

by the committee of American ladies, of the fittings which they have put into the ship, and he was sure their Lordships would agree with him in thinking the gift a most gracious one from the citizens and ladies of the United States. Thus Great Britain is indebted to the generosity of American men and women for her first permanent hospital ship.

In an interesting series of articles on "With the Maine to South Africa," in the *American Journal of Nursing*, Miss M. Eugénie Hibbard, describes a visit which she paid to the Mooi River Field Hospital, Natal. Speaking of General Buller's advance for the relief of Ladysmith, she says: "The firing continued throughout the afternoon, which I spent in visiting the wards of the hospital and officers' quarters, containing altogether between seven and eight hundred patients, the majority seriously ill. In the distribution of the work I found one nursing Sister had been assigned to ten wards, each containing six cots, making a total of sixty patients, a large and impossible number for one nurse to even supervise. When will the medical department fully realize the responsibilities that fall to it in time of war? This hospital, though apparently fully equipped in other respects, feels keenly the policy pursued at home of restricting the number of Sisters, assigning so small a proportion to acute cases, handicapping the service, and sacrificing the soldier to an ignorance of conditions which, though possibly unforeseen, should have been quickly appreciated and promptly corrected. History repeating herself should teach us lessons not so easily forgotten. Nature is a most exacting mistress, and under morbid conditions demands servile homage."

An interesting point which is being raised at the present time is the advisability, or otherwise, of establishing pro-maternity hospitals. It is argued on the one hand that the establishment of such hospitals would afford an opportunity of rest to working women, who for financial reasons are unable to take it, during the last weeks of pregnancy, that such conditions as placenta-prævia, albuminuria, and the pre-eclamptic condition could be watched, and the lives of both mother and child might not unfrequently be saved.

According to this judgment, therefore, no patient in a hospital in this state can obtain redress for an injury received for carelessness or negligence on the part of a hospital official. We cannot believe that this judgment will be a final one on the question.

On the other hand it is urged that "all this tinkering of invalids is a direct interference with

well recognised 'laws of nature,' and that just so far as we succeed in setting on their feet those who, without our aid, would have been eliminated as 'unfit,' we lower the racial stamina and spoil the breed."

But then why have any hospitals at all? On the other hand if we admit that we have a duty to the weak and sickly, the pregnant woman has as great a claim upon us as anyone else. We are inclined to think that pro-maternity hospitals for all would be a mistake. That the working woman has a better time than her rich sister, because she takes more exercise, but in abnormal conditions it is unquestionable that she should have every care beforehand.

A decision of considerable importance was recently given in the Circuit Court of Appeals in the United States, in the case of a patient who sought to recover damages against the Massachusetts Homeopathic Hospital, for an injury caused by a hot water bag, alleged to have been occasioned by the negligence of a nurse. The patient's counsel endeavoured to prove that as the patient paid, in part at least, for the services rendered, her case was different to that of a patient who pays nothing.

The court rightly held "That such a hospital in its treatment of a rich patient shall be held to a greater degree of care than in its treatment of a pauper is not to be tolerated. The degree of protection from unskilled and careless nurses must be the same in both cases. . . . We are of opinion that the case stands as if the plaintiff had been admitted without any payment whatever."

No other decision than this is in our view possible. It would be outrageous for any court to decide that because a patient receives gratuitous treatment he must submit to any careless treatment to which a hospital may subject him, and we are glad, therefore, that the court placed the case of paying and free patients on the same footing in this connection. Its further decision is, however, somewhat surprising, namely, that the rule laid down in Massachusetts by the supreme court is the proper one to follow, which, in substance is: "All the funds of a public charitable hospital are held in trust for a particular charitable purpose. It is a breach of trust to apply them to any other purpose. The payment of damages recovered for the negligence of the hospital servants is not within the terms of the trust. Hence the funds cannot be employed for that payment, and if the funds cannot be so employed, a bare judgment against the corporation is nugatory, and should not be permitted."

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)