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Editorial.

NURSING BY RELIGIOUS COMMUNITIES.

IN view of the discussion caused by the decision of the Joint Committee of the Cork South Charitable Infirmary and County Hospital to fill the vacancy for a matron by appointing a member of a religious order, it is interesting to consider the pros and cons of such an arrangement.

For many years the nursing of the sick was almost entirely in the hands of religious communities. It was quite against the spirit of the age for young unmarried women to leave their homes and live independent lives, and, indeed, in more lawless times such a proceeding would have been inexpedient, and not devoid of danger. But at the present time this danger does not exist. Moreover, our hospitals are supported by voluntary contributions, subscribed by persons of all creeds and denominations, and should, therefore, be managed on unsectarian lines. On the face of things it appears that the person with the best credentials should be appointed irrespective of her religious opinions. But this does not represent the whole question where a religious community is concerned.

Firstly the selecting area is then immensely narrowed to the exclusion of some of the best candidates. Then, it must be remembered that if a suitable Sister be appointed it is not the individual, but the Order, which makes the agreement, and that this Sister may at any time be replaced by another by the head of the Community. Again, if any question arises in which the interests of the hospital and the Community diverge a Sister would consider that she failed in her religious obligations if she did not put the interests of her Order first, while at no time is she a free agent, and, though a wise head will allow her much latitude, yet the ultimate control is unquestionably vested in the Superior of the Community, who is by no means necessarily, or even commonly, a trained nurse. It must also be taken into consideration that Religious Communities are proverbially conservative, and progress, therefore, difficult of attainment. Lastly, we should like to impress upon Committees the importance of examining the professional credentials of Sisters as particularly as those of lay nurses. In our experience this is not done, but the nursing is entrusted to the Sisterhood as a whole, and the rest taken for granted.

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