

that in the sick wards of many Workhouses throughout the country there are provided no attendants at all, and that the care of the sick and the dying is left to ignorant and irresponsible paupers—men and women who are literally the waifs and strays of humanity, and whose hardships and failures in the struggle for existence have rendered them far from fit attendants, where kindness, gentleness, and devotion are essentially requisite. To many, such facts—and they cannot be controverted—will appear to be amply sufficient to condemn a system which permits of such complete carelessness of the comfort and well-being of the sick. In devoting the consideration to the matter, which we now propose to give, we would direct attention, first, to what we believe to be the root of many of the present difficulties. The Master and the Matron of the ordinary Workhouse may be estimable individuals, and far be it from us to say that they are not so; but modern views as to the necessities of the administration of the Poor Law demand that, so far as the Matron is concerned, she should be a person of experience, tact, and refinement. We would even go further and say that she should also be a trained Nurse, because the duties which fall to her lot, as specified in the standing orders, imply her knowledge of, or, at any rate, her ability to deal with, the care of the sick. We have no hesitation in saying that, in the great majority of instances at the present time, this qualification is not possessed by those who hold this most responsible post.

Let the Master, then, be who he may, the Matron, we contend, should have received an efficient Hospital training. From this, it will follow that the present system of placing her under the control of the Master—a principle which, with present arrangements, we admit is necessary as well as logical—must be abolished if she is to be a skilled worker and an efficient superintendent of her department. Without this change, we contend that it will be impossible to make any radical improvement in the nursing of the sick wards, because the trained Nurses, who should be placed in charge of those wards, cannot be properly superintended by a Matron who does not understand their work; and, without such supervision, it is manifest that, on the one hand, the opportunity is provided for endless friction; and, on the other, a barrier is erected against the introduction of Trained Nursing at all. To point our moral—although, unhappily, it does not adorn our tale—attention may be called to the fact that within the last fortnight there have been the most grievous complaints of the treatment of the sick in Workhouses in four different parts of the country, and that in one case the Matron has been sent for trial on the charge of expediting the death of a patient by cruelty and neglect.

WOMEN AS STATE SANITARIANS.

Whatever be the merits or demerits of the Local Government, popularly known as the Parish Councils, Bill which is now before the House of Lords, there is one part of it which has received but little attention, but which is of the greatest importance not only to Nurses in particular, but to women generally. For the first time, provision is made that women may be elected upon sanitary boards. They have proved their usefulness and efficiency as guardians of the poor, and there is no reason to doubt—in fact, there is every reason to believe—that, as sanitarians, they will render even more useful work both to the State and to their immediate neighbourhood. The hygiene of the home with its many direct and indirect results in the creation or production of health or disease, the domestic details of household management which women are, by their training and daily life so much better able to understand and to deal with than men are, all go to strengthen the belief that the advent of women as sanitary workers will be of the greatest public benefit. Here then, again, we have an important new field of labour and usefulness opened up to women who have passed through the ordinary training of a Nurse, and who, therefore, are excellently qualified both by knowledge and experience to act in this responsible and honorable position. We fully expect to see in the near future many Hospital Nurses who have resigned the active work of their profession for the less onerous duties of matrimony and household management coming forward to make their knowledge useful for the public good.

THE MIDWIVES' REGISTRATION ASSOCIATION.

A new body has been formed under this name, and is now endeavouring to obtain the adhesion of medical men as members. Its object, avowedly, is to secure legislation, making the registration of Midwives compulsory; and it is officially stated that the "formation of the Association has been welcomed by those who rightly appreciate the importance of the question"; and that the opposition to legislation emanates from "a small section" of the medical profession. We are inclined to believe that those who made this statement cannot be aware that several hundreds of medical men have expressed themselves determined to use any means in their power to prevent legislation of so retrograde a character as that of licensing ignorant women to practice an important branch of Medicine, and that behind those who are thus prepared to give an active resistance, there is the great body of the profession who are simply passive at the present moment because they do not believe there is any genuine life in this agitation. This is somewhat supported by the fact that those who have "welcomed" the new Association by becoming members of it, number, we believe, less than sixty. But it is impossible to treat this Association seriously when one of its circulars gravely states that its object is, "that medical practitioners may be recognized as the proper persons "to supervise Midwives in their practice," and its Rules define a Midwife as, "a woman who attends, or undertakes to attend, a labour without the direct supervision of a medical practitioner."

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)