

During the past week the subject of the nursing of our sick and wounded and the need for reform, has been discussed in the columns of the *Times*, and, equally important, it is reported, in the *British Medical Journal*, that, at a meeting of the Parliamentary Bills Committee of the British Medical Association, held on the 16th ult., the two following reports were presented.

NURSING IN NAVAL AND MILITARY HOSPITALS.

Inspector-General Turnbull and Dr. Groves presented the following reports on the nursing in naval and military hospitals:—

Naval.

The nursing in naval hospitals is performed at Haslar, Plymouth, Chatham, Malta, and in the sick quarters for naval cadets at Dartmouth, by sisters of the nursing staff and by male nurses of the sick berth staff.

In the other naval hospitals, at home and abroad, the male nurses specified are alone provided.

The sick berth staff is recruited from the shore, the age for entry being from 21 to 25 years. The recruits must possess a fair knowledge of reading, writing, and the simple rules of arithmetic, and be considered physically fit; but at present there is no fixed standard for height or chest measurement.

On entry they undergo at Haslar a course of instruction in nursing by the nursing sisters and senior sick berth staff; in "first aid" and ambulance drill by a naval surgeon; in compounding by the senior dispenser; in cookery for the sick by a lady cook; in physical drill by an instructor.

When qualified to pass an examination in these subjects, they are confirmed in the rating of sick berth attendants, and advance by seniority, efficiency, and good conduct to sick berth steward and to chief sick berth steward rank, namely, that of a chief petty officer in the Navy.

They are eligible for pensions after twenty-two years' service, and may, if considered desirable, serve to the age of 50, indicating continuous service, as contrasted with short service in the army.

As regards messing, all naval ratings have rations, or an equivalent money payment in lieu; provision is made for the usual three meals a day; there are no special arrangements for refreshments when on night duty.

Night duty when required is, as a rule, in watches of three hours, from 9 p.m. to 6 a.m., and in addition to day duty.

Such are some of the present regulations for nursing in naval hospitals, but the subject is now under special consideration by the Admiralty, and it is understood that great reform and improvement, both in the case of the nursing sisters and the sick berth staff regulations, have been recommended, and may shortly be carried out with a view to make these services more attractive than at present, the necessity for which being recognised by the Admiralty.

ALEX. TURNBULL.

Inspector-General of Hospitals and Fleets
(retired).

Military.

In some of the larger military hospitals, as Netley, the nursing is done, in part at least, by sisters of the nursing staff. In station hospitals the privates—known as orderlies—under the superintendence of the sergeants and corporals of the R.A.M.C. do the nursing.

The recruits of the R.A.M.C. receive instruction in nursing, "first aid," and ambulance work, dispensing, and in cooking for the sick during a probationary period in one of the larger military hospitals, and they are drilled in a military sense. The orderlies are promoted after examination.

The non-commissioned officers dispense, do all the clinical recording, and act as clerks to the hospital, their duties as such absorbing a large amount of time. Many of them are superior men, and some of them are said to have been trained as pharmaceutical chemists, and others for the medical profession, before they entered the service.

The regulations provide for three meals a day, the first of which is taken about 7.30 a.m., the last about 5.30 p.m. When on night duty the orderlies are not allowed nourishment or money in lieu of it. Night duty commences at 5.30, 6.0, or 6.30, according to season, and is taken two hours on and four off, or three hours on and three off. The men on night duty take the day duty until 5 p.m., and are liable to be called upon to assist in cases of emergency, or if assistance is needed by the night nurses through the evening and night. In times of pressure—as during epidemics or when the staff is reduced by drafts—the strain upon the orderlies and non-commissioned officers is often very great.

The military conditions which obtain in these hospitals oppress the whole system of nursing and hinder its efficiency. Everything is made subordinate to "drill." Attention to the equipment—furniture, utensils, and so forth—takes precedence of attention to the patients. The hospital orderly signs for and is made responsible for the equipment of his ward; and if at the weekly or monthly inspection any portion of it is broken or deficient, it must be replaced at his private cost. Each morning there is "parade" in hospital, with general inspection, which occupies much time and hinders attention to cases of acute disease.

The nursing system in military hospitals would appear to be singularly defective from the civilian's point of view. It is possible that after the war, sweeping reforms in the army may occur; but, in any case, the whole subject of administration, and more particularly the question of nursing in military hospitals, should be inquired into and reform pressed for.

J. GROVES, M.D.

It was proposed by the CHAIRMAN, seconded by Dr. HOLMAN, and resolved:—

"That this Committee tenders its warm thanks to Inspector-General Turnbull, R.N., and Dr. Groves, for their valuable reports; that the reports entered on the minutes and published in the *British Medical Journal*, and that Inspector-General Turnbull, R.N., and Dr. Groves be asked to continue as a watching Subcommittee in regard to this matter."

We are glad to learn that Members of Parliament are interesting themselves in this important matter.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)