

## Nursing in Country Workhouse Infirmaries.

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WHAT the results obtained under the conditions at present existing in these Institutions, are unsatisfactory, is admitted. The facts as to these which continually see the light through the medium of the press, admit of no justification, and if they referred to the management of voluntary Hospitals would raise a storm of indignation throughout the country. It will be well to pause and consider why it is that, at a time when Metropolitan Hospitals have passed through the ordeal of an inquiry held by a Select Parliamentary Committee, Workhouse Infirmaries under the management of a Government Department are in the lamentable condition that they are admitted to be.

The reason is, primarily, that they are Poor Law Establishments. The Poor Law is a measure for which the country may justly claim credit. It remedied a grievous condition of things, and has worked with great advantage to the poor. The statement that in no other country are the conditions of poverty so well dealt with by the State as in our own is absolutely correct.

Under these circumstances there is a natural reluctance on the part of statesmen to meddle with the law; for the thought arises that, at the present day, it is not wise to give any chance to the crack-brained politician to engraft his nostrum upon a well-trying remedy. The persons who administer the law have felt themselves pretty secure from interference, and those persons being government and local officials it is needless to say that administrative defects have arisen. In the case under consideration, the hardships which result to the poor from the Nursing machinery are simply the outcome of faulty administration, and could be summarily disposed of by the powers that be, if they had the mind. Miss C. J. Wood has, in her pamphlet, pointed out that so long ago as 1865, the Local Government Board issued a memorandum to the Local Authorities on the question of trained Nurses, advising that trained Nurses should invariably be employed in nursing the sick. That memorandum, she says, is a model of wisdom and knowledge, and so are other official rules, regulations, memoranda and reports—but what is the practical use of these except to make the position of one set of officials secure as against another set, if any uncomfortable facts come to light. The officials at the top of the tree are thus entrenched, and the officials in the middle throw the responsibility on those who work under them. If the latter write inconvenient reports or letters, then they are snubbed, and the subject with which they deal is dropped.

The question now arises, Is the Nursing question to be allowed to sleep? I hope not. The poor

have a legitimate grievance—the respectable portion object to the Workhouse to a very great extent, because they know that when they are sick or infirm they will as likely as not be nursed by tramps, bad characters, imbeciles, or retired lunatics. And there is also another larger question. The following duty is one incumbent upon each district—to provide for its own poor, sick and infirm. As I have stated, each district does provide for its own poor in a substantial manner, but when the poor are sick or infirm, they do not. The sick are drafted off to perhaps distant Hospitals, or perhaps to Cottage Hospitals provided and supported by the charitable. But I maintain that each locality should provide a rate-supported Infirmary, where the sick poor can be properly treated, and the sick should be removed there when their maladies cannot be adequately treated in their cottages. The relieving officers would be quite capable of preventing imposition. The Infirmary should thus be adapted, not only for the needs of the inhabitants of the Workhouse, but also for the sick poor in the district who require its shelter. The distinction between the sick or infirm poor and paupers, is one which should rigidly be kept up, and the idea sedulously inculcated that there is a very great difference between persons who seek relief because of sickness and infirmity, and those who seek relief owing to faults of their own.

The difficulties in the way of the establishment of such Infirmaries are not insuperable, if the motive power comes from the top. I am quite aware that to expect government officials to help forward such a movement is to expect in vain, but I do believe that if this matter were brought to the notice of the Government through the House of Commons, and by means of deputations to the President of the Local Government Board, that good in the end would result. The Royal British Nurses' Association is a body which is, in the best sense of the term, representative, and I greatly hope to see its Executive Council taking steps to arrange for a deputation to the President of the Local Government Board before the year is out.

Perhaps a word may not be out of place in reference to the Workhouse with which I am connected.

Foreseeing the difficulties which have arisen from having no trained Nurse as Matron, when the opportunity came, I did all I could to obtain the election of such a person. Unfortunately, I have failed, but what I have done will, I feel sure, bear fruit. The services of a trained Nurse are to be secured and the only difficulty now before us is to obtain harmonious working between her and the Matron. So far as the local authority is concerned, I am confident that they will loyally support in the long run, any improvement which will tend to the comfort of the poor under their charge. They are not responsible for the system; and for the desired change in that system, an appeal—and no half-hearted one—must be made to the Government.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)