

The Status of the Metropolitan Asylums Board's Matrons.

At the fortnightly meeting of the Metropolitan Asylums Board held on Saturday last, the following letter from the Matrons' Council of Great Britain and Ireland was reported as having been received:—

To the Chairman of the Metropolitan Asylums Board.

SIR,—I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 5th instant, sent by the desire of the members of the Metropolitan Asylums Board. May I ask that you will be good enough to lay this letter before them at their next meeting.

The Matrons' Council is under no misapprehension as to the proposed change in the position of the Matrons of the Hospitals under the management of the Metropolitan Asylums Board. From the draft prepared for submission to the Local Government Board of the proposed new Order to consolidate and amend the Orders now subsisting, it learns that "The officers now graded as principal officers are reduced in number. The following are omitted: Two at a hospital, viz., Matron and Steward."

It appears that "the effect will be that at each establishment there will be only one resident principal officer, who will be recognised as head of the establishment with general authority and control subject to the regulations, over the entire Staff, thereby removing doubts which now exist as to the semi-independence of certain officers."

The proposal of the Board is, therefore, to omit in future the names of the Matrons from the list of principal officers, and to include them in the list of subordinate workers. At present they rank as principal officers, and are classed with the Medical Superintendent, the Chaplain, and Steward. By the proposed change they are to be included in the subordinate class, in which nurses, wardmaids, and servants are also numbered.

The distinction is obvious. The Matrons will not rank as first class officers as they do now.

There is no doubt in the minds of those conversant with the management of hospitals, that the efficiency of the nursing of the patients, the discipline of the nurses, and the tone of the whole female staff depends mainly on the power and efficiency of the Matron. This fact can, perhaps, be most clearly illustrated by reference to the history of the hospitals under the control of the Metropolitan Asylums Board. The enormous improvement in the care of the patients consequent on the employment of skilled nurses is co-incident with the advent of the fully trained nurse as Matron. These Matrons have great responsibilities, which can only be adequately maintained by sufficient authority. To lower the status of the Matron will inevitably lessen her authority, and will deprive her of the power to perform her duty. There is no analogy, in the opinion of the Matrons' Council, between the appointment of Matrons of hospitals supported by voluntary contributions, or the appointment of those to hospitals supported

by the rates, and which are under the control of a Government Department. The latter are directly servants of the State, and their position is of sufficient importance to be safeguarded and directly controlled by the authority which is ultimately responsible.

The Matrons' Council desires once more to urge upon the Metropolitan Asylums Board the importance to the public of the proposed new Order. The fact that the patients admitted to the hospitals under its control are suffering from an infectious disease, and cannot be visited by their relations and friends, throws vital responsibility on the Board, it is imperative that in accepting this responsibility the Board shall provide the best medical treatment and the most efficient nursing care for the sick. If, however, the recommendation of the Board be confirmed by the Local Government Board, the ultimate result will certainly be that fewer highly skilled nurses will be attracted to the service of the fever hospitals, the Board will find it increasingly difficult to maintain an efficient standard of nursing, the patients will inevitably suffer, and the public lose confidence in the administration of the Metropolitan Asylums Board.

The Matrons' Council ventures to add that under these circumstances, the final court of appeal must be the public.

I am, yours faithfully,

MARGARET BREAY,
Hon. Secretary.

The Chairman, Mr. J. T. Helby, informed the Board that the letter was on the same lines as before, and proposed that it should be taken as read.

A Member: "Yes, waste of paper."

The Chairman's proposal was agreed to, and it was arranged that the letter should be acknowledged.

It is evident that the Metropolitan Asylums Board are not open to argument, and do not wish to be convinced that their determination to deprive future Matrons of the rank of principal officers is a mistaken and disastrous one. We must remember, however, as Sir Augustus Scovell pointed out later in the meeting in regard to another question, that the Local Government Board are "masters of the situation," and we have the assurance of that Board that before issuing any Order they will give full consideration to the representations which have been made to them.

Inoculation Against Enteric Fever.

We are informed that the nurses who join Lady Minto's Indian Nursing Association are strongly advised, not required, to be inoculated against enteric fever, and that they are not required to be inoculated against plague and cholera.

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