

## The Best Means of Providing and Training Nurses for the Indoor Poor.\*

By MISS C. B. S. WILKIE.

Lady Superintendent of the Halifax Workhouse Infirmary.

YEAR by year the question of the nursing of the sick poor in the Workhouse Infirmaries has been brought under the notice of Conferences, and with the years the aspect of the question has altered. In its earlier presentations the necessity for trained nursing was the point upon which conviction was needed. When that was attained the position and treatment of the nurses became the matter of the moment; and to-day the consideration of the question of the inadequate supply of nurses qualified to fulfil the requirements of the Nursing Order of 1897 is of paramount and vital importance. That Order, like so many others, does not go to the root of the evils. It merely suggests palliative treatment. It is weak. It forces slight improvements on existing conditions, but the Local Government Board fails to recognise its responsibility for these conditions, or its responsibility or power in the alteration of a state of affairs admittedly wrong.

The "Times" inquires, in an article published 22nd December, 1897, "Where are the nurses now to come from for the carrying on of Poor Law work? . . . The effect of the new Order will be to make the demand for trained nurses for infirmaries greater than ever, and now that the Workhouse Infirmary Nurses' Association has stopped work, it is thought that the Local Government Board will be compelled to take some definite action in the matter. There is reason to believe that that body has not sufficiently realised the difficulty in the way of securing competent nurses for Workhouse Infirmaries under present conditions; but the question arises whether the Central Poor Law authority will not now be forced to establish some system of its own for the training of nurses for Poor Law services as it already does for the army and navy, and at the same time to reorganise the whole system as regards the status of the nurses when they have been trained."

The "Lancet," in its issue of 11th December, 1897, remarks, "There is no doubt that the time has now come when the central authority shall take up the matter of organising a training school for Workhouse nurses, and for introducing reform as regards increased salaries, pensions, regulations for duty, and the like, so as to constitute a separate and more attractive service of its own on the same lines as has been recently done in the army and navy."

These suggestions and hopes have not yet been realised. To any one practically interested in

\* Being a Paper read at the Central Conference of Poor Law Guardians, held at the Guildhall, London, February 16th and 17th, 1899.

the care of the sick poor in the Workhouse Infirmaries (a care which should not be limited to their bodies), the need of a radical change must be very apparent—a change which, to be thorough, must be revolutionary, which must clear away abuses root and branch, and replace an inefficient system with one which shall provide in entirety for the needs of the patients and the nurses. Alteration to meet one or another of these needs will not suffice. The alteration should meet all needs.

In order to induce you to give your attention and influence to the desirability of a revolutionary change, it is necessary to point out to you that the present system is unsound in principle and defective in operation; that it leads to a serious amount of wrong; and to lay before you just and reasonable proposals, which, if carried out with completeness, would be effective in operation.

A primary consideration is the nurse. What is the qualification for a trained nurse? To such a question there is no satisfactory reply. It is a matter of opinion—opinion as various as are the knowledge and capacity of the multitude. There is no standard. Every hospital sets its own. There is neither uniformity of training nor of standard of attainment. Is that not a fundamental error?—an error which might, and ought to be remedied without delay. Why should the Local Government Board not constitute a nursing department, worked by a committee which should formulate a general scheme of training in detail, and which should be an examining body. All examinations should be held at fixed intervals, and all papers of answers should be returned to, and judged at, headquarters.

The age at which probationers would be received to be decided by the department. Each nursing school should have the choice of candidates for that school, but such candidates only to be admitted on three months' trial, at certain stated periods, after satisfying the requirements of the examining body as to their general knowledge. The time of training should be fixed at four years. During the first two of these years no salary should be paid; board, lodging, washing and uniform should be provided, and training fees should be charged. Why should a nurse receive training at no monetary cost—on the contrary, gain to herself—while a medical, or any other student, has to pay for all his knowledge. Knowledge paid for is generally valued.

In order that otherwise suitable women should not be debarred from entering the service, scholarships should be established, the funds for the provision of such scholarships to be acquired by capitation grants to each training school. Prizes and medals should be given for proficiency; but not for proficiency in theoretical work alone. In connection with the nursing department there should be a staff of nursing inspectors who would

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)