

### **A Nursing Charity.**

IN last week's *Lancet* appeared an article upon the abuse of Nursing Charities, commenting somewhat severely upon the management of the Maternity Charity and District Nurses' Home, Plaistow. We are of opinion that Maternity Charities, conducted on the right lines, and under medical supervision, may be of great benefit to a poor neighbourhood. The medical practitioners in Plaistow, however, object so strongly to the lines upon which the Maternity Charity there is worked, that they have formed themselves into a union to protect their own position; we must say that unless the facts to which they take exception can be disproved, that they have reasonable ground for complaint. They accuse the nurses of touting, and of interfering with the treatment of their patients. For instance, they say that "in a house let out in tenements, a medical practitioner is attending one family, and a nurse from the Plaistow Nurses' Home is attending the other family.

In the medical man's absence the nurse will give advice gratuitously to the medical man's patients. This may be done from motives of kindness and good nature, but it interferes with the medical treatment and advertises the fact that the nurses cost less than the medical practitioner. Also this interference may at times injure the patients, for it must be borne in mind that these nurses are often raw girls recruited from the uneducated classes, who have paid their premiums but have not yet learnt much about nursing. Of course, any help given gratuitously to the extreme poor is better than no help at all; but when fees are charged and fully qualified practitioners are driven away, and replaced by nurses, the question as to the ability and knowledge possessed by these nurses may very justifiably be raised. Ought untrained nurses who are just beginning their apprenticeship to be sent to private patients?

It is true that a promise has been given not to allow touting, and that this is now against the rules of the Plaistow Maternity Charity. The zeal, however, of subordinates renders this rule ineffectual. Thus, for instance, a short time ago a medical practitioner arranged to take a midwifery case, and the fee was to be one and a half guineas. The patient said she proposed to engage a nurse from the Plaistow Maternity Charity and went there for that purpose. After having made the necessary arrangements, the attendant, who took down the name and address, inquired what the applicant proposed to do about a midwife. The lady replied that having engaged the services of her usual medical attendant she did not require a midwife. In spite of this, and just as the lady was leaving and going downstairs, the attendant called out after her, "Do you really think a

doctor is necessary?" Here, then, was a deliberate effort made to replace a fully qualified practitioner by a nurse who was to undertake this midwifery case though her qualifications might well be open to question. It was an attempt to undercut a medical practitioner by offering a nurse who would take a much smaller fee. The acceptance of the smaller fee by the nurse is economically possible because the institution from which she comes is supported by charitable donations."

Apparently the weak point in the management of the Plaistow Nurses' Home is that untrained, or very imperfectly trained, nurses are sent out to attend patients, for it cannot be supposed that a fully trained nurse would act in the manner alleged. In our opinion, only fully trained nurses, who are also certificated midwives, should attend maternity cases, and this under the supervision of a medical man, and in ordinary cases of illness a certificated nurse should be invariably sent, and she should certainly decline to visit a patient unless a medical man is in attendance. If these rules were followed we think the grievances of the medical practitioners of Plaistow would be removed, but if untrained women, who are sent out by an institution, supported partially by public charity, prescribe for their patients, we think they have legitimate ground for complaint.

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### **Legal Matters.**

#### **THE MATERNITY HOME, PLAISTOW.**

FOLLOWING upon the complaint in the *Lancet* comes the account of an inquest held by Dr. Ambrose at the Local Board offices, Wanstead, concerning the death of Grace Darling Wooton, the illegitimate child of a domestic servant, at Stratford. The foster mother of the child deposed that it was placed in her care by Sister Katherine, of St. Mary's Maternity Home, Plaistow, that she took it to see Sister Katherine once a fortnight. The child was not a strong child, and broke into sores all over. On the last occasion Sister Katherine told her to continue the same as she had been doing.

Medical evidence showed that the child died of broncho-pneumonia and convulsions. The inquest was adjourned for the attendance of Sister Katherine. At the adjourned inquest on Monday last, Sister Katherine gave evidence that early in March she was consulted with reference to boarding out this child, and as she knew Mrs. Bullen—the child's grandmother—and sympathised with her in her troubles, she said that if she was guaranteed the payment she would find her daughter's child a home. Everyone concerned knew that the home did not take in infants, and that this child was to

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