

To the unbiassed onlooker, experienced in the modern methods of Nursing, and in the management of important Nurse Training Schools, it is easy at once to perceive the precise cause and origin of the whole difficulty. In the great majority of the disputes in Workhouse Infirmaries, whether they be small or large, whether in old or modern Institutions, whether they be situated in London or the Provinces, in England, Scotland, or Ireland, a careful enquiry elicits the fact that they originate in some dispute between the Medical Superintendent and the Matron. To some who know how smoothly and harmoniously great General Hospitals are conducted, these constant controversies under the Poor Law appear to be strange and even mysterious. But to those who have studied the Poor Law system, they appear to be almost a matter of course and of necessity. To those who know that the Medical Superintendents of these Workhouse Infirmaries are, almost without exception, gentlemen of high education and marked professional ability, and that the Matrons, in the majority of instances, are ladies of equal social standing who have passed through a thorough course of training in Nursing—if they have not even held also posts of importance in other Institutions—it appears almost incredible that when such gentlemen and such ladies are appointed to work together, under the Poor Law, friction and discord almost inevitably occur.

It may seem a paradox, but it is nevertheless the case, that these very conditions, which in a General Hospital tend to induce harmony, in a Poor Law Institution produce discord. But it is a fact that the Medical Superintendent had formerly no difficulty in carrying out the rules of his office, when the Nursing staff was chiefly composed of pauper helps, headed by a person of the domestic class and unacquainted with the slightest detail of Nursing. All that she and her so-called assistants had to do, was to obey, as well as they could, the directions which were given to them. Nowadays, when Nursing has become a matter of importance to the sick, and, therefore, one which demands from its workers definite knowledge, it has become necessary that the Matron should not only have the entire personal control over her female subordinates, but also that she should have been thoroughly trained and specially educated for her position, so that she may be

able both to efficiently supervise her Nurses' work and to superintend their education. The old rules, therefore, which twenty years ago were admirable and workable, are at the present day obsolete, and their retention and observance cause inevitable embarrassment and friction. The Medical Superintendent now, better educated in every way than his predecessor, finds the details which the latter fulfilled without irritation, often in the highest degree irksome and unpleasant to himself. There are many amongst these gentlemen who object to be called upon to add, to their medical duties, the supervision of the other departments of the Infirmary, and who with much reason consider that they should not be required to deal with such diverse matters as the cleanliness of the garrets; the provision of uniform for the probationers, and the regulation of the kitchen and the laundry. All this was very well, and perhaps even necessary, a generation ago, when the Medical Superintendent was the one educated official in the Institution, and when Workhouse Infirmaries were not the palaces that they are to-day. Then, the doctor made an admirable head; to-day, he has advanced past the drudgery of officialdom; yet the details of his duty still comprise those which in all well-managed public Institutions should be, and usually are, confided to the responsible heads of strictly defined departments.

Then, on the Matron's side, a lady who comes from a well-organised General Hospital finds herself prevented from doing her duties as she has been accustomed to do, because she is bound hand and foot by red tape. Indeed, sooner or later, she discovers that if she is to do her duty with the utmost satisfaction to her immediate employers, the rule of her life and conduct must be to do—Nothing.

What, then, is wanted is a simple reform of the present rules and regulations for the Medical Superintendent and the Matron. Until this step is taken, as we have previously said, troubles and discord will inevitably occur, again and again, at Institution after Institution; and the better trained are the Nurses and Matrons introduced into the Workhouse Infirmaries, the more will they resent the injustice and the discomfort of the existing arrangements. The Local Government Board have a great opportunity for doing an incalculable public service by considering this question and taking action upon it.

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