

## Irish Workhouse Nursing.

### EVIDENCE TAKEN BY THE JUDICIAL COMMITTEE OF THE PRIVY COUNCIL.

We, last week, gave a report of the decision of the Judicial Committee of the Irish Privy Council, with reference to the sealed order of the Irish Local Government Board of 1901. The Order, as our readers know, was disallowed as it stands, but the Judicial Committee reported that evidence had been given establishing to their satisfaction the necessity for some rule or order which will make better provision for efficient nursing, and this conclusion is amply justified by the evidence.

The broad principle asserted by the Guardians of the Armagh Union was that there was undue interference by the Local Government Board with the functions of the Board of Guardians, and that the Order of February 4th of this year went beyond the real intention of the Legislature in giving powers to the controlling board, that it took from Guardians the management of their own affairs, and deprived their position of all status and dignity. They objected that the nurse of the workhouse had of recent years ranked as an officer (an officer, it will be remembered can only be removed from his or her position by the Local Government Board), whereas in the regulations of June, 1844, she was not included in the list of officers (presumably because, in those days, trained nurses were non-existent), but ranked as an assistant to the medical officer. They further complained that every assistant nurse in every poorhouse in Ireland was obliged to have such qualifications as the Local Government Board required. The Order, of which they complained, was a most far reaching one; it would include the gardener, the man who painted the doors; in fact, it prescribed that every individual in the place should have such qualifications as the Local Government Board had laid down; and it seemed to take away from every Board of Guardians every power of initiative and every power of regulating what expenditure was to be upon the rates.

It will be observed that by this argument the Armagh Guardians regard nursing as a trade, instead of a profession. They do not claim that their medical officer should have only such qualifications as they consider necessary. For the Armagh Board it was further argued that, in accordance with Local Government Board regulations they had appointed two trained nurses, one on day duty, and one on night duty. These were supplemented by probationers from the district, but on one of their probationers being appointed to the position of head nurse, the Local Government Board insisted upon sending down a Dublin-trained nurse to fill the post she had vacated. The

Guardians declined to accept the nomination, and the Board threatened to sue them for payment of her services. It was maintained that the action was *ultra vires*, as it was only within the power of the Local Government Board to appoint officers.

On behalf of the Local Government Board Mr. Ronan said the Board considered that there were urgent reasons for the Order, which was appealed against. Evidence would be given to show why the Local Government Board should at present have power to supply adequate staffs. The Inspectors of the Board would be called, and case after case would be given of grossly inadequate nursing arrangements, grossly inadequate hospital attendance, and in consequence of the restrictions contained in the Order of 1882 the Local Government Board found themselves unable to exercise the duty which the statute cast upon them and bound them to exercise.

On evidence being called Dr. Edward C. Bigger, Local Government Board Inspector, in reply to Mr. Chambers, said, he had been for a number of years visiting medical officer to the Belfast Workhouse. In the Armagh Workhouse at present there were one day nurse, one night nurse, and one temporary nurse. The nursing staff at present, in his opinion, was not sufficient. He had been engaged in inspecting the workhouse infirmaries throughout Ireland. He regretted to say that the nursing staffs were manifestly insufficient and inefficient. In some of the hospitals he had visited there was no trained nurse whatever. There had been very great difficulty in getting the Guardians to appoint efficient nurses. There were 28 workhouse infirmaries in which there was no trained nurse whatever. There were 40 or 45 in which the staff was manifestly insufficient. Among the workhouse infirmaries in which there was no trained nurse were Ballymoney, Bailieborough, Cootehill, Dunfanaghy, and Milford. In Downpatrick there was no night nurse for 112 patients; in Enniskillen there were 58 patients and no trained nurse; in Castlederg there was no trained nurse; in Omagh there were 101 patients and no trained nurse. Among the infirmaries with insufficient nursing staffs were Antrim, with 77 patients and three nurses, there being no night nurse; Larne, with 71 patients and only one fully trained nurse; Lurgan, with 182 patients and two trained nurses. The proper proportion was one nurse to 11 or 12 patients. For acute cases in general hospitals the proportion was higher. In Belfast Workhouse at present the proportion was about one nurse to 14 patients.

Cross-examined by Serjeant Dodd: If he were the medical officer at Armagh he would insist upon one or, perhaps, two additional nurses. He was not aware that the guardians were willing to appoint one additional nurse. In the Belfast

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)