

The Workhouse Infirmary Nursing Association.

WE reported in a former issue the fact that the Executive Committee of the Workhouse Infirmary Nursing Association had decided that the time had come for the work of the Association to cease. On Thursday, the 2nd inst., a meeting of the subscribers to the Association was held at St. Martin's Town Hall, under the presidency of Mr. E. Boulnois, M.P. Two resolutions were passed. The first, moved by Mr. W. Bousfield, and seconded by Lord Montagu of Beaulieu, was:—

"That the Executive Committee, after long and careful consideration, is of opinion that the work of the Association must of necessity cease."

The second resolution, moved by Miss Twining, and seconded by Lady Wantage, ran as follows:—

"That the Executive Committee and the Office shall continue for a time as a centre of information to guardians and nurses, and for the maintenance of the connection with the nurses and probationers now belonging to the Association."

As we desired to hear from head-quarters something of the reasons which had led the Association to arrive at this decision, a representative of the NURSING RECORD called upon Miss Gill, the Secretary of the Association, at 6, Adam Street, Strand.

"One of the chief reasons for dissolving the Association," said Miss Gill, "is that it is quite unable to cope with the work that there is to be done. Financially, we do not get enough support to enable us to do this, but another even more serious difficulty is the impossibility of getting suitable candidates to train; for instance, at the beginning of 1897 we had eighty-seven applications for nurses, and were only able to meet twenty-five."

"How do you account for the lack of candidates? The nursing profession is at present so overcrowded that I should have supposed there would be plenty of suitable candidates?—Unfortunately, there is nothing in workhouse nursing to attract the right stamp of women. Some, of course, we do get who are doing their duty most admirably, often under exceedingly trying conditions; but the majority of applications we get we cannot even entertain. Then when we come to inquire into the previous career of those who seem as if they might be suitable, many of them prove most undesirable persons."

"What is the reason of that?"

"In the first place, there is no prestige attached to the post of Workhouse Nurse. If the position were a Government one, it would be very different. As it is, so many nurses are absorbed by the Queen Victoria's Jubilee Institute; there is a certain amount of honour attached to being a "Queen's Nurse," and one cannot wonder that

nurses prefer this branch of nursing. Then, again, the position of the workhouse nurse needs defining. Good nurses do not care to place themselves in the position of working under untrained matrons. It is somewhat better since the new order of the Local Government Board has come into effect, and the nurse is placed under the doctor so far as her work for the patients is concerned, but still there are many ways in which an untrained matron can make the work of a trained nurse very trying. A nurse, for instance, often finds the greatest difficulty in getting a proper supply of linen for the use of the patients. The nurse should, I think, have her own supply for the sick wards quite independent of the workhouse stock. Then, again, the nurse should have her regular times off duty daily, appointed by the guardians. As it is she has to apply to the matron for leave, and the matron may be quite unable to understand why the nurse should go out at a particular time, when, perhaps, it is the only time possible for her to leave her patients. You will readily understand that there are endless little ways in which an untrained master and matron can fret a trained nurse if they are placed in a position of authority over her. The nurse should, I think, be directly responsible to the board for her own department as the schoolmistress is for hers. This would obviate many of the present difficulties."

"Are there other difficulties besides those you have mentioned?"

"Yes, those are some of the most important ones, but there are others. The accommodation for the nurses is often very bad, the salaries are not high, and the necessary appliances for the nurses are often not forthcoming, and good nurses like to have things for their use. Then, again, the food provided for the patients is sometimes very unsuitable. One of our nurses a little while ago was very unhappy about a poor phthisical patient. The regulation dinner was pork and potatoes. Naturally the patient could not eat it, and the nurse was absolutely unable to obtain anything else for her. Of course the doctor might have insisted if he had chosen—I do not think any board would refuse a request from a medical man if he stated that in his opinion a different diet was necessary for a patient—but he did not. We have not, with some few exceptions, had very much help from the doctors. Many of them are badly paid themselves, and, so far, have not taken a great deal of interest in the work. Even where these difficulties as to accommodation and so on do not exist, it still is not easy to obtain nurses. The guardians of the new Infirmary at Portsmouth, which is a beautiful place, were anxious to obtain good nurses and applied to us. We were unable to supply them, and then they advertised. They got very few answers, and, finally, asked us to advertise for them. We did so for five weeks, and even then we did not get the

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