

A Question of Discipline.

AN official report of the inquiry which has been held into the case of mistaken identity, at the North-Western Fever Hospital, has been drawn up by the Committee, and has been duly presented to the Metropolitan Asylums Board.

We quote the greater part of the report *in extenso*—

"It is with extreme regret that we have to inform the managers of a serious mistake which has occurred at the North-Western Hospital in regard to the identity of two patients.

"On the afternoon of Friday, November 19th last, William Malquin, aged three years, of Islington, and Ernest Green, aged four years, of Shoreditch, were admitted to the receiving ward of the hospital within a few minutes of each other, each certified to be suffering from scarlet fever. Through unfortunate carelessness on the part of some of the hospital officials, William Malquin became known as Ernest Green, and Ernest Green as William Malquin, from the outset.

"We have conducted a searching investigation into the circumstances attending the admission to hospital of these two patients, and have examined the hospital officials concerned, and we find that the mistake arose through a series of inattentions to small but important duties on the part of certain of the officers.

"The Board's regulations seem to us to adequately provide for the preservation of the identity of young children if the officers give reasonable attention to them and properly carry them out.

"The results of our investigation may be briefly summarised as follows:—

"William Malquin, the first child admitted, was accompanied by an ambulance nurse, who, in compliance with the Board's regulation, tied a label round the child's neck before leaving the child's home. This child, being very ill, was, according to the directions of the assistant medical officer, not bathed at the receiving ward. It was taken, by the receiving nurse herself, direct to the ward, but without the bed-card, which should have been taken at the same time and affixed to the bed-head board. The excuse for this omission was explained to us to be that the getting of the patient to bed was of the first importance, and that the bed-card was not completed by the doctor.

"BED-CARDS WERE CHANGED.

"The second child, Ernest Green, arrived at the receiving room a few minutes afterwards, and, being a mild case, had the usual bath. The nurse who fetched this second patient from its home was a new nurse, and, this being her first ambulance duty, was not acquainted with the details of her work, and omitted to tie a label round the neck of her patient as required by the Board's rules. By the time the bath was finished the bed-cards of both children were completed, and the receiving nurse, most unfortunately, sent them together to the ward by the hand of the porter who carried this second child to its bed. She asserts that in doing so she gave him strict injunctions as to which was which. We do not doubt that the bed-cards were placed over the wrong beds, and that from that moment the children were known by wrong names.

"What became of the label round the neck of the first child (Malquin) we cannot trace, and the evidence of the ward nurses on the one hand, and that of the ambulance receiving nurses on the other, are hopelessly at variance. We fear, however, that insufficient attention has been paid to these labels generally, and it is evident that, if the label was still upon the child Malquin when it reached the ward (as to which it is impossible to be certain), it was carelessly removed, without being made use of for its proper purpose—namely, the preservation of the identity of the patient.

"We feel bound to add that we have reason to believe that in preparing the bed-cards in the receiving room the assistant medical officer entered some of his notes on the wrong sheets.

"As regards the nurse, inexperienced in ambulance duty, it is fair to state that the matron had considerable difficulty in consequence of great pressure in selecting nurses for this duty at the time, and as regards the receiving room nurse we believe that, notwithstanding her error of judgment, she acted from the best motives, and in the interests of the patient Malquin.

"OFFICERS REPRIMANDED.

"We have deemed it our duty to administer a severe reprimand to the assistant medical officer for not completing the first bed-card before he dealt with the next child, and to censure the receiving nurse for her mistake, and generally we have instructed the principal officers to give such directions in matters of detail as will ensure on the part of all their subordinates a better knowledge and appreciation of the several duties required of them."

The obvious lesson to be learned from this tragic occurrence is the need of a strict enforcement of discipline in public institutions. It would seem that the rules laid down by the Asylums Board for the direction of its subordinate officers are excellent, and if faithfully carried out would preclude any possibility of a mistake. But, from a lack of strict attention to the detailed rules of the board, the error occurred on the part of the assistant medical officer and the receiving nurse, which ended in the mistaken identity of the two children.

We have no hesitation in saying that those institutions attain the highest standard of efficiency, and the subordinate workers are happiest, where discipline is strictly enforced, but, at the same time, in the present day everything appears to be tending in an opposite direction. We remember once inquiring of a clever Matron, who at one time worked under the Poor Law, what constituted the elements of success in the head of the nursing department in one of these important institutions. What should the Matron do in order to ensure it. The answer we received was "*Nothing*." If a Matron wishes to get on she should let things take their own course, and she will be successful and popular, and, provided no scandal occurs which gets into the public press, her committee will congratulate themselves upon the treasure they have obtained. But, let her try to put down abuses, and to enforce discipline. Let

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