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Editorial.

SUGGESTIONS FOR POOR LAW REFORM.

The suggestions of the Local Government Committee of the London County Council as to poor law reform, submitted to the Royal Commission on the Poor Laws, would, if carried into effect, abolish Boards of Guardians and merge the powers and duties of Poor Law Authorities in the general municipal government; they are thus of far-reaching importance. The transference of authority suggested would affect the many nurses now working in the great poor law infirmaries, as the powers now entrusted to the Guardians would be taken over by the Borough Councils.

Some of the principal suggestions are:—

That the Central Poor Law Authority for London shall be the County Council.

That the City Corporation and the Metropolitan Borough Councils shall be the authorities charged with the administration of those duties now performed by the London Boards of Guardians which are local in character.

That the powers and duties of the Metropolitan Asylums Board in regard to infectious diseases' hospitals, ambulances, and other health services shall be transferred to the Council acting through the Public Health Committee.

That it shall be the duty of the Local Government Board to frame such general rules as may be necessary to co-ordinate the practice and expenditure of the London Poor Law Administration with that in the rest of the country.

The Asylums Committee proposes that the Council shall continue to appoint an Asylums Committee as at present, under the provisions of the Lunacy Act, 1890, and that the five asylums now controlled by the

Metropolitan Asylums Board shall be handed over to the Council and be regarded as county asylums, and not workhouses. Automatically, then, these asylums would come under the control of the Asylums Committee, which, it is suggested, should continue to be the visiting committee under the Lunacy Acts, with power to co-opt members, but only to such an extent as would conserve the control of expenditure to elected members.

The London County Council would thus practically take over the management of the County Asylums, and the work of the Metropolitan Asylums Board, and would be responsible for the provision of buildings, principles of administration, and classification of paupers. It will be seen that this effort at co-ordination would involve far-reaching changes, and if in a scheme of general re-organisation, the disabilities which are at present attached to those who enter a poor law infirmary for treatment were removed, as surely they should be in the case of poverty caused by illness, they would form splendid municipal hospitals to which citizens would have the right of admission in case of necessity without any loss of self respect.

This attempt at the reform of Poor Law Authority in London seems to be suggested along the right lines, and, assuming that the services of women are secured on the Committees to which the administration is entrusted under the London County Council, the scheme, if adopted, should be capable of development in a manner which would make for the welfare of the community in the Metropolis. But no one can ever forget the incalculable services rendered by women on Boards of Guardians, and their influence must be at least as great on any new authority if progress is to be maintained.

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