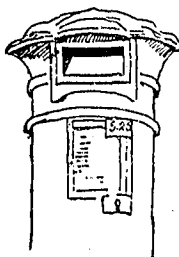


**Letters to the Editor.**

**NOTES, QUERIES. &c.**



*Whilst cordially inviting communications upon all subjects for these columns, we wish it to be distinctly understood that we do not in ANY WAY hold ourselves responsible for the opinions expressed by our correspondents*

**WORKHOUSE NURSING.**

*To the Editor of the "Nursing Record."*

MADAM,—In your issue of September 21st Dr. Toogood writes: "My opinion is that with adequate salaries and proper government there would be no lack of good nurses even in our smaller infirmaries." No doubt Dr. Toogood speaks from his own experience, but his opinion is not in agreement with that of some of those whose special work is the inspection of Poor Law Infirmaries. One of the General Inspectors of the Local Government Board thus reports: "The nursing staffs, at any rate in the larger Workhouses, are being slowly strengthened, but the same difficulty still exists in getting nurses who have had thorough training, and I do not think that in this part of England (Durham, Northumberland, North Riding of Yorkshire, and parts of Cumberland) the blame can be wholly laid on the salaries offered or the quarters provided" (XXIXth Annual Report, 1899-1900, Local Government Board, page 149). Another Inspector reports: "The chief obstacles in the way of better nursing continue to be inadequate accommodation for nurses, and the rather limited supply of experienced nurses." (Idem., page 126). Another Inspector remarks: "The difficulty in obtaining and retaining the services of nurses for workhouses continues to increase." (Idem., page 93.)

The reports teem with similar observations.

Then, again, there is the question of "proper government." Presumably, your correspondent means the interference of Masters and Matrons with the nursing arrangements. But so long as the sick wards are contained within the workhouse walls, so long must these officials have some responsibilities towards nurses, patients, and nursing. The nurses will necessarily be under the Master as regards general discipline; and the patients likewise. The nursing will be subject to the Matron in respect to the supply of necessaries. The wards will come under the care of the master as regards repairs, and such like. There must, therefore, be relations between workhouse nurses and the higher workhouse officials. The past as well as the present shows the practical impossibility of these two sections of the staff working together in harmony. Thus, one of the General Inspectors reports, "I regret to have to report friction between masters and matrons on the one part, and nurses of the infirmaries on the other. . . . I do look forward to the day when, in workhouses of any size, the infirmaries will be detached." The mere fact that the wards are actually within the workhouses exercises a very bad influence upon the recruiting of nurses and probationers. The subordination of the nurses to their social inferiors is fatal. Yet

these things cannot fail to be present in the smaller infirmaries.

Dr. Toogood "questions the necessity of having highly-trained" nurses in country workhouses. Here he is in conflict with the opinion of Dr. Downes, Medical Inspector of the Local Government Board, who, in a Memorandum dated, April, 1892, makes the following observation: "Humanity and economy alike dictate that the sick poor in workhouse sick wards should receive nursing treatment not less efficient than that which is now afforded in general hospitals, and in well administered cottage hospitals." Later on, in the same Memorandum he remarks ". . . it should always be remembered that, although the sick are mostly chronic, a large number are of such a kind as to require constant care and attention." It is impossible therefore to accept Dr. Toogood's method of solving the nursing difficulty in country workhouses by supplying the infirmaries with untrained nurses. The Guardians' efforts to secure trained nurses for their sick wards, too, indicate their opinion as to the necessity for trained nurses.

Then, as to the difficulty of getting or training nurses, a large number of Boards of Guardians passed important resolutions on this subject in 1900. With one exception all the General Inspectors refer forcibly to it in their last reports. How are trained nurses to be obtained in sufficient quantity from outside? The Poor Law Service compares unfavourably in attractions with the General Hospitals, the Nursing Institutions, the District Nursing Associations, and such like. It requires a certain amount of special training before outside nurses can be put into responsible positions in workhouses. The nurses who have come from General Hospitals find their ideals in the way rather than otherwise, and the life is extremely monotonous. Except in the higher posts they do not care sufficiently for the service to remain any longer in it than they can help. I do not think that it will ever be sufficiently attractive to trained nurses to induce many of them to fill the lesser posts. Under the present conditions they are strongly repelled from workhouse service.

To turn from the nurses to the sick, the country workhouses are mostly out of date. "It is undoubtedly the case that since workhouses were established under the Poor Law Amendment Act, 1834, the circumstances connected with the administration of relief, and the character of those for whom accommodation in workhouses has to be provided have so materially changed that arrangements originally adequate and in accordance with the spirit of the times have ceased to be so." (Circular letter of the Local Government Board to Boards of Guardians, January 29th, 1895.) One of the General Inspectors, in his last report, refers to the Workhouses in the West of England as being "at least half a century old." He says: ". . . there are a good many workhouses in the West where improved accommodation for the sick is much needed, and where I believe that even if existing rooms were vacated . . . their conversion into sick-wards would at best be only a makeshift arrangement, and nothing but the erection of a new infirmary on modern lines would give really satisfactory results." (Page III.) It is the same all over the country, and Boards of Guardians are spending very large sums annually in trying to improve these ancient structures, or in building small infirmaries attached to them; the latter

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