

Asylums' Board Nurses.

At the meeting of the Metropolitan Asylums Board on Saturday, several matters of nursing interest were discussed. The Hospitals Committee, reporting on the second portion of the statement in the Local Government Board's letter of February last, viz., that when the hospitals are slack and there are but few patients requiring attention, it is the custom to give the nurses the option of taking a compulsory holiday, without pay, or losing their employment altogether, submitted a copy of the circular letter (20th June, 1908) which was sent to the several medical superintendents conveying the instructions in this matter under which they acted, and they advised that a copy of the letter be sent to the Local Government Board in reply to their communication.

Mr. Harold Spender desired to know whether in 1903 there was not a system of keeping a minimum staff of nurses in the fever hospitals, and whether it was not a good system in view of the seasonal outbreaks of fever. In the circular letter to the medical superintendents attention was directed to the opportunity that the comparatively low number of patients afforded for dispensing with the services of any members of the staff who had failed to give full satisfaction either in their conduct or in the performance of their duties, or whom from other circumstances it might appear desirable to select for discharge. He asked whether that was not calculated to do grave injustice to the nurses as stimulating sub-committees to find excuses for getting rid of them. Mr. W. Dennis, the Chairman of the Committee, was unable to reply to the first question. With regard to the second, he said that sub-committees only acted upon the recommendations of the medical superintendents and the Matrons. He thought there was no possibility of any nurse suffering injustice owing to the instruction. The Committee's recommendation was agreed to.

The Children's Committee reported that the scheme for the employment and training of probationer nurses at the Children's Infirmary had been put into force. The question of the age limits had received their special consideration, and they had fixed the minimum and maximum limits at 19 and 26 years respectively. Miss Baker moved a resolution disapproving of the Committee's action. She thought that 21 should be the minimum. It was suggested by Mr. Spender that the Board's hospitals' service was unpopular, and that it was better to have probationers at 19 than no nurses at all. The motion was lost.

The Ruchill Hospital Scandal.

Those who remember the history of the trouble at Ruchill Hospital, Glasgow, last year, when the resident medical officers who fought in the interests of their patients and hospital efficiency, and were undoubtedly sacrificed for exposing the over-working and under-staffing of the nursing department, and the excessive over-crowding of the wards; and the fate which befel those sisters and nurses who, being assured of the absolute protection of the Committee, gave frank and open evidence, will not be surprised that friction has again arisen in the institution. This time it is the Medical Superintendent at Ruchill, Dr. Johnston, who is to be sacrificed, and at a meeting of the Glasgow Corporation, held on March 11th, at which the Lord Provost presided, it was decided to transfer Dr. Johnston to Belvidere Hospital, where, prior to the opening of Ruchill, he acted as Physician-Superintendent, and to appoint Dr. Brownlee, of Belvidere, to Ruchill. The *Glasgow Herald* of March 12th, commenting on this action, says:—"The excambing of two hospital Superintendents, or some other piece of temporising policy, appears to have flowed naturally and almost inevitably from the refusal of the Corporation to face certain facts established by the Ruchill inquiry, and to act upon them in any effective way. . . . The Corporation shirked an unpleasant responsibility then. Now, when there has been further friction . . . the Superintendent is transferred to another hospital, although 'nothing is further from the Lord Provost's mind than to censure him.' . . . If the Superintendent is not censurable why has he been removed? The only rational reply which those who voted with the majority can give is that the Matron at Ruchill is indispensable, and one would require the clearest and strongest evidence in support of this statement in order to accept it." Our contemporary shows that in the friction which occurred "the Matron had been the aggressor," and had apologised for her action, "thereupon the Superintendent, though blameless, is removed."

That the Superintendent was blameless is evident from the extracts from the Hospitals Committee minutes, which were not in the hands of the Council at their meeting, but which Bailie Willox has since done public service by sending to the press.

The point at issue between the Physician Superintendent, Dr. Johnston, and the Matron, Miss Landles, concerns Miss Wilson, who has been on the staff at Ruchill as librarian and night telephonist since 1900, and whose work has, according to Dr. Johnston, been perfectly satisfactory.

The following letter was addressed by the Matron to the Superintendent on February 8th:—

"I want Miss Wilson's resignation, and I want her to leave the hospital at once. She was grossly insolent to me to-night because I spoke to her about the uniform I had provided her with. I also want to know if you gave the house steward orders to provide Miss Wilson with uniform after I had given her the material I wanted her to wear."

previous page

next page