

Matrons in Council.

THE POOR LAW NURSING SERVICE.*

By MISS JULIAN, M.M.C.

Matron of the Croydon Infirmary.

MADAM PRESIDENT, LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,—
As Matron and Superintendent Nurse of a large Workhouse Infirmary Training School, I have been asked to furnish a few particulars with regard to the Poor Law Nursing Service.



Strange as it may appear, this much depreciated branch of the nursing profession, offers far and away greater facilities for a thorough and comprehensive training, than any general hospital.

In the first place, these rate-supported palaces of pain cannot pick their cases. They are specially built for the waifs and strays of suffering humanity, therefore, all who need help must be succoured. Hence, within their gates is found almost every known form of disease, either in its primary, intermediate, or final stage, and I suppose the first thing that strikes a Hospital Matron, when taking office, is the wide field for practical nursing, and the appalling waste of clinical material. For there are the very young, and the very, very old; the foundling from the doorstep, the street accident, the vagrant dying of starvation. There also is the well-appointed, up-to-date operating-room, with its succession of major and minor operations. The nurses' classroom and reference library, weekly lectures, and periodical competitive examinations; whilst the food, home comforts, and "time off duty" will, in the majority of cases, be found to meet any reasonable requirement.

Finally, after the certificate for three (3) years' satisfactory work has been gained, there is the advantage of further training in the Maternity Annexe and of qualifying for the L.O.S. Moreover, without the least difficulty, a Probationer can be drafted into the Hospitals under the Metropolitan Asylums Board, for six months' special training in Fever Nursing.

In the large general hospitals, Probationers are rarely accepted under 23 years of age, whereas under the Poor Law they can enter the best training schools at 21.

Thus we see that a Nurse trained under the Local Government Board has, at 25 years of age,

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completed a comprehensive course of instruction, and has, at the outset, two years start of the hospital trained nurse. That a well-trained Infirmary Nurse can compete on equal ground with her hospital trained sister, is a fact no longer questioned, and they are to be found wherever skilled nursing, and the special qualities necessary to success are in greatest demand.

Judged from the commercial standpoint, the terms of engagement for Probationers, Staff Nurses, Ward Sisters and Night Superintendents, compare favourably with those of voluntary hospitals. Superintendent Nurses holding the L.O.S. can command salaries ranging from £40 to £60 a year. Board, laundry, and in-door uniform, is provided for all grades of the service.

The difficulty experienced by Boards of Guardians in finding fully-qualified nurses willing to act as Superintendents, is exciting much controversy in the professional world, and that the conditions of service are at the root of the difficulty, is generally admitted.

Now seeing that this Office exists in name only, the marvel is, not that so few are available, but that there are any at all, and this applies not only to the small provincial infirmaries attached to workhouses, but to the large Parish hospitals, which are distinct from the Workhouses, and under separate administration.

In the small Workhouse Infirmary, the Superintendent Nurse is under the control of the Master and Matron; in the large Parish hospital, her position is precisely what the Medical Superintendent and the Guardians choose to make it.

The rules framed for the guidance of the Superintendent of Nurses in the Poor Law Training Schools of to-day, are the same as those laid down for Workhouse Matrons by the Local Government Board, in the Consolidated Orders of 1847, and are practically those of a working housekeeper. It is true that, during the last decade, through force of circumstances, the supervision of the House Staff has been handed over to an Assistant Matron, the care of culinary utensils to the Cook, and the laundry to a Superintendent, but the Matron is still held responsible for the satisfactory performance of these duties notwithstanding.

She is, in addition, required to aid the Medical Superintendent, and, in his absence, the Assistant Medical Officer, in enforcing the due observance of all regulations laid down, for the government of the Infirmary, on the part of the female servants therein; but the word "Nurse" is never mentioned in connection with her duties. All responsibility with regard to the care of the sick, and the control of the nursing staff being vested in the Medical Superintendent.

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