

An Important Appointment.

IT is with great pleasure that we announce that Miss Dorothy de Meza Warren, S.R.N., S.C.M., D.N.(Lond.), F.B.C.N., has been appointed Principal Matron at the Whittington Hospital, London, N.19, which is divided into three separate wings—The Archway Hospital, Highgate Hospital, and St. Mary, Islington, Hospital—and which at present are in process of unification.

There is a bed accommodation for approximately 1,400 patients for the treatment of medical (acute and chronic), surgical, obstetrical and gynaecological, paediatric and tuberculosis cases.

The approval of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales is being sought to amalgamate the three existing Training Schools for Student Nurses, and Miss Warren will co-operate with the Matron of each of the three hospitals to bring this to a successful conclusion.

Miss Warren is well qualified to hold this high office. Trained at Charing Cross Hospital, London, she later became Ward Sister and Night Sister there; she later left for Barbados, where she was Ward Sister (Private Wards) at the General Hospital. Returning to England, she was appointed Sister-Tutor and Assistant Matron at the Putney Hospital; Assistant Matron at the Kent and Canterbury Hospital, Canterbury; and for two years she held the post of Matron at the General Hospital, Croydon.

In 1946 she was appointed Matron of the Royal Infirmary, Sheffield, a post she relinquishes early in the New Year, to the sorrow of her staff.

A Councillor of the British College of Nurses, Ltd., and a valued member of the Editorial Board, Miss Warren will carry to her new post the sincere wishes of her colleagues for a happy and successful term of service in North London.

Successful Candidates.

AT the Meeting of the General Nursing Council for England and Wales, held on November 25th, 1949, Examination Results were announced: 1,880 passed Parts I and II of the Preliminary Examination; 120 Part I only, and 666 Part II only. For the Final Examination: 2,347 General, 196 Male, 71 Mental, 7 Mental Defectives, 137 Sick Children, and 120 Fever Parts of the Register.

Garden Legends.

The Nurse and the Flowers.

EVERYONE who has been a patient in hospital will remember that important item in the evening programme, the removal of all the flowers from the ward, to be placed in the bathroom or "annex." Even Sister has little time to discuss the reasons as her staff scurry desperately to finish "bowls," bedmaking and other services before the night nurses come on duty, but she will usually tell the enquiring patient that the reason for depriving the sleepless of the pure beauty of flowers dimly glowing in the shaded lights, is because, if the vases were left in the ward, the leaves would "breathe up all the oxygen in the air."

This flower legend is one of the very few whose origins are known accurately, it began in 1779, and is a survival of the days when leeches and bleeding were still in use. As its basis is not the knowledge of country craftsmen, reinforced by experience, but "science" of pre-antiseptic medical knowledge, it can be disproved by modern science, even though the science of a generation ahead may reintroduce it.

The original source was a book by Ingen Housz, a classic work in which many of the muddled ideas of photosynthesis of botanists were cleared up, first published in London at that time, with the following lengthy title: "Experiments upon vegetables, discovering their great power of purifying the common air in sunshine, and of *injuring it in shade and at night*; to which is joined a new method of examining the accurate degree of solubility of the atmosphere." (Italics 1948.)

In 1799, all the great London teaching hospitals were well established except the University College (1833), the new book, at a time when foul air bore the blame for the disease germs it carried, would have been widely read in the medical profession, and owing to its very sound experimental basis would still have been a standard text book when Florence Nightingale began her training in 1849, and the tradition of "No Flowers at Night" so well established that it has long outlasted the leeches.

Yet the reasons on which it is founded are absurd. As everyone with botanical knowledge knows, all plants breathe in carbon dioxide during the day and breathe out oxygen, fixing the carbon to carbo-hydrates and taking in the energy of sunlight to provide the power for the process. On this photosynthesis all life on this planet depends. In a normal summer day, 50 square centimetres of sunflower leaf (2.79 inches) will breathe out 7 c.c. of oxygen per hour, and secure an increase of dry weight of 8 milligrams of sugars, during the same time. During the night the same area of leaf, to provide the energy needed for growth processes will break down or "burn" a tiny fraction of this sugar, taking up oxygen to reverse the process. Not all the cells of a leaf are employed on the work, and the amount of oxygen consumed varies according to the temperature and other conditions; a plant which is growing fast taking more, up to 0.08 c.c.: cut flowers not making growth would be nearer the minimum hourly rate of 0.02 c.c.

To bring these figures to life, suppose that each patient in the ward had beside his bed, in a pot, a full grown sunflower plant, its great head soaring far above his temperature chart and topping the screens. The sunflower is used as an example because accurate figures are available, and would be maximum figures for such a strongly growing subject. In twenty-four hours each plant would breathe up 2½ litres of oxygen (4½ litres are roughly a gallon), but each patient, an adult man, breathes in one hour over 12 litres of oxygen.

Therefore, even if ventilation were totally neglected, and the floral decoration of the ward increased fantastically, the oxygen consumption at night would be a minor consideration, with normal cut flowers the difference would be completely undetectable.

It is likely that the additional oxygen consumed by the nurse when she makes the effort of going across to see if old Mrs. Smith is awake or talking in her sleep, is greater than that used by the daffodils, brought by Mrs. Smith's granddaughter, for the whole of the night. If the hospital cat follows the night sister on her round, and walks by itself with ramrod tail and glowing eyes before purring to sleep while Nurse writes up her report, it is devouring oxygen far faster than a vase of flowers by every bed.

The scent of the flowers may be heavy in a badly ventilated over-heated room, but why not open the windows, pull back the blinds and let in the free air, before blackouts come again? Our doctors no longer fear the "noisome vapours engendered by the dew" or the "poisonous night air," why should our nurses banish our flowers in obedience to an exploded legend, which would have died even in 1779, had Sister Gamp (perhaps) read more than the title of the book on photosynthesis. Our modern nurses banish our flowers in deference to an equally exploded legend.

LAWRENCE D. HILLS.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)