

Nursing in New Zealand.

A MASTERLY REVIEW.

The recently published report of Dr. Macgregor, the Inspector of Hospitals and Charitable Institutions in New Zealand, addressed to the Hon. the Minister of Education, and presented to both Houses of the General Assembly by Command of His Excellency the Governor, is an important document. We believe the portion of it which we subjoin will be studied with profound interest by our readers, who will appreciate Dr. Macgregor's masterly grip of the nursing question. It runs thus:—

OUR HOSPITAL SYSTEM.

The last few years have brought a great change in the organization of our hospitals. Formerly our hospitals were for the most part served by a mixed staff of male and female nurses. Gradually this has been altered, so that now in almost all our hospitals, large as well as small, the nursing staff consists of female nurses only, male nurses being still retained to help in the care of such cases as are unsuitable for females.

The revolution has been part of a world-wide movement. For the first period of the nineteenth century the novelist has generalised the type in "Sairey Gamp." In too many instances professional nurses were of this pattern—ignorant, untrained, and self-indulgent. After the Crimean war the reforms instituted by Florence Nightingale caught hold of the national imagination, and she was presented with a sum of £52,000, which she devoted to the forming of a training-school for nurses, where self-denial, devotion, and discipline should rule. For a long time numbers of well-educated women, filled with the enthusiasm of humanity, devoted themselves to the noble career thus opened for them, and from their ranks matrons and others officers of English hospitals were drawn, until now, at the opening of the present century, we find the business of nursing has become a distinct profession.

As now organised the nursing profession has gradually been placed on quite another basis—the market value of labour—*i.e.*, contract. This inevitable development has brought a great many wide-reaching implications in its train, and it has been apparent to me for a long time that the State must interfere to regulate this now important organization. Under the impulse of Florence Nightingale a new career was opened up for the pent-up energies and aspirations of women in England, and the dreary uselessness of so many young women's lives, as drawn for us by Jane Austen and Anthony Trollope, drove many to earnestly struggle for a more wholesome ideal of individual activity. The establishment of the earlier training-schools, the extension of university teaching to

women, and their admission to the medical schools caused a great movement among many who were yearning for such opportunities. This early enthusiasm has long faded into the light of common day. Our girls have now no let or hindrance in entering the fields of competitive labour. In this country, young women, many of them still no doubt inspired by altruistic enthusiasm and the halo which still irradiates the nurses' work, find themselves simply engaging in one of the many occupations which give an outlet for energy and ability. Love of nursing work is now only one among many more ordinary motives. The question has become one of wage-earning, like type-writing, teaching, domestic work, etc. The objects are determined by the common pressure of life, the questions being: Are the prospects of future permanent employment good? Are the hours definite and short, pay fairly good, and reasonable uncontrolled freedom insured?

In 1895, feeling the necessity for some co-ordination and a standard of training among our own hospital nurses, I sent a circular to those of our nurses who had already become members of the Royal British Nurses' Association, asking them if they were willing to form themselves into a nucleus of an affiliated colonial branch. All answered in the affirmative, and I accordingly opened a correspondence with their headquarters in London. The parent association desired all subscriptions to be sent to them, and yet the colonial branch must be self-supporting. No regulations were to be made until assent had been granted from England, and I found it impracticable to secure such a standard enforced by examination as would make a system to meet our needs. Our plea for colonial self-government was not listened to, and the matter fell through. I instructed Mrs. Neill, when in England in 1899, to place herself in communication with the authorities. She had an interview with some of the officers of the Royal British Nurses' Association, and attended their annual meeting. On her report I saw no reason to expect the slightest advantage to accrue to New Zealand from becoming members of the R.B.N.A. They have never seen their way to make admission to their membership any guarantee of efficiency, even now their doors are so wide that membership is no evidence of either professional qualification or character. The R.B.N.A. was founded in 1887 by Mrs. Bedford Fenwick and other women interested in making the profession of hospital nursing a reality instead of a sham. They aimed at attaining the following objects: A legal status and a definite educational curriculum for hospital nurses. The association, after a stormy existence and the exodus of its original founders, has proved itself incapable of attaining these ends. The cause of its failure is self-evident in the constitution of its

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