

### The Work of Women on Hospital Boards.\*

THE Paper read by Miss Louisa Stevenson before the National Union of Women Workers at Brighton on "the Work of Women on Hospital Boards," was supplemented by a long and very interesting paper by Miss Georgiana Hill (London). She opened the discussion by speaking of the Hospital for Incurables, Putney Heath, on to the Committee of which she, in conjunction with others, had endeavoured to secure the admission of women. They had met with an extraordinary amount of opposition from the authorities of the Hospital. There had, however, been one result of the agitation, and that was the appointment of a Ladies' Visiting Committee. A Ladies' Visiting Committee was no substitute for a mixed Board; and she considered that the work was only begun. With a view to show the sort of place women held on the Boards of Hospitals, she referred to the Boards of the most important hospitals in London, to which male medical schools were attached, all of which excluded women from participation in the government, and then referred to special hospitals and explained how and to what extent women were associated with their management; afterwards alluding to other hospitals in and around London, and then to those in the principal cities of the United Kingdom and in Ireland. The returns given showed clearly, she thought, that they needed a much more widespread representation of women on Hospital Boards. Wherever the principle of a mixed Board was carried out it worked well. She had made careful inquiries on that point, and the answers had been most reassuring. In hospitals where there was neither a mixed Board nor a separate Ladies' Committee, the patients had practically no Court of Appeal. There was no reason why men should take to themselves the entire control in a Hospital Board any more than the entire control in a School Board, or a Board of Guardians or Vestry.

#### DANGERS OF RESPONSIBILITY WITHOUT POWER.

In opening the discussion, Miss Bannatyne (Women's University Settlement, Southwark) said that from time immemorial women had taken care of the sick; and during the last twelve months women had been allowed to go nearer to the seat of war in hospitals than ever before. It seemed stupidity that women who were capable of doing nursing should be considered incompetent of judging how nursing was to be done. In hospitals there was a great

tendency to look upon patients as merely "cases." The introduction of the right sort of women would greatly help to do away with this. The reply to the question why women did not figure upon Hospital Boards was that the work which they were essentially fitted to do was delegated to women by the men; but they knew that responsibility without power was very dangerous. Many complaints never reached the Board when the Board was composed entirely of men. If women were on the Board such things would often be set right; in fact, they would not occur. There was one remedy which men brought forward, that of instituting Ladies' Committees and lady visitors. She strongly opposed that. It was because women had an equal part in the responsibility in matters in the family that they claimed that they should have an equal responsibility in the management of hospital and other Boards. As to the much-discussed question of women's ability to deal with matters of finance, she said if men knew more about the saving, women knew more about the spending. Women had been allowed to sit on School Boards, and in Poor Law their right to advise and help had been admitted, and also in nearly every charitable Society. It, therefore, seemed a strange contradiction that in hospital work, where they might find a sphere for their special qualifications and gifts, they were debarred from a chance of public service.

#### UNREASONABLE AND MALIGNANT MAN.

Mrs. W. J. Evans (Hon. Secretary of Leicester branch of the N.U.W.W.) gave some of the reasons put forward in support of the opposition met with to the introduction of women as members of hospital Boards. In their moments of depression she thought they were a little inclined to think the opposition was due to the unreasoning and malignant influence of man. She was of opinion they made rather too much of that. She thought it was perfectly right that women on hospital Boards would refuse to consider hospitals as schools for students, but as primarily places where sick people were to be cured. Women were a little more ready to innovate, it was said, without giving proper study to a subject. Of course women had the defects of their good qualities of enthusiasm and sympathy, and she thought it was quite right that they should endeavour to get a better idea of justice in one sense of the word—a more perfect balance. In many hospitals the Matron herself would say that she did not like women on the Board. She could not understand how that should be. Women would not go spying out the nakedness of the land, but

\* Read at the Annual Conference National Union of Women Workers, Brighton, 24th October, 1900.

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