

Nursing Politics.

"Men's Evil Manners Live in Brass."—*Shakespeare.*

WE have frequently expressed the opinion that unless the Matron of a Hospital or Infirmary has a reasonable amount of power in selecting probationers and nurses, an efficient nursing department is not possible. At the same time, we must admit that circumstances alter cases.

It has been an open secret for several years past that there has been a large amount of friction and dissatisfaction in the working of the nursing department of the Chelsea Workhouse Infirmary, and we cannot say that under the circumstances we were surprised when, last summer, the Infirmary Board of that Institution took the law into their own hands and somewhat curtailed the power of the Matron in relation to the selection of nurses, and the absolute and arbitrary authority she had assumed in connection with the nursing department.

SEVERAL unsatisfactory matters had been brought to the notice of the Guardians. For example, two poor nurses had lost their eyesight through contagion—disasters which it was considered might have been avoided if the condition of the nurses' health had received due care. The Guardians were compelled on both occasions to pay compensation.

AGAIN, rumours were rife of a very undesirable system of favouritism in the nursing school, and statements were made to members of the Board by various nurses and their friends, that the regime was not all that could be desired.

WE drew the attention of the Infirmary Board in these columns to the very undignified and undesirable position in which they, with the Committee of the Middlesex Hospital, were placed, by permitting their Matron to exercise undue influence over the members of the Chelsea staff in relation to the affairs of the Royal British Nurses' Association—the Matrons of these institutions having consented to a most overwhelming and unjust representation of nurses from Middlesex and Chelsea on the General Council of the Association. By the votes of these persons the reactionary policy of the Hon. Officers was ultimately enforced. Following the lead of their Matrons, the conduct of the nurses from these institutions was universally condemned by all unprejudiced persons. Their abusive personal remarks, hisses, guffaws, and rowdy conduct were the means adopted by the officials and their subordinates to intimidate the better class members and they ultimately earned for the governing

body of the R.B.N.A. the apt if deplorable description of the "Cockpit."

AGAIN, Miss de Pledge, the Matron of the Chelsea Infirmary, was selected by the Hon. Officers, as editor of their organ, the "Nurses' Journal," and during the time she controlled that paper she inserted defamatory and false statements and personal attacks from Mr. Brudenell-Carter and other medical members, and excluded the replies of the members so attacked—conduct which, in the opinion of all honourable people, reflected no credit on Miss de Pledge.

THESE and other cognate matters caused much public scandal, and have naturally resulted in depreciating the Nursing School of the Chelsea Infirmary. No surprise need therefore be felt if women of education and refinement will not apply for vacancies in the nursing department of this Institution, but the Guardians appear to be much exercised in their minds and divided in their opinions as to the cause.

As a result, turbulent Board Meetings have been held with lengthy and acrimonious personal discussions. Some of the Guardians, led by the present Chairman, desire to restore to Miss de Pledge very considerable power and authority, especially in the selection of, and the control over, the nurses. Other Guardians, who have no confidence in the discretion of Miss de Pledge, and who are opposed to what they term "her high-handed and dictatorial conduct in dealing with her subordinates," are anxious for a Nursing Sub-Committee. But at the last meeting of the Board a compromise was adopted to the effect "That as vacancies in the nursing staff occur the Matron be requested as far as possible to select two or more candidates for each vacancy as it occurs, and bring them before the General Committee for final decision."

IN any case, it is noticeable that the powers of Dr. Moore, the Medical Superintendent of the Chelsea Infirmary, have been considerably curtailed in so far as the Nursing Department is concerned. For the future, although responsible to the Local Government Board for the control of the Infirmary, and the efficiency of every department, his authority has been largely superseded by that of the Matron in relation to the nursing staff. He is apparently to have no voice in the selection and appointment, nor presumably in the discharge, of nurses, and he will find himself in an altogether false position under the existing Parliamentary Orders.

WE are therefore of opinion that before Dr. Moore can be deprived of authority to which he is now legally entitled, the Local Government

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