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Editorial.

THE WORKHOUSE MATRON AND THE SUPERINTENDENT NURSE.

The Order of the Local Government Board in relation to Workhouse Nursing, stated by the President of the Local Government Board to be in course of preparation, is expected to be announced before the end of the current year. Having possessed our souls in patience since the Departmental Committee appointed to inquire into the Nursing of the Sick Poor in Workhouses issued its Report in 1902, we must do so for a short time longer still. The Order was no doubt delayed by the advent of the "qualified nurse," that astonishing creation of the Committee who caused such a sensation in the nursing world when suddenly hurled into its midst. All sections were unanimous in their protests against her recognition. Like so many vultures, they pounced down upon her, and tore her to shreds, till we doubt if now even her bare skeleton remains. It is said, however, that the chief cause in the delay in the issue of the expected Order is the recommendation made by the Committee that the Superintendent Nurse should be independent of the Matron, a recommendation which has met with considerable opposition, so that the Local Government Board have not at present seen their way to act upon it.

We consider it would be a mistake were the Board to do so, and have always frankly stated our opinion on this point. Divided authority is always productive of friction, and the Matron of the workhouse, as the superior female officer, should always be the supreme authority on the female side.

Do we, therefore, support the present system of placing the work of a skilled nurse under the supervision of an unskilled person? By no means. The trouble in workhouse nursing administration goes back further than the Superintendent Nurse, and her inability to work under the Matron—namely, to the

qualifications of the Matron herself. It is these which need defining anew in conformity with modern requirements; for, if the Matron is to be held responsible, as she undoubtedly should be, for the efficiency of all the departments of work under her supervision, she should be qualified by her knowledge to exercise that supervision, and if part of her duty, as is the case where the infirmary is not separate from the workhouse, is to supervise sick wards, she must herself be a trained nurse, competent to supervise the work of the nurses working under her. True, at present, workhouse Masters and Matrons are usually man and wife, but surely the day has gone by for the principal qualification of a responsible official, such as a workhouse Matron, to be that she is the wife of the Master. Would it not be to the public advantage if the separate entity of the workhouse Matron were recognised? It would then be possible to make a regulation that workhouse Matrons, who are required to supervise sick wards, must be trained nurses, and as these appointments fall vacant to fill them with women possessing certificates of training as nurses. The wife of the Master would not be ineligible, but she would, as any other candidate, stand on her own merits. The perennial difficulties connected with the supervision of trained nurses by the workhouse Matron would then be non-existent.

This was the course recommended in the evidence tendered by Mrs. G. F. Wates, late Matron of the Lewisham Infirmary, to the Departmental Committee, on behalf of the Matrons' Council, and it has always appeared to us the only satisfactory solution of the problem, a solution moreover so simple and so obvious that the only wonder is that it has not ere this been adopted.

Until, however, the Local Government Board establishes a Nursing Department, similar to that under the supervision of the Matron-in-Chief at the War Office, it is probable that many of the nursing problems with which the Board is confronted will await solution.

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