. The post is one with no future, and little (other than in the largest Hospitals) to sustain the interest of the sort of person envisaged for the post.

We live in a world of change for the sake of change. Perhaps, as one dear old lady used to say to me, "My dear, a change is as good as a rest." But, then, she isn't living in these strenuous times when change is more often synonymous with duplication and chaos.

D.W.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)