

## Nursing the Plague.

### AN AMAZING SUGGESTION.

THE plague in India has during the last week been attracting considerable attention. To begin with the subject has been referred to at considerable length by Lord George Hamilton in the House of Commons, and we confess to having read his utterances with regard to a nurse who was included in a search party for plague cases with undisguised amazement. We quote from Lord George Hamilton's speech as reported by the *Times*.—

"If there was an idea among the native population that under the British regulations their women would be subjected to any indignity a storm would have arisen which would have made it hopeless to apply the regulations. It was necessary, therefore, to secure a number of lady nurses and doctors to assist in the search operations. There was a great difficulty in getting the nurses, but at last the Government secured a sufficient number. One of these nurses made a deposition that she had received a letter purporting to be signed by one of the brothers Natu, stating that it would be greatly to her detriment if she worked with the search party. Since receiving this letter, she persisted in working in the search operations, and she had not had a midwifery case in the city in consequence, although previously she frequently was called in."

We have no sympathy with the brothers Natu in their political intrigues, but we confess to great unanimity of sentiment with them in their objection to having their lying-in women attended by a nurse who was engaged in searching for plague. In this particular we think the brothers showed a greater knowledge of nursing matters than did the Secretary of State for India. We cannot, perhaps, expect that an expert knowledge of nursing should be required of the holder of this important position, but nothing could more surely prove the need for the adoption of our suggestion, made last week, that representative nurses should be included in the Government Committees appointed to deal with the various Nursing Services, than the fact that such a startling statement, betraying as it does absolute ignorance of the matter dealt with, should be gravely made in the House of Commons. What would home authorities say if it was suggested that a nurse should divide her time impartially between scarlet fever and midwifery cases?

### DANGEROUS DUTY.

Again, the death of Miss Morgan, the acting Lady Superintendent of the General Plague Hospital, Bombay, which we recorded last week, caused universal regret, and now the news of the death from the plague of Miss McDougall has just arrived, and also the destruction, by fire, of three hospitals—the European, Hindu, and Parsee—in the plague compound at Bombay. The fire spread so rapidly

that the patients were only rescued from the burning building with considerable difficulty. The rescue of all was ultimately effected, but three Hindu patients died subsequently from shock. The nurses' quarters were destroyed, and the six English nurses lost all their personal property. It is satisfactory to learn that the epidemic is showing signs of abatement, there being a decrease of about seventy daily in the mortality returns. This is no doubt due to the efficient measures which are now enforced, with a view to combating the disease, as well as to the present nursing arrangements. We hope that the death from the plague of the two sisters will not have the effect of making parents hesitate to allow their daughters to volunteer for duty in India. If their sons were needed for active service, they would be proud of the distinction thus accorded to them, but daughters are somehow looked upon as the more especial property of their parents, who seem to think that they have a right to dispose of them as they please, a right which they do not claim with regard to their sons. A nurse's professional duty, however, is much the same as a soldier's. Wherever necessity calls, provided she has not prior and stronger claims, she should be ready to go. She should not, any more than the soldier, be willing to spend all her life as a fair-weather worker. We believe that the effect of recent events will be to infuse an element of deeper seriousness, and a sense of greater responsibility into the minds of those who volunteer. That they are facing peril, they must, and it well that they should, realize, but this will only mean that the volunteers will be drawn from the ranks of the most earnest minded of the nursing profession, who, realizing the risks they run, are, nevertheless, content to face them, in order that now, as ever, wherever disease, sickness, and necessity call for their assistance trained nurses may be to the fore. That the nurses are needed, and appreciated, is evident from a recent leading article in the *Times*, which, in speaking of the paper read by Mr. H. M. Birdwood, C.S.I., upon the plague, before the Indian Section of the Society of Arts, stated, "Mr. Birdwood referred to pathetic stories illustrating the gratitude of plague-stricken patients for the kindness and care shown to them by the nurses." While the need for their services, therefore, remains, so long, we believe, will the nurses volunteer.

### A CIVIL MEDAL OF MERIT.

Mr. Alfred McCabe Dallas, late District Medical Officer of Health, and Senior Medical Officer, Grant Road Hospital, Bombay, has publicly advocated that a State medal should be struck to commemorate medical and nursing services during the plague. Of the nurses he says, "These British women have worked for months, were continually involved in risk, several contracted the disease on

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