

CONCERNING Workhouse Nursing there is, says our contemporary, a veritable epidemic of Workhouse scandals. We have pointed out the evils of the Workhouse system so often that we hope the recent scandal will hasten on the reformation. In the *Sunday Chronicle*, July 1st, we found the following:—

ALLEGED WORKHOUSE SCANDAL AT BLACKBURN.

At the Blackburn Board of Guardians yesterday (June 30th, 1894) a Committee, appointed to inquire into the recent scandal, which ended in the resignation of the master and matron, reported that they were irresistibly forced to the conclusion that the master had been guilty of grossly immoral conduct whilst he was the master of the Workhouse. The Committee also found that he had been guilty of indecent conduct towards one probationer nurse who was still in the service of the Guardians, and who was able to reject and resist his advances. He had also been systematically cruel and tyrannical towards Nurses who had been unwilling witnesses of his bad conduct. The report was adopted, but a motion that the evidence and a copy of the report be sent to the Local Government Board was defeated, as was also a motion for a Local Government Board inquiry.

* * *

WE recently commented briefly upon an action brought against the Elgin Hospital authorities and the Matron of that Institution by Miss AGNES ANDERSON, a recent Probationer, on the ground that she had been dismissed from that Hospital without sufficient justification. The Sheriff has now issued the following judgment and note; but as we understand that an appeal has been lodged against his decision, we content ourselves with putting on record the conclusions at which he has arrived, reserving our comments upon the matter until the case has been finally decided:—

“The Sheriff finds that Anderson’s dismissal was justifiable. His interlocutor and note are in the following terms:—

ELGIN, 26th July, 1894.—The Sheriff-Substitute having advised the cause: Finds (1) that the pursuer was a Probationer Nurse in Gray’s Hospital, Elgin, and that the defenders, other than the Rev. Alexander Lawson and Miss Jamesina Paterson, are the trustees and managers of the said Hospital: (2) That the defender, the said Rev. Alexander Lawson, ceased to be a trustee and manager of the said Hospital on his translation from the Presbytery of Elgin to the Presbytery of Old Deer on 12th October, 1893: (3) That Miss Jamesina Paterson is the Matron of said Hospital; (4) That the pursuer was engaged by the said Matron as a Probationer Nurse in the said Hospital, and entered upon her duties as such on 2nd January, 1894; (5) That the terms of the contract were that the pursuer should receive a year’s training, and that her salary should be 10s. a month with board and washing and uniform; (6) That rule No. 4 of chapter VI. of the Regulations for the government of Gray’s Hospital, Elgin, is in the following terms:—‘Nurses and servants shall be hired by her (the Matron), subject to the approval of the Managers, and be subject to her orders.’ (7) That on the 16th April, 1894, the said Miss Jamesina Paterson dismissed the pursuer for various acts of negligence on her part; that she received the balance of wages due to her on the 18th of April without objection, and left on the following day: Finds in law (1) that on the principle of *Eodem modo quo quid constituitur, eodem modo dissolvitur*, the Matron having the power of engaging Nurses, subject to the approval of the Managers, has also the power of dismiss-

ing them, subject to the same approval; (2) that by minute of a meeting of the Committee of Gray’s Hospital, held on 18th April last, the defenders through said committee approved the action of their Matron in dismissing the pursuer; (3) that the dismissal of the pursuer by the said Matron was justifiable. Therefore assoilzies the defenders from the conclusions of the action, finds them entitled to their expenses, allows accounts thereof to be lodged, and when lodged remits the same to the auditor of the court to tax and report, and decerns. (Signed), CHARLES RAMPINI.

NOTE.—The result at which the Sheriff-Substitute has arrived obviates the necessity of disposing of the many nice questions of law that were raised at the debate. The simple issue to which the Sheriff-Substitute has directed his attention is whether the acts of omission and commission complained of justify the Matron in dismissing the pursuer. The Sheriff-Substitute thinks they do. No doubt each taken by itself is a very slight dereliction from duty. It may even be conceded that, taken as a whole, they amount to nothing more serious than a young girl’s thoughtlessness. But as negligence is relative—as it is and must always be conditioned by the nature of the duties undertaken to be performed—and as, in the case of a Nurse in an Hospital, the slightest act of negligence may be productive of serious, perhaps fatal effects, the standard of duty must in such a case be placed very high. In the case of *Mackintosh v. Mackintosh*, 2 M. 1862 (1862) this was distinctly laid down by Lord Neaves. ‘The amount of care’ (which every prudent and conscientious person should observe) says his Lordship ‘will be proportionate to the degree of risk run, and to the magnitude of the mischief that may be occasioned.’ ‘Carelessness,’ says the Matron, ‘is a great fault in a Nurse.’ This cannot be disputed. And when a person is so careless as to mix turpentine with milk instead of lime water; as to let a steam lamp go out which was necessary for the comfort of a bronchitic patient; as to wipe up trays with babies’ dirty napkins; as to leave patients unvisited for a lengthened period (for the Sheriff-Substitute does not believe the pursuer’s story that, on the night when she was in the operating room with the house surgeon, she left every ten minutes to visit her patients), and other similar acts, the inference is unavoidable—she was not attending to her work as she ought to have done, and she was unfitted for the office of Nurse. The Sheriff-Substitute readily believes what some of the witnesses have said, that the pursuer was kind to her patients. He has not the slightest doubt but that she intended to be so. But her thoughtlessness was such that she did not rightly appreciate the nature of her work, and her childishness so great that she could not refrain from amusing herself and the other Nurses by mimicking her patients.

The Sheriff-Substitute, with the most earnest desire to do so, can find nothing to palliate her conduct. It is true that the proof discloses considerable laxity in much connected with the administration of the Hospital, and very regrettable relations between the Matron and the house-surgeon; and he may further add that the Matron’s attempt to influence Nurses Dawson and Cruickshank in connection with this case was in the highest degree improper. But such matters can have no bearing on the issue. Nor does he think that the pursuer has any reason to complain of want of instruction. The witnesses concurred in stating that the Matron gave her a general idea of her duties on her taking office, and left it to her sister Nurses to teach her the details. This was the general rule in the Institution, and the pursuer got neither more or less instruction than any of the other Probationers. On the whole, he has no doubt but that his judgment must be adverse to the pursuer. (Int’l.) C. R.”

* * *

Truth, last week, had the following very pertinent paragraph. It is much to be wished that our contemporary would use its great influence more

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)