

ditions of their work and education. There are two points, especially, concerning the constitution of this Board which we would briefly discuss. The proposal that a large number of members should be elected by the British Medical Association and by the various medical Corporations, makes too little provision for the representation of general practitioners upon the Board—a class whose interests are more closely affected, perhaps, by the present out-patient system pursued in General Hospitals than those of any other body of workers.

In the next place, there can be, we think, no question that if a Central Board of Control is to be established over Metropolitan Hospitals, it should include some representative Nurses. At the present day, the Nursing department in all the Medical Charities is so important, and the oversight over that department on the part of the lay Committee is, as a rule, so perfunctory and inefficient, that it would be of inestimable advantage to each Institution to possess, upon its Board of management, women with some experience and knowledge of domestic affairs and of Nursing details. Upon a Central Advisory Board, it is not too much to say that it would be essential that some such Nursing experts should be elected. Many of the questions which at present cause most difficulty to Hospital Committees are those which affect the welfare and education of their Nursing Staff; and in deciding such points it is well known that the gentlemen who compose these Committees are entirely dependent upon the advice of one or two of their paid officials, because under the present system they have no special knowledge of the subject, and have no independent expert adviser; they are therefore incapable of deciding for themselves as to the best methods to be adopted in any given professional matter.

There are now so many ladies, who have held high and important positions in the Nursing world, who are married and have time to spare for public matters, that there could be no difficulty in obtaining such expert assistance on the Boards of Metropolitan Hospitals. Already, the principle has been tested in the case of women guardians, and has yielded such excellent results, especially in the improved management of Workhouse Infirmaries, that there can be no further question as to the advantages of the system—if indeed it could ever have been disputed. The

difficulty at the present day almost is, for women who are willing to devote their spare time and energy to public life to obtain sufficient work, and there should be no difficulty, experienced by any Metropolitan Hospital and certainly none by a Central Hospital Board—if that is ever established—in obtaining the services of women whose advice and experience upon Nursing questions would be of inestimable value.

Unfortunately, however, there are grave difficulties in the way of instituting a Central Hospital Board. The jealousies and divergent interests of the many Medical Charities will probably render it a task of the utmost difficulty to create a body representative of all; and then again, each Hospital being dependent upon the exertions of its own managers for funds, and being maintained to an appreciable extent by the interest which these gentlemen can excite amongst the charitable public, it must inevitably be a matter of supreme difficulty for terms to be arranged upon which all these Institutions can be drawn together under any sort of central control. Indeed, unless the Central Board possesses the power of the purse—and we cannot see how it is to possess such power under the present voluntary system—we find it difficult to comprehend how it can possibly exercise any efficient authority. And, without some definite controlling power, a Central Board might easily be productive of increased difficulties, rather than of any benefit, in the management of Metropolitan Hospitals. Everyone must recognise the necessity of reforms, the growing difficulty of the maintenance of the voluntary charities, and the lessened public interest in these Institutions. But, in our judgment, reform must be made very warily if the voluntary system is to continue to exist at all; hasty or ill-advised reform would merely spell revolution; and then the voluntary charities would disappear in a vortex of public discontent, being superseded in all probability either by State governed, or by rate-supported, Hospitals.

That would be a result which all who are proud of the history and past work of these great Institutions would greatly regret.

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