

The Hospital World.

THE METROPOLITAN ASYLUMS BOARD.

It is now generally believed that we may expect the present outbreak of smallpox to continue for some months to come, and it is satisfactory to know that in the Metropolitan Asylums Board we have an agency experienced in the best methods of dealing with infectious disease, and alive to the necessity for making adequate provision for the isolation of these cases. A silver lining to the cloud—there always is a silver lining to the blackest cloud if we search for it insistently—is that the epidemic will afford to medical men an opportunity for the scientific investigation of this comparatively rare disease, and to nurses of the best methods of nursing it. We hope that the result will be an increase of knowledge which will minimise the occurrence of the disease in the future. Some details of the work of the Metropolitan Asylums Board are of special interest just now, and we quote from an admirable article on this subject which appeared recently in the *Daily News*.

The Metropolitan Asylums Board is a body of which no Londoner can at any time be quite ignorant. Every half-year, at least, all London ratepayers are compelled, however reluctantly, to give some little attention to it, and of late the small-pox alarm, a serious prevalence of fever, and an occasional report of the appearance of bubonic plague in our midst have together brought into more than usual prominence the name and some of the public services of this very remarkable piece of organization.

There are really five public services provided by the £700,000 a year and upwards spent by the Metropolitan Asylums Board: 1. The Infectious Hospital; 2. The Ambulance Service; 3. Imbecile Asylums; 4. Training Ships; and 5. State-supported Children.

Of hospitals for acute fever and diphtheria cases there are now ten, with a total of 4,421 beds. For convalescent cases there are two, with 1,464 beds, and for acute and convalescent cases of smallpox there are three hospitals—one of them afloat some seventeen miles down the river—with 1,892 beds. This gives altogether, according to the latest statement to hand, 7,777 beds.

The taking in of patients is the work of the second of the services—the Ambulance Service, the necessity for which soon became apparent when the Board's earliest hospitals were opened, and patients suffering from the most virulent forms of fever and diphtheria, came jolting in private or public vehicles, very unsuitable in themselves, and often the means of disseminating the diseases. This Ambulance Service was authorised by Act of Parliament passed in 1879. There are three branches of it—the Land Service, the River Service, and a third for the removal and distribution of patients.

In a case of infectious illness the medical man writes out a certificate stating the nature of it, and application is made to the Ambulance Department at headquarters, giving name, age, sex, disease, and address. These particulars are at once sent on by telephone to the Ambulance Station nearest to the patient; and, almost as smartly as the fire brigade

will turn out an engine, an ambulance will be set in motion. Within three minutes the conveyance will be on the road to the sufferer, a trained nurse going with it; and, if the patient is over ten years of age, a male attendant also, restoratives and refreshments being carried in the ambulance for patients in a prostrate condition.

If it is a fever case the ambulance rolls off softly and silently to one of the hospitals. If it is a case of smallpox it goes to a wharf on the river bank, of which there are three at convenient points on the Thames—two on the north and one on the south—where it will be met by one of the four ambulance steamers—the Maltese Cross, the Albert Victor, the Geneva Cross—all paddle-wheel steamers—and the White Cross, a screw steamer. The two latest are the Geneva Cross and the White Cross. The Geneva Cross was built in 1894. It is a steel vessel 143 feet long, 22 feet in breadth, with a 5-foot draught and 263 tons displacement. It is beautifully fitted up for the conveyance of 52 adult patients in a recumbent position, and they are borne—or may be borne, if way and weather are clear—down the Thames at the rate of 14 knots an hour. The White Cross was built in 1896, and is smaller. It is especially designed for navigation in the upper reaches of the Thames, where the water is sometimes very shallow. The voyage down the river occupies from an hour and a half to two hours, and during the years 1884 to 1899 over 16,000 patients have made the journey.

The first hospital ship for smallpox was the *Dreadnought*, at Greenwich, which was superseded at the same anchorage by the *Atlas* and the *Endymion*. These two have been removed to an isolated position in Long Reach, nearly 15 miles from London Bridge, and at the same time the accommodation afforded was increased by the addition of the *Castalia*, which was transformed into a hospital and moored astern of the *Endymion*. The managers also purchased land near the ships on which to build a laundry, accommodation for nurses, and an engine and dynamo house for electric lighting. Immense benefit has undoubtedly resulted from the isolation of smallpox patients on board these ships, but the managers are not altogether satisfied with the arrangement. This floating hospital, they say, regarded as a permanent institution, has some serious disadvantages, not the least of which being the liability to injury from passing craft during foggy or stormy weather, and the disastrous results likely to follow any serious outbreak of fire. Sooner or later no doubt these ships will be superseded by hospital accommodation on land down in their neighbourhood; indeed, the managers have secured the land, and are erecting a hospital for 400 patients.

The Registered Nurses' Society.

At a Meeting of the Committee of the R.N.S., held on Tuesday, Sister Cartwright presented her Report as Delegate to the Congress at Buffalo, dealing more particularly with Private Nursing.

The suggestion to form a Registered Nurses' League was warmly approved by the nurse members present, and it was decided to circularise the members after New Year. We hope to find space for a full report of the meeting next week.

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)