

Annotations.

THE AUSTRALASIAN MATRONS' COUNCIL.

We learn with pleasure that a Matrons' Council has been formed in Australia, on the lines of the Matrons' Council of Great Britain and Ireland. Such organisations have immense powers for good, as those realise who have watched the work of the American Society of Superintendents of Training-Schools (which includes the Matrons of the leading Canadian hospitals) and that of our own Council at home. The Matrons in Holland have also formed a Council, which, we believe, takes a keen interest in every movement which touches the nursing profession. It is to be hoped that all these Councils will be well represented at the forthcoming quinquennial meeting of the International Council of Women at Berlin next year, when the International Council of Nurses intends to meet again to receive reports of nursing progress and elect officers. Matters move so quickly nowadays that we have little doubt that the Registration of Trained Nurses will be an accomplished fact in many of the United States of America, and, if rumour tells true, in some of our own self-governing Colonies as well, by 1904.

OUR DEMORALISING PRISON SYSTEM.

Opinions founded on practical experience are always of interest and value to the community, and this is especially the case in relation to the working of our prison system, of which very little is known. No one has a more intimate knowledge of prisons and prisoners than Mr. Thomas Holmes, the police-court missionary, and an interview with him, published by the *Pall Mall Magazine*, affords much food for thought. Prisons, he says, must punish. Society must be protected, and it would be folly to menace vice with no retribution, but our prison system is "the most senseless, brutal, and wicked of all human schemes for checking crime. . . . It crucifies a man and hardens him past redemption." Said a prisoner once to Mr. Holmes: "My mind is a mill that grinds nothing. Give me work—work for heart and mind—or my heart will lose its last spark of hope, and my brain its last remnant of reason."

Why do men steal; why do they sin; and why do they go straight into hell with their eyes open? It lies with Science to tell why so many fall back into sin, and how a cure may be effected.

But Science does not speak, and the public does not believe that it can do anything. "I wish," says Mr. Holmes, "Science would produce a great hero as well as great savants: we're only waiting for someone who will dare."

"A prison, you see, ought to be an asylum for treating moral diseases. That is the great point. What do you want with a military governor? and are the prison officials—excellent men themselves—qualified in any pathological way for their infinitely delicate and difficult work? The doctors are not specialists in mental disease, and too often, I fear, the chaplains know nothing of human nature. And these are the officials placed by the State over innumerable men and women who provide science with one of the most interesting, as it is one of the most tremendous, problems in civilisation! How dreadfully wasteful it all is! Think of the money poured out, and the lives penned in!"

One of the first steps to accurate scientific knowledge is close observation. In this, in our general hospitals and infirmaries, the man of science is aided by the modern nurse, who is trained in habits of accurate observation, and is able to furnish him with information of great value in regard to the condition of the patient in his absence. From every point of view—the humanitarian, the economic, and the scientific—the introduction of trained nurses into prisons, whether as prison matrons or in charge of infirmary wards, would, we are convinced, be followed by the best results.

The nurse must, however, be specially selected for such a task. Not only must she be professionally competent, but she must be inspired by the spirit which animated Elizabeth Fry, Agnes Jones, Frederica Flidner, and other noble-hearted women consumed by a love for humanity.

FELO-DE-SE.

The present month has been remarkable for the extraordinary number of suicides which have occurred in England, Scotland, and Wales. Up to the middle of the month there were no less than forty, one-third of the cases being those of women. During the whole of April last year the number was fifty, so that the increase is very considerable. The motives for the act were varied; the largest number were due to love and jealousy, while four were the result of financial worry. The ever-increasing strain of life at the present day is, no doubt, accountable, in part, for the increasing number of suicides. The intolerance of the present pleasure-loving generation of any kind of trouble or discomfort is doubtless also a factor in the case.

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